

The Novels and Novellas of Joseph Conrad - Part 1

Joseph Conrad

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Almayer's Folly

A STORY OF AN EASTERN RIVER

Almayer's Folly was first published in 1895 and is Conrad's first novel. Set in the late 19th century, it concerns the life of the Dutch trader Kaspar Almayer in the Borneo jungle, largely based on the author's own exotic experiences in the East.

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The first edition

Qui de nous n'a eu sa terre promise, son jour d'extase et sa fin en exil? — Amiel.
To the memory of T. B.

Chapter 1

“Kaspar! Makan!”

The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. An unpleasant voice too. He had heard it for many years, and with every year he liked it less. No matter; there would be an end to all this soon.

He shuffled uneasily, but took no further notice of the call. Leaning with both his elbows on the balustrade of the verandah, he went on looking fixedly at the great river that flowed — indifferent and hurried — before his eyes. He liked to look at it about the time of sunset; perhaps because at that time the sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters of the Pantai, and Almayer’s thoughts were often busy with gold; gold he had failed to secure; gold the others had secured — dishonestly, of course — or gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions, for himself and Nina. He absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years, forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter. They would be rich and respected. Nobody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth. Witnessing her triumphs he would grow young again, he would forget the twenty-five years of heart-breaking struggle on this coast where he felt like a prisoner. All this was nearly within his reach. Let only Dain return! And return soon he must — in his own interest, for his own share. He was now more than a week late! Perhaps he would return to-night. Such were Almayer’s thoughts as, standing on the verandah of his new but already decaying house — that last failure of his life — he looked on the broad river. There was no tinge of gold on it this evening, for it had been swollen by the rains, and rolled an angry and muddy flood under his inattentive eyes, carrying small drift-wood and big dead logs, and whole uprooted trees with branches and foliage, amongst which the water swirled and roared angrily.

One of those drifting trees grounded on the shelving shore, just by the house, and Almayer, neglecting his dream, watched it with languid interest. The tree swung slowly round, amid the hiss and foam of the water, and soon getting free of the obstruction began to move down stream again, rolling slowly over, raising upwards a long, denuded branch, like a hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven against the river’s brutal and unnecessary violence. Almayer’s interest in the fate of that tree increased rapidly. He leaned over to see if it would clear the low point below. It did; then he drew back, thinking that now its course was free down to the sea, and he envied the lot of that

inanimate thing now growing small and indistinct in the deepening darkness. As he lost sight of it altogether he began to wonder how far out to sea it would drift. Would the current carry it north or south? South, probably, till it drifted in sight of Celebes, as far as Macassar, perhaps!

Macassar! Almayer's quickened fancy distanced the tree on its imaginary voyage, but his memory lagging behind some twenty years or more in point of time saw a young and slim Almayer, clad all in white and modest-looking, landing from the Dutch mail-boat on the dusty jetty of Macassar, coming to woo fortune in the godowns of old Hudig. It was an important epoch in his life, the beginning of a new existence for him. His father, a subordinate official employed in the Botanical Gardens of Buitenzorg, was no doubt delighted to place his son in such a firm. The young man himself too was nothing loth to leave the poisonous shores of Java, and the meagre comforts of the parental bungalow, where the father grumbled all day at the stupidity of native gardeners, and the mother from the depths of her long easy-chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam, where she had been brought up, and of her position as the daughter of a cigar dealer there.

Almayer had left his home with a light heart and a lighter pocket, speaking English well, and strong in arithmetic; ready to conquer the world, never doubting that he would.

After those twenty years, standing in the close and stifling heat of a Bornean evening, he recalled with pleasurable regret the image of Hudig's lofty and cool warehouses with their long and straight avenues of gin cases and bales of Manchester goods; the big door swinging noiselessly; the dim light of the place, so delightful after the glare of the streets; the little railed-off spaces amongst piles of merchandise where the Chinese clerks, neat, cool, and sad-eyed, wrote rapidly and in silence amidst the din of the working gangs rolling casks or shifting cases to a muttered song, ending with a desperate yell. At the upper end, facing the great door, there was a larger space railed off, well lighted; there the noise was subdued by distance, and above it rose the soft and continuous clink of silver guilders which other discreet Chinamen were counting and piling up under the supervision of Mr. Vinck, the cashier, the genius presiding in the place — the right hand of the Master.

In that clear space Almayer worked at his table not far from a little green painted door, by which always stood a Malay in a red sash and turban, and whose hand, holding a small string dangling from above, moved up and down with the regularity of a machine. The string worked a punkah on the other side of the green door, where the so-called private office was, and where old Hudig — the Master — sat enthroned, holding noisy receptions. Sometimes the little door would fly open disclosing to the outer world, through the bluish haze of tobacco smoke, a long table loaded with bottles of various shapes and tall water-pitchers, rattan easy-chairs occupied by noisy men in sprawling attitudes, while the Master would put his head through and, holding by the handle, would grunt confidentially to Vinck; perhaps send an order thundering down the warehouse, or spy a hesitating stranger and greet him with a friendly roar,

“Welgome, Gapitan! ver’ you come vrom? Bali, eh? Got bonies? I vant bonies! Vant all you got; ha! ha! ha! Come in!” Then the stranger was dragged in, in a tempest of yells, the door was shut, and the usual noises refilled the place; the song of the workmen, the rumble of barrels, the scratch of rapid pens; while above all rose the musical chink of broad silver pieces streaming ceaselessly through the yellow fingers of the attentive Chinamen.

At that time Macassar was teeming with life and commerce. It was the point in the islands where tended all those bold spirits who, fitting out schooners on the Australian coast, invaded the Malay Archipelago in search of money and adventure. Bold, reckless, keen in business, not disinclined for a brush with the pirates that were to be found on many a coast as yet, making money fast, they used to have a general “rendezvous” in the bay for purposes of trade and dissipation. The Dutch merchants called those men English pedlars; some of them were undoubtedly gentlemen for whom that kind of life had a charm; most were seamen; the acknowledged king of them all was Tom Lingard, he whom the Malays, honest or dishonest, quiet fishermen or desperate cut-throats, recognised as “the Rajah-Laut” — the King of the Sea.

Almayer had heard of him before he had been three days in Macassar, had heard the stories of his smart business transactions, his loves, and also of his desperate fights with the Sulu pirates, together with the romantic tale of some child — a girl — found in a piratical prau by the victorious Lingard, when, after a long contest, he boarded the craft, driving the crew overboard. This girl, it was generally known, Lingard had adopted, was having her educated in some convent in Java, and spoke of her as “my daughter.” He had sworn a mighty oath to marry her to a white man before he went home and to leave her all his money. “And Captain Lingard has lots of money,” would say Mr. Vinck solemnly, with his head on one side, “lots of money; more than Hudig!” And after a pause — just to let his hearers recover from their astonishment at such an incredible assertion — he would add in an explanatory whisper, “You know, he has discovered a river.”

That was it! He had discovered a river! That was the fact placing old Lingard so much above the common crowd of sea-going adventurers who traded with Hudig in the daytime and drank champagne, gambled, sang noisy songs, and made love to half-caste girls under the broad verandah of the Sunda Hotel at night. Into that river, whose entrances himself only knew, Lingard used to take his assorted cargo of Manchester goods, brass gongs, rifles and gunpowder. His brig Flash, which he commanded himself, would on those occasions disappear quietly during the night from the roadstead while his companions were sleeping off the effects of the midnight carouse, Lingard seeing them drunk under the table before going on board, himself unaffected by any amount of liquor. Many tried to follow him and find that land of plenty for gutta-percha and rattans, pearl shells and birds’ nests, wax and gum-dammar, but the little Flash could outsail every craft in those seas. A few of them came to grief on hidden sandbanks and coral reefs, losing their all and barely escaping with life from the cruel grip of this sunny and smiling sea; others got discouraged; and for many years the green and

peaceful-looking islands guarding the entrances to the promised land kept their secret with all the merciless serenity of tropical nature. And so Lingard came and went on his secret or open expeditions, becoming a hero in Almayer's eyes by the boldness and enormous profits of his ventures, seeming to Almayer a very great man indeed as he saw him marching up the warehouse, grunting a "how are you?" to Vinck, or greeting Hudig, the Master, with a boisterous "Hallo, old pirate! Alive yet?" as a preliminary to transacting business behind the little green door. Often of an evening, in the silence of the then deserted warehouse, Almayer putting away his papers before driving home with Mr. Vinck, in whose household he lived, would pause listening to the noise of a hot discussion in the private office, would hear the deep and monotonous growl of the Master, and the roared-out interruptions of Lingard — two mastiffs fighting over a marrowy bone. But to Almayer's ears it sounded like a quarrel of Titans — a battle of the gods.

After a year or so Lingard, having been brought often in contact with Almayer in the course of business, took a sudden and, to the onlookers, a rather inexplicable fancy to the young man. He sang his praises, late at night, over a convivial glass to his cronies in the Sunda Hotel, and one fine morning electrified Vinck by declaring that he must have "that young fellow for a supercargo. Kind of captain's clerk. Do all my quill-driving for me." Hudig consented. Almayer, with youth's natural craving for change, was nothing loth, and packing his few belongings, started in the Flash on one of those long cruises when the old seaman was wont to visit almost every island in the archipelago. Months slipped by, and Lingard's friendship seemed to increase. Often pacing the deck with Almayer, when the faint night breeze, heavy with aromatic exhalations of the islands, shoved the brig gently along under the peaceful and sparkling sky, did the old seaman open his heart to his entranced listener. He spoke of his past life, of escaped dangers, of big profits in his trade, of new combinations that were in the future to bring profits bigger still. Often he had mentioned his daughter, the girl found in the pirate prau, speaking of her with a strange assumption of fatherly tenderness. "She must be a big girl now," he used to say. "It's nigh unto four years since I have seen her! Damme, Almayer, if I don't think we will run into Sourabaya this trip." And after such a declaration he always dived into his cabin muttering to himself, "Something must be done — must be done." More than once he would astonish Almayer by walking up to him rapidly, clearing his throat with a powerful "Hem!" as if he was going to say something, and then turning abruptly away to lean over the bulwarks in silence, and watch, motionless, for hours, the gleam and sparkle of the phosphorescent sea along the ship's side. It was the night before arriving in Sourabaya when one of those attempts at confidential communication succeeded. After clearing his throat he spoke. He spoke to some purpose. He wanted Almayer to marry his adopted daughter. "And don't you kick because you're white!" he shouted, suddenly, not giving the surprised young man the time to say a word. "None of that with me! Nobody will see the colour of your wife's skin. The dollars are too thick for that, I tell you! And mind you, they will be

thicker yet before I die. There will be millions, Kaspar! Millions I say! And all for her — and for you, if you do what you are told.”

Startled by the unexpected proposal, Almayer hesitated, and remained silent for a minute. He was gifted with a strong and active imagination, and in that short space of time he saw, as in a flash of dazzling light, great piles of shining guilders, and realised all the possibilities of an opulent existence. The consideration, the indolent ease of life — for which he felt himself so well fitted — his ships, his warehouses, his merchandise (old Lingard would not live for ever), and, crowning all, in the far future gleamed like a fairy palace the big mansion in Amsterdam, that earthly paradise of his dreams, where, made king amongst men by old Lingard’s money, he would pass the evening of his days in inexpressible splendour. As to the other side of the picture — the companionship for life of a Malay girl, that legacy of a boatful of pirates — there was only within him a confused consciousness of shame that he a white man — Still, a convent education of four years! — and then she may mercifully die. He was always lucky, and money is powerful! Go through it. Why not? He had a vague idea of shutting her up somewhere, anywhere, out of his gorgeous future. Easy enough to dispose of a Malay woman, a slave, after all, to his Eastern mind, convent or no convent, ceremony or no ceremony.

He lifted his head and confronted the anxious yet irate seaman.

“I — of course — anything you wish, Captain Lingard.”

“Call me father, my boy. She does,” said the mollified old adventurer. “Damme, though, if I didn’t think you were going to refuse. Mind you, Kaspar, I always get my way, so it would have been no use. But you are no fool.”

He remembered well that time — the look, the accent, the words, the effect they produced on him, his very surroundings. He remembered the narrow slanting deck of the brig, the silent sleeping coast, the smooth black surface of the sea with a great bar of gold laid on it by the rising moon. He remembered it all, and he remembered his feelings of mad exultation at the thought of that fortune thrown into his hands. He was no fool then, and he was no fool now. Circumstances had been against him; the fortune was gone, but hope remained.

He shivered in the night air, and suddenly became aware of the intense darkness which, on the sun’s departure, had closed in upon the river, blotting out the outlines of the opposite shore. Only the fire of dry branches lit outside the stockade of the Rajah’s compound called fitfully into view the ragged trunks of the surrounding trees, putting a stain of glowing red half-way across the river where the drifting logs were hurrying towards the sea through the impenetrable gloom. He had a hazy recollection of having been called some time during the evening by his wife. To his dinner probably. But a man busy contemplating the wreckage of his past in the dawn of new hopes cannot be hungry whenever his rice is ready. Time he went home, though; it was getting late.

He stepped cautiously on the loose planks towards the ladder. A lizard, disturbed by the noise, emitted a plaintive note and scurried through the long grass growing on the bank. Almayer descended the ladder carefully, now thoroughly recalled to the realities of life by the care necessary to prevent a fall on the uneven ground where the

stones, decaying planks, and half-sawn beams were piled up in inextricable confusion. As he turned towards the house where he lived — "my old house" he called it — his ear detected the splash of paddles away in the darkness of the river. He stood still in the path, attentive and surprised at anybody being on the river at this late hour during such a heavy freshet. Now he could hear the paddles distinctly, and even a rapidly exchanged word in low tones, the heavy breathing of men fighting with the current, and hugging the bank on which he stood. Quite close, too, but it was too dark to distinguish anything under the overhanging bushes.

"Arabs, no doubt," muttered Almayer to himself, peering into the solid blackness. "What are they up to now? Some of Abdulla's business; curse him!"

The boat was very close now.

"Oh, ya! Man!" hailed Almayer.

The sound of voices ceased, but the paddles worked as furiously as before. Then the bush in front of Almayer shook, and the sharp sound of the paddles falling into the canoe rang in the quiet night. They were holding on to the bush now; but Almayer could hardly make out an indistinct dark shape of a man's head and shoulders above the bank.

"You Abdulla?" said Almayer, doubtfully.

A grave voice answered —

"Tuan Almayer is speaking to a friend. There is no Arab here."

Almayer's heart gave a great leap.

"Dain!" he exclaimed. "At last! at last! I have been waiting for you every day and every night. I had nearly given you up."

"Nothing could have stopped me from coming back here," said the other, almost violently. "Not even death," he whispered to himself.

"This is a friend's talk, and is very good," said Almayer, heartily. "But you are too far here. Drop down to the jetty and let your men cook their rice in my campong while we talk in the house."

There was no answer to that invitation.

"What is it?" asked Almayer, uneasily. "There is nothing wrong with the brig, I hope?"

"The brig is where no Orang Blanda can lay his hands on her," said Dain, with a gloomy tone in his voice, which Almayer, in his elation, failed to notice.

"Right," he said. "But where are all your men? There are only two with you."

"Listen, Tuan Almayer," said Dain. "To-morrow's sun shall see me in your house, and then we will talk. Now I must go to the Rajah."

"To the Rajah! Why? What do you want with Lakamba?"

"Tuan, to-morrow we talk like friends. I must see Lakamba to-night."

"Dain, you are not going to abandon me now, when all is ready?" asked Almayer, in a pleading voice.

"Have I not returned? But I must see Lakamba first for your good and mine."

The shadowy head disappeared abruptly. The bush, released from the grasp of the bowman, sprung back with a swish, scattering a shower of muddy water over Almayer, as he bent forward, trying to see.

In a little while the canoe shot into the streak of light that streamed on the river from the big fire on the opposite shore, disclosing the outline of two men bending to their work, and a third figure in the stern flourishing the steering paddle, his head covered with an enormous round hat, like a fantastically exaggerated mushroom.

Almayer watched the canoe till it passed out of the line of light. Shortly after the murmur of many voices reached him across the water. He could see the torches being snatched out of the burning pile, and rendering visible for a moment the gate in the stockade round which they crowded. Then they went in apparently. The torches disappeared, and the scattered fire sent out only a dim and fitful glare.

Almayer stepped homewards with long strides and mind uneasy. Surely Dain was not thinking of playing him false. It was absurd. Dain and Lakamba were both too much interested in the success of his scheme. Trusting to Malays was poor work; but then even Malays have some sense and understand their own interest. All would be well — must be well. At this point in his meditation he found himself at the foot of the steps leading to the verandah of his home. From the low point of land where he stood he could see both branches of the river. The main branch of the Pantai was lost in complete darkness, for the fire at the Rajah's had gone out altogether; but up the Sambir reach his eye could follow the long line of Malay houses crowding the bank, with here and there a dim light twinkling through bamboo walls, or a smoky torch burning on the platforms built out over the river. Further away, where the island ended in a low cliff, rose a dark mass of buildings towering above the Malay structures. Founded solidly on a firm ground with plenty of space, starred by many lights burning strong and white, with a suggestion of paraffin and lamp-glasses, stood the house and the godowns of Abdulla bin Selim, the great trader of Sambir. To Almayer the sight was very distasteful, and he shook his fist towards the buildings that in their evident prosperity looked to him cold and insolent, and contemptuous of his own fallen fortunes.

He mounted the steps of his house slowly.

In the middle of the verandah there was a round table. On it a paraffin lamp without a globe shed a hard glare on the three inner sides. The fourth side was open, and faced the river. Between the rough supports of the high-pitched roof hung torn rattan screens. There was no ceiling, and the harsh brilliance of the lamp was toned above into a soft half-light that lost itself in the obscurity amongst the rafters. The front wall was cut in two by the doorway of a central passage closed by a red curtain. The women's room opened into that passage, which led to the back courtyard and to the cooking shed. In one of the side walls there was a doorway. Half obliterated words — "Office: Lingard and Co." — were still legible on the dusty door, which looked as if it had not been opened for a very long time. Close to the other side wall stood a bentwood rocking-chair, and by the table and about the verandah four wooden armchairs straggled forlornly, as if ashamed of their shabby surroundings. A heap of common

mats lay in one corner, with an old hammock slung diagonally above. In the other corner, his head wrapped in a piece of red calico, huddled into a shapeless heap, slept a Malay, one of Almayer's domestic slaves — "my own people," he used to call them. A numerous and representative assembly of moths were holding high revels round the lamp to the spirited music of swarming mosquitoes. Under the palm-leaf thatch lizards raced on the beams calling softly. A monkey, chained to one of the verandah supports — retired for the night under the eaves — peered and grinned at Almayer, as it swung to one of the bamboo roof sticks and caused a shower of dust and bits of dried leaves to settle on the shabby table. The floor was uneven, with many withered plants and dried earth scattered about. A general air of squalid neglect pervaded the place. Great red stains on the floor and walls testified to frequent and indiscriminate betel-nut chewing. The light breeze from the river swayed gently the tattered blinds, sending from the woods opposite a faint and sickly perfume as of decaying flowers.

Under Almayer's heavy tread the boards of the verandah creaked loudly. The sleeper in the corner moved uneasily, muttering indistinct words. There was a slight rustle behind the curtained doorway, and a soft voice asked in Malay, "Is it you, father?"

"Yes, Nina. I am hungry. Is everybody asleep in this house?"

Almayer spoke jovially and dropped with a contented sigh into the armchair nearest to the table. Nina Almayer came through the curtained doorway followed by an old Malay woman, who busied herself in setting upon the table a plateful of rice and fish, a jar of water, and a bottle half full of genever. After carefully placing before her master a cracked glass tumbler and a tin spoon she went away noiselessly. Nina stood by the table, one hand lightly resting on its edge, the other hanging listlessly by her side. Her face turned towards the outer darkness, through which her dreamy eyes seemed to see some entrancing picture, wore a look of impatient expectancy. She was tall for a half-caste, with the correct profile of the father, modified and strengthened by the squareness of the lower part of the face inherited from her maternal ancestors — the Sulu pirates. Her firm mouth, with the lips slightly parted and disclosing a gleam of white teeth, put a vague suggestion of ferocity into the impatient expression of her features. And yet her dark and perfect eyes had all the tender softness of expression common to Malay women, but with a gleam of superior intelligence; they looked gravely, wide open and steady, as if facing something invisible to all other eyes, while she stood there all in white, straight, flexible, graceful, unconscious of herself, her low but broad forehead crowned with a shining mass of long black hair that fell in heavy tresses over her shoulders, and made her pale olive complexion look paler still by the contrast of its coal-black hue.

Almayer attacked his rice greedily, but after a few mouthfuls he paused, spoon in hand, and looked at his daughter curiously.

"Did you hear a boat pass about half an hour ago Nina?" he asked.

The girl gave him a quick glance, and moving away from the light stood with her back to the table.

"No," she said, slowly.

“There was a boat. At last! Dain himself; and he went on to Lakamba. I know it, for he told me so. I spoke to him, but he would not come here to-night. Will come to-morrow, he said.”

He swallowed another spoonful, then said —

“I am almost happy to-night, Nina. I can see the end of a long road, and it leads us away from this miserable swamp. We shall soon get away from here, I and you, my dear little girl, and then — ”

He rose from the table and stood looking fixedly before him as if contemplating some enchanting vision.

“And then,” he went on, “we shall be happy, you and I. Live rich and respected far from here, and forget this life, and all this struggle, and all this misery!”

He approached his daughter and passed his hand caressingly over her hair.

“It is bad to have to trust a Malay,” he said, “but I must own that this Dain is a perfect gentleman — a perfect gentleman,” he repeated.

“Did you ask him to come here, father?” inquired Nina, not looking at him.

“Well, of course. We shall start on the day after to-morrow,” said Almayer, joyously. “We must not lose any time. Are you glad, little girl?”

She was nearly as tall as himself, but he liked to recall the time when she was little and they were all in all to each other.

“I am glad,” she said, very low.

“Of course,” said Almayer, vivaciously, “you cannot imagine what is before you. I myself have not been to Europe, but I have heard my mother talk so often that I seem to know all about it. We shall live a — a glorious life. You shall see.”

Again he stood silent by his daughter’s side looking at that enchanting vision. After a while he shook his clenched hand towards the sleeping settlement.

“Ah! my friend Abdulla,” he cried, “we shall see who will have the best of it after all these years!”

He looked up the river and remarked calmly:

“Another thunderstorm. Well! No thunder will keep me awake to-night, I know! Good-night, little girl,” he whispered, tenderly kissing her cheek. “You do not seem to be very happy to-night, but to-morrow you will show a brighter face. Eh?”

Nina had listened to her father with her face unmoved, with her half-closed eyes still gazing into the night now made more intense by a heavy thunder-cloud that had crept down from the hills blotting out the stars, merging sky, forest, and river into one mass of almost palpable blackness. The faint breeze had died out, but the distant rumble of thunder and pale flashes of lightning gave warning of the approaching storm. With a sigh the girl turned towards the table.

Almayer was in his hammock now, already half asleep.

“Take the lamp, Nina,” he muttered, drowsily. “This place is full of mosquitoes. Go to sleep, daughter.”

But Nina put the lamp out and turned back again towards the balustrade of the verandah, standing with her arm round the wooden support and looking eagerly to-

wards the Pantai reach. And motionless there in the oppressive calm of the tropical night she could see at each flash of lightning the forest lining both banks up the river, bending before the furious blast of the coming tempest, the upper reach of the river whipped into white foam by the wind, and the black clouds torn into fantastic shapes trailing low over the swaying trees. Round her all was as yet stillness and peace, but she could hear afar off the roar of the wind, the hiss of heavy rain, the wash of the waves on the tormented river. It came nearer and nearer, with loud thunder-claps and long flashes of vivid lightning, followed by short periods of appalling blackness. When the storm reached the low point dividing the river, the house shook in the wind, and the rain pattered loudly on the palm-leaf roof, the thunder spoke in one prolonged roll, and the incessant lightning disclosed a turmoil of leaping waters, driving logs, and the big trees bending before a brutal and merciless force.

Undisturbed by the nightly event of the rainy monsoon, the father slept quietly, oblivious alike of his hopes, his misfortunes, his friends, and his enemies; and the daughter stood motionless, at each flash of lightning eagerly scanning the broad river with a steady and anxious gaze.

Chapter 2

When, in compliance with Lingard's abrupt demand, Almayer consented to wed the Malay girl, no one knew that on the day when the interesting young convert had lost all her natural relations and found a white father, she had been fighting desperately like the rest of them on board the prau, and was only prevented from leaping overboard, like the few other survivors, by a severe wound in the leg. There, on the fore-deck of the prau, old Lingard found her under a heap of dead and dying pirates, and had her carried on the poop of the Flash before the Malay craft was set on fire and sent adrift. She was conscious, and in the great peace and stillness of the tropical evening succeeding the turmoil of the battle, she watched all she held dear on earth after her own savage manner, drift away into the gloom in a great roar of flame and smoke. She lay there unheeding the careful hands attending to her wound, silent and absorbed in gazing at the funeral pile of those brave men she had so much admired and so well helped in their contest with the redoubtable "Rajah-Laut."

* * * * *

The light night breeze fanned the brig gently to the southward, and the great blaze of light got smaller and smaller till it twinkled only on the horizon like a setting star. It set: the heavy canopy of smoke reflected the glare of hidden flames for a short time and then disappeared also.

She realised that with this vanishing gleam her old life departed too. Thenceforth there was slavery in the far countries, amongst strangers, in unknown and perhaps terrible surroundings. Being fourteen years old, she realised her position and came to that conclusion, the only one possible to a Malay girl, soon ripened under a tropical sun, and not unaware of her personal charms, of which she heard many a young brave warrior of her father's crew express an appreciative admiration. There was in her the dread of the unknown; otherwise she accepted her position calmly, after the manner of her people, and even considered it quite natural; for was she not a daughter of warriors, conquered in battle, and did she not belong rightfully to the victorious Rajah? Even the evident kindness of the terrible old man must spring, she thought, from admiration for his captive, and the flattered vanity eased for her the pangs of sorrow after such an awful calamity. Perhaps had she known of the high walls, the quiet gardens, and the silent nuns of the Samarang convent, where her destiny was leading her, she would have sought death in her dread and hate of such a restraint. But in imagination she pictured to herself the usual life of a Malay girl — the usual succession of heavy work and fierce love, of intrigues, gold ornaments, of domestic drudgery, and of that great but occult influence which is one of the few rights of half-savage womankind. But her

destiny in the rough hands of the old sea-dog, acting under unreasoning impulses of the heart, took a strange and to her a terrible shape. She bore it all — the restraint and the teaching and the new faith — with calm submission, concealing her hate and contempt for all that new life. She learned the language very easily, yet understood but little of the new faith the good sisters taught her, assimilating quickly only the superstitious elements of the religion. She called Lingard father, gently and caressingly, at each of his short and noisy visits, under the clear impression that he was a great and dangerous power it was good to propitiate. Was he not now her master? And during those long four years she nourished a hope of finding favour in his eyes and ultimately becoming his wife, counsellor, and guide.

Those dreams of the future were dispelled by the Rajah Laut's "flat," which made Almayer's fortune, as that young man fondly hoped. And dressed in the hateful finery of Europe, the centre of an interested circle of Batavian society, the young convert stood before the altar with an unknown and sulky-looking white man. For Almayer was uneasy, a little disgusted, and greatly inclined to run away. A judicious fear of the adopted father-in-law and a just regard for his own material welfare prevented him from making a scandal; yet, while swearing fidelity, he was concocting plans for getting rid of the pretty Malay girl in a more or less distant future. She, however, had retained enough of conventual teaching to understand well that according to white men's laws she was going to be Almayer's companion and not his slave, and promised to herself to act accordingly.

So when the Flash freighted with materials for building a new house left the harbour of Batavia, taking away the young couple into the unknown Borneo, she did not carry on her deck so much love and happiness as old Lingard was wont to boast of before his casual friends in the verandahs of various hotels. The old seaman himself was perfectly happy. Now he had done his duty by the girl. "You know I made her an orphan," he often concluded solemnly, when talking about his own affairs to a scratch audience of shore loafers — as it was his habit to do. And the approbative shouts of his half-intoxicated auditors filled his simple soul with delight and pride. "I carry everything right through," was another of his sayings, and in pursuance of that principle he pushed the building of house and godowns on the Pantai River with feverish haste. The house for the young couple; the godowns for the big trade Almayer was going to develop while he (Lingard) would be able to give himself up to some mysterious work which was only spoken of in hints, but was understood to relate to gold and diamonds in the interior of the island. Almayer was impatient too. Had he known what was before him he might not have been so eager and full of hope as he stood watching the last canoe of the Lingard expedition disappear in the bend up the river. When, turning round, he beheld the pretty little house, the big godowns built neatly by an army of Chinese carpenters, the new jetty round which were clustered the trading canoes, he felt a sudden elation in the thought that the world was his.

But the world had to be conquered first, and its conquest was not so easy as he thought. He was very soon made to understand that he was not wanted in that corner

of it where old Lingard and his own weak will placed him, in the midst of unscrupulous intrigues and of a fierce trade competition. The Arabs had found out the river, had established a trading post in Sambir, and where they traded they would be masters and suffer no rival. Lingard returned unsuccessful from his first expedition, and departed again spending all the profits of the legitimate trade on his mysterious journeys. Almayer struggled with the difficulties of his position, friendless and unaided, save for the protection given to him for Lingard's sake by the old Rajah, the predecessor of Lakamba. Lakamba himself, then living as a private individual on a rice clearing, seven miles down the river, exercised all his influence towards the help of the white man's enemies, plotting against the old Rajah and Almayer with a certainty of combination, pointing clearly to a profound knowledge of their most secret affairs. Outwardly friendly, his portly form was often to be seen on Almayer's verandah; his green turban and gold-embroidered jacket shone in the front rank of the decorous throng of Malays coming to greet Lingard on his returns from the interior; his salaams were of the lowest, and his hand-shakings of the heartiest, when welcoming the old trader. But his small eyes took in the signs of the times, and he departed from those interviews with a satisfied and furtive smile to hold long consultations with his friend and ally, Syed Abdulla, the chief of the Arab trading post, a man of great wealth and of great influence in the islands.

It was currently believed at that time in the settlement that Lakamba's visits to Almayer's house were not limited to those official interviews. Often on moonlight nights the belated fishermen of Sambira saw a small canoe shooting out from the narrow creek at the back of the white man's house, and the solitary occupant paddle cautiously down the river in the deep shadows of the bank; and those events, duly reported, were discussed round the evening fires far into the night with the cynicism of expression common to aristocratic Malays, and with a malicious pleasure in the domestic misfortunes of the Orang Blando — the hated Dutchman. Almayer went on struggling desperately, but with a feebleness of purpose depriving him of all chance of success against men so unscrupulous and resolute as his rivals the Arabs. The trade fell away from the large godowns, and the godowns themselves rotted piecemeal. The old man's banker, Hudig of Macassar, failed, and with this went the whole available capital. The profits of past years had been swallowed up in Lingard's exploring craze. Lingard was in the interior — perhaps dead — at all events giving no sign of life. Almayer stood alone in the midst of those adverse circumstances, deriving only a little comfort from the companionship of his little daughter, born two years after the marriage, and at the time some six years old. His wife had soon commenced to treat him with a savage contempt expressed by sulky silence, only occasionally varied by a flood of savage invective. He felt she hated him, and saw her jealous eyes watching himself and the child with almost an expression of hate. She was jealous of the little girl's evident preference for the father, and Almayer felt he was not safe with that woman in the house. While she was burning the furniture, and tearing down the pretty curtains in her unreasoning hate of those signs of civilisation, Almayer, cowed by these outbursts of savage nature,

meditated in silence on the best way of getting rid of her. He thought of everything; even planned murder in an undecided and feeble sort of way, but dared do nothing — expecting every day the return of Lingard with news of some immense good fortune. He returned indeed, but aged, ill, a ghost of his former self, with the fire of fever burning in his sunken eyes, almost the only survivor of the numerous expedition. But he was successful at last! Untold riches were in his grasp; he wanted more money — only a little more to realise a dream of fabulous fortune. And Hudig had failed! Almayer scraped all he could together, but the old man wanted more. If Almayer could not get it he would go to Singapore — to Europe even, but before all to Singapore; and he would take the little Nina with him. The child must be brought up decently. He had good friends in Singapore who would take care of her and have her taught properly. All would be well, and that girl, upon whom the old seaman seemed to have transferred all his former affection for the mother, would be the richest woman in the East — in the world even. So old Lingard shouted, pacing the verandah with his heavy quarter-deck step, gesticulating with a smouldering cheroot; ragged, dishevelled, enthusiastic; and Almayer, sitting huddled up on a pile of mats, thought with dread of the separation with the only human being he loved — with greater dread still, perhaps, of the scene with his wife, the savage tigress deprived of her young. She will poison me, thought the poor wretch, well aware of that easy and final manner of solving the social, political, or family problems in Malay life.

To his great surprise she took the news very quietly, giving only him and Lingard a furtive glance, and saying not a word. This, however, did not prevent her the next day from jumping into the river and swimming after the boat in which Lingard was carrying away the nurse with the screaming child. Almayer had to give chase with his whale-boat and drag her in by the hair in the midst of cries and curses enough to make heaven fall. Yet after two days spent in wailing, she returned to her former mode of life, chewing betel-nut, and sitting all day amongst her women in stupefied idleness. She aged very rapidly after that, and only roused herself from her apathy to acknowledge by a scathing remark or an insulting exclamation the accidental presence of her husband. He had built for her a riverside hut in the compound where she dwelt in perfect seclusion. Lakamba's visits had ceased when, by a convenient decree of Providence and the help of a little scientific manipulation, the old ruler of Sambir departed this life. Lakamba reigned in his stead now, having been well served by his Arab friends with the Dutch authorities. Syed Abdulla was the great man and trader of the Pantai. Almayer lay ruined and helpless under the close-meshed net of their intrigues, owing his life only to his supposed knowledge of Lingard's valuable secret. Lingard had disappeared. He wrote once from Singapore saying the child was well, and under the care of a Mrs. Vinck, and that he himself was going to Europe to raise money for the great enterprise. "He was coming back soon. There would be no difficulties," he wrote; "people would rush in with their money." Evidently they did not, for there was only one letter more from him saying he was ill, had found no relation living, but little else besides. Then came a complete silence. Europe had swallowed up the Rajah Laut

apparently, and Almayer looked vainly westward for a ray of light out of the gloom of his shattered hopes. Years passed, and the rare letters from Mrs. Vinck, later on from the girl herself, were the only thing to be looked to to make life bearable amongst the triumphant savagery of the river. Almayer lived now alone, having even ceased to visit his debtors who would not pay, sure of Lakamba's protection. The faithful Sumatrese Ali cooked his rice and made his coffee, for he dared not trust any one else, and least of all his wife. He killed time wandering sadly in the overgrown paths round the house, visiting the ruined godowns where a few brass guns covered with verdigris and only a few broken cases of mouldering Manchester goods reminded him of the good early times when all this was full of life and merchandise, and he overlooked a busy scene on the river bank, his little daughter by his side. Now the up-country canoes glided past the little rotten wharf of Lingard and Co., to paddle up the Pantai branch, and cluster round the new jetty belonging to Abdulla. Not that they loved Abdulla, but they dared not trade with the man whose star had set. Had they done so they knew there was no mercy to be expected from Arab or Rajah; no rice to be got on credit in the times of scarcity from either; and Almayer could not help them, having at times hardly enough for himself. Almayer, in his isolation and despair, often envied his near neighbour the Chinaman, Jim-Eng, whom he could see stretched on a pile of cool mats, a wooden pillow under his head, an opium pipe in his nerveless fingers. He did not seek, however, consolation in opium — perhaps it was too expensive — perhaps his white man's pride saved him from that degradation; but most likely it was the thought of his little daughter in the far-off Straits Settlements. He heard from her oftener since Abdulla bought a steamer, which ran now between Singapore and the Pantai settlement every three months or so. Almayer felt himself nearer his daughter. He longed to see her, and planned a voyage to Singapore, but put off his departure from year to year, always expecting some favourable turn of fortune. He did not want to meet her with empty hands and with no words of hope on his lips. He could not take her back into that savage life to which he was condemned himself. He was also a little afraid of her. What would she think of him? He reckoned the years. A grown woman. A civilised woman, young and hopeful; while he felt old and hopeless, and very much like those savages round him. He asked himself what was going to be her future. He could not answer that question yet, and he dared not face her. And yet he longed after her. He hesitated for years.

His hesitation was put an end to by Nina's unexpected appearance in Sambir. She arrived in the steamer under the captain's care. Almayer beheld her with surprise not unmixed with wonder. During those ten years the child had changed into a woman, black-haired, olive-skinned, tall, and beautiful, with great sad eyes, where the startled expression common to Malay womankind was modified by a thoughtful tinge inherited from her European ancestry. Almayer thought with dismay of the meeting of his wife and daughter, of what this grave girl in European clothes would think of her betel-nut chewing mother, squatting in a dark hut, disorderly, half naked, and sulky. He also feared an outbreak of temper on the part of that pest of a woman he had hitherto

managed to keep tolerably quiet, thereby saving the remnants of his dilapidated furniture. And he stood there before the closed door of the hut in the blazing sunshine listening to the murmur of voices, wondering what went on inside, wherefrom all the servant-maids had been expelled at the beginning of the interview, and now stood clustered by the palings with half-covered faces in a chatter of curious speculation. He forgot himself there trying to catch a stray word through the bamboo walls, till the captain of the steamer, who had walked up with the girl, fearing a sunstroke, took him under the arm and led him into the shade of his own verandah: where Nina's trunk stood already, having been landed by the steamer's men. As soon as Captain Ford had his glass before him and his cheroot lighted, Almayer asked for the explanation of his daughter's unexpected arrival. Ford said little beyond generalising in vague but violent terms upon the foolishness of women in general, and of Mrs. Vinck in particular.

"You know, Kaspar," said he, in conclusion, to the excited Almayer, "it is deucedly awkward to have a half-caste girl in the house. There's such a lot of fools about. There was that young fellow from the bank who used to ride to the Vinck bungalow early and late. That old woman thought it was for that Emma of hers. When she found out what he wanted exactly, there was a row, I can tell you. She would not have Nina — not an hour longer — in the house. Fact is, I heard of this affair and took the girl to my wife. My wife is a pretty good woman — as women go — and upon my word we would have kept the girl for you, only she would not stay. Now, then! Don't flare up, Kaspar. Sit still. What can you do? It is better so. Let her stay with you. She was never happy over there. Those two Vinck girls are no better than dressed-up monkeys. They slighted her. You can't make her white. It's no use you swearing at me. You can't. She is a good girl for all that, but she would not tell my wife anything. If you want to know, ask her yourself; but if I was you I would leave her alone. You are welcome to her passage money, old fellow, if you are short now." And the skipper, throwing away his cigar, walked off to "wake them up on board," as he expressed it.

Almayer vainly expected to hear of the cause of his daughter's return from his daughter's lips. Not that day, not on any other day did she ever allude to her Singapore life. He did not care to ask, awed by the calm impassiveness of her face, by those solemn eyes looking past him on the great, still forests sleeping in majestic repose to the murmur of the broad river. He accepted the situation, happy in the gentle and protecting affection the girl showed him, fitfully enough, for she had, as she called it, her bad days when she used to visit her mother and remain long hours in the riverside hut, coming out as inscrutable as ever, but with a contemptuous look and a short word ready to answer any of his speeches. He got used even to that, and on those days kept quiet, although greatly alarmed by his wife's influence upon the girl. Otherwise Nina adapted herself wonderfully to the circumstances of a half-savage and miserable life. She accepted without question or apparent disgust the neglect, the decay, the poverty of the household, the absence of furniture, and the preponderance of rice diet on the family table. She lived with Almayer in the little house (now sadly decaying) built originally by Lingard for the young couple. The Malays eagerly discussed her arrival. There were

at the beginning crowded levées of Malay women with their children, seeking eagerly after “Ubat” for all the ills of the flesh from the young Mem Putih. In the cool of the evening grave Arabs in long white shirts and yellow sleeveless jackets walked slowly on the dusty path by the riverside towards Almayer’s gate, and made solemn calls upon that Unbeliever under shallow pretences of business, only to get a glimpse of the young girl in a highly decorous manner. Even Lakamba came out of his stockade in a great pomp of war canoes and red umbrellas, and landed on the rotten little jetty of Lingard and Co. He came, he said, to buy a couple of brass guns as a present to his friend the chief of Sambir Dyaks; and while Almayer, suspicious but polite, busied himself in unearthing the old popguns in the godowns, the Rajah sat on an armchair in the verandah, surrounded by his respectful retinue waiting in vain for Nina’s appearance. She was in one of her bad days, and remained in her mother’s hut watching with her the ceremonious proceedings on the verandah. The Rajah departed, baffled but courteous, and soon Almayer began to reap the benefit of improved relations with the ruler in the shape of the recovery of some debts, paid to him with many apologies and many a low salaam by debtors till then considered hopelessly insolvent. Under these improving circumstances Almayer brightened up a little. All was not lost perhaps. Those Arabs and Malays saw at last that he was a man of some ability, he thought. And he began, after his manner, to plan great things, to dream of great fortunes for himself and Nina. Especially for Nina! Under these vivifying impulses he asked Captain Ford to write to his friends in England making inquiries after Lingard. Was he alive or dead? If dead, had he left any papers, documents; any indications or hints as to his great enterprise? Meantime he had found amongst the rubbish in one of the empty rooms a note-book belonging to the old adventurer. He studied the crabbed handwriting of its pages and often grew meditative over it. Other things also woke him up from his apathy. The stir made in the whole of the island by the establishment of the British Borneo Company affected even the sluggish flow of the Pantai life. Great changes were expected; annexation was talked of; the Arabs grew civil. Almayer began building his new house for the use of the future engineers, agents, or settlers of the new Company. He spent every available guilder on it with a confiding heart. One thing only disturbed his happiness: his wife came out of her seclusion, importing her green jacket, scant sarongs, shrill voice, and witch-like appearance, into his quiet life in the small bungalow. And his daughter seemed to accept that savage intrusion into their daily existence with wonderful equanimity. He did not like it, but dared say nothing.

Chapter 3

The deliberations conducted in London have a far-reaching importance, and so the decision issued from the fog-veiled offices of the Borneo Company darkened for Almayr the brilliant sunshine of the Tropics, and added another drop of bitterness to the cup of his disenchantments. The claim to that part of the East Coast was abandoned, leaving the Pantai river under the nominal power of Holland. In Sambir there was joy and excitement. The slaves were hurried out of sight into the forest and jungle, and the flags were run up to tall poles in the Rajah's compound in expectation of a visit from Dutch man-of-war boats.

The frigate remained anchored outside the mouth of the river, and the boats came up in tow of the steam launch, threading their way cautiously amongst a crowd of canoes filled with gaily dressed Malays. The officer in command listened gravely to the loyal speeches of Lakamba, returned the salaams of Abdulla, and assured those gentlemen in choice Malay of the great Rajah's — down in Batavia — friendship and goodwill towards the ruler and inhabitants of this model state of Sambir.

Almayr from his verandah watched across the river the festive proceedings, heard the report of brass guns saluting the new flag presented to Lakamba, and the deep murmur of the crowd of spectators surging round the stockade. The smoke of the firing rose in white clouds on the green background of the forests, and he could not help comparing his own fleeting hopes to the rapidly disappearing vapour. He was by no means patriotically elated by the event, yet he had to force himself into a gracious behaviour when, the official reception being over, the naval officers of the Commission crossed the river to pay a visit to the solitary white man of whom they had heard, no doubt wishing also to catch a glimpse of his daughter. In that they were disappointed, Nina refusing to show herself; but they seemed easily consoled by the gin and cheroots set before them by the hospitable Almayr; and sprawling comfortably on the lame armchairs under the shade of the verandah, while the blazing sunshine outside seemed to set the great river simmering in the heat, they filled the little bungalow with the unusual sounds of European languages, with noise and laughter produced by naval witticisms at the expense of the fat Lakamba whom they had been complimenting so much that very morning. The younger men in an access of good fellowship made their host talk, and Almayr, excited by the sight of European faces, by the sound of European voices, opened his heart before the sympathising strangers, unaware of the amusement the recital of his many misfortunes caused to those future admirals. They drank his health, wished him many big diamonds and a mountain of gold, expressed even an envy of the high destinies awaiting him yet. Encouraged by so much friendliness,

the grey-headed and foolish dreamer invited his guests to visit his new house. They went there through the long grass in a straggling procession while their boats were got ready for the return down the river in the cool of the evening. And in the great empty rooms where the tepid wind entering through the sashless windows whirled gently the dried leaves and the dust of many days of neglect, Almayer in his white jacket and flowered sarong, surrounded by a circle of glittering uniforms, stamped his foot to show the solidity of the neatly-fitting floors and expatiated upon the beauties and convenience of the building. They listened and assented, amazed by the wonderful simplicity and the foolish hopefulness of the man, till Almayer, carried away by his excitement, disclosed his regret at the non-arrival of the English, "who knew how to develop a rich country," as he expressed it. There was a general laugh amongst the Dutch officers at that unsophisticated statement, and a move was made towards the boats; but when Almayer, stepping cautiously on the rotten boards of the Lingard jetty, tried to approach the chief of the Commission with some timid hints anent the protection required by the Dutch subject against the wily Arabs, that salt water diplomat told him significantly that the Arabs were better subjects than Hollanders who dealt illegally in gunpowder with the Malays. The innocent Almayer recognised there at once the oily tongue of Abdulla and the solemn persuasiveness of Lakamba, but ere he had time to frame an indignant protest the steam launch and the string of boats moved rapidly down the river leaving him on the jetty, standing open-mouthed in his surprise and anger. There are thirty miles of river from Sambir to the gem-like islands of the estuary where the frigate was awaiting the return of the boats. The moon rose long before the boats had traversed half that distance, and the black forest sleeping peacefully under her cold rays woke up that night to the ringing laughter in the small flotilla provoked by some reminiscence of Almayer's lamentable narrative. Salt-water jests at the poor man's expense were passed from boat to boat, the non-appearance of his daughter was commented upon with severe displeasure, and the half-finished house built for the reception of Englishmen received on that joyous night the name of "Almayer's Folly" by the unanimous vote of the lighthearted seamen.

For many weeks after this visit life in Sambir resumed its even and uneventful flow. Each day's sun shooting its morning rays above the tree-tops lit up the usual scene of daily activity. Nina walking on the path that formed the only street in the settlement saw the accustomed sight of men lolling on the shady side of the houses, on the high platforms; of women busily engaged in husking the daily rice; of naked brown children racing along the shady and narrow paths leading to the clearings. Jim-Eng, strolling before his house, greeted her with a friendly nod before climbing up indoors to seek his beloved opium pipe. The elder children clustered round her, daring from long acquaintance, pulling the skirts of her white robe with their dark fingers, and showing their brilliant teeth in expectation of a shower of glass beads. She greeted them with a quiet smile, but always had a few friendly words for a Siamese girl, a slave owned by Bulangi, whose numerous wives were said to be of a violent temper. Well-founded rumour said also that the domestic squabbles of that industrious cultivator ended

generally in a combined assault of all his wives upon the Siamese slave. The girl herself never complained — perhaps from dictates of prudence, but more likely through the strange, resigned apathy of half-savage womankind. From early morning she was to be seen on the paths amongst the houses — by the riverside or on the jetties, the tray of pastry, it was her mission to sell, skilfully balanced on her head. During the great heat of the day she usually sought refuge in Almayer's campong, often finding shelter in a shady corner of the verandah, where she squatted with her tray before her, when invited by Nina. For "Mem Putih" she had always a smile, but the presence of Mrs. Almayer, the very sound of her shrill voice, was the signal for a hurried departure.

To this girl Nina often spoke; the other inhabitants of Sambir seldom or never heard the sound of her voice. They got used to the silent figure moving in their midst calm and white-robed, a being from another world and incomprehensible to them. Yet Nina's life for all her outward composure, for all the seeming detachment from the things and people surrounding her, was far from quiet, in consequence of Mrs. Almayer being much too active for the happiness and even safety of the household. She had resumed some intercourse with Lakamba, not personally, it is true (for the dignity of that potentate kept him inside his stockade), but through the agency of that potentate's prime minister, harbour master, financial adviser, and general factotum. That gentleman — of Sulu origin — was certainly endowed with statesmanlike qualities, although he was totally devoid of personal charms. In truth he was perfectly repulsive, possessing only one eye and a pockmarked face, with nose and lips horribly disfigured by the small-pox. This unengaging individual often strolled into Almayer's garden in unofficial costume, composed of a piece of pink calico round his waist. There at the back of the house, squatting on his heels on scattered embers, in close proximity to the great iron boiler, where the family daily rice was being cooked by the women under Mrs. Almayer's superintendence, did that astute negotiator carry on long conversations in Sulu language with Almayer's wife. What the subject of their discourses was might have been guessed from the subsequent domestic scenes by Almayer's hearthstone.

Of late Almayer had taken to excursions up the river. In a small canoe with two paddlers and the faithful Ali for a steersman he would disappear for a few days at a time. All his movements were no doubt closely watched by Lakamba and Abdulla, for the man once in the confidence of Rajah Laut was supposed to be in possession of valuable secrets. The coast population of Borneo believes implicitly in diamonds of fabulous value, in gold mines of enormous richness in the interior. And all those imaginings are heightened by the difficulty of penetrating far inland, especially on the north-east coast, where the Malays and the river tribes of Dyaks or Head-hunters are eternally quarrelling. It is true enough that some gold reaches the coast in the hands of those Dyaks when, during short periods of truce in the desultory warfare, they visit the coast settlements of Malays. And so the wildest exaggerations are built up and added to on the slight basis of that fact.

Almayer in his quality of white man — as Lingard before him — had somewhat better relations with the up-river tribes. Yet even his excursions were not without dan-

ger, and his returns were eagerly looked for by the impatient Lakamba. But every time the Rajah was disappointed. Vain were the conferences by the rice-pot of his factotum Babalatchi with the white man's wife. The white man himself was impenetrable — impenetrable to persuasion, coaxing, abuse; to soft words and shrill revilings; to desperate beseechings or murderous threats; for Mrs. Almayer, in her extreme desire to persuade her husband into an alliance with Lakamba, played upon the whole gamut of passion. With her soiled robe wound tightly under the armpits across her lean bosom, her scant grayish hair tumbled in disorder over her projecting cheek-bones, in suppliant attitude, she depicted with shrill volubility the advantages of close union with a man so good and so fair dealing.

“Why don't you go to the Rajah?” she screamed. “Why do you go back to those Dyaks in the great forest? They should be killed. You cannot kill them, you cannot; but our Rajah's men are brave! You tell the Rajah where the old white man's treasure is. Our Rajah is good! He is our very grandfather, Datu Besar! He will kill those wretched Dyaks, and you shall have half the treasure. Oh, Kaspar, tell where the treasure is! Tell me! Tell me out of the old man's surat where you read so often at night.”

On those occasions Almayer sat with rounded shoulders bending to the blast of this domestic tempest, accentuating only each pause in the torrent of his wife's eloquence by an angry growl, “There is no treasure! Go away, woman!” Exasperated by the sight of his patiently bent back, she would at last walk round so as to face him across the table, and clasping her robe with one hand she stretched the other lean arm and claw-like hand to emphasise, in a passion of anger and contempt, the rapid rush of scathing remarks and bitter cursings heaped on the head of the man unworthy to associate with brave Malay chiefs. It ended generally by Almayer rising slowly, his long pipe in hand, his face set into a look of inward pain, and walking away in silence. He descended the steps and plunged into the long grass on his way to the solitude of his new house, dragging his feet in a state of physical collapse from disgust and fear before that fury. She followed to the head of the steps, and sent the shafts of indiscriminate abuse after the retreating form. And each of those scenes was concluded by a piercing shriek, reaching him far away. “You know, Kaspar, I am your wife! your own Christian wife after your own Blanda law!” For she knew that this was the bitterest thing of all; the greatest regret of that man's life.

All these scenes Nina witnessed unmoved. She might have been deaf, dumb, without any feeling as far as any expression of opinion went. Yet oft when her father had sought the refuge of the great dusty rooms of “Almayer's Folly,” and her mother, exhausted by rhetorical efforts, squatted wearily on her heels with her back against the leg of the table, Nina would approach her curiously, guarding her skirts from betel juice besprinkling the floor, and gaze down upon her as one might look into the quiescent crater of a volcano after a destructive eruption. Mrs. Almayer's thoughts, after these scenes, were usually turned into a channel of childhood reminiscences, and she gave them utterance in a kind of monotonous recitative — slightly disconnected, but generally describing the glories of the Sultan of Sulu, his great splendour, his power,

his great prowess; the fear which benumbed the hearts of white men at the sight of his swift piratical praus. And these muttered statements of her grandfather's might were mixed up with bits of later recollections, where the great fight with the "White Devil's" brig and the convent life in Samarang occupied the principal place. At that point she usually dropped the thread of her narrative, and pulling out the little brass cross, always suspended round her neck, she contemplated it with superstitious awe. That superstitious feeling connected with some vague talismanic properties of the little bit of metal, and the still more hazy but terrible notion of some bad Djinns and horrible torments invented, as she thought, for her especial punishment by the good Mother Superior in case of the loss of the above charm, were Mrs. Almayer's only theological luggage for the stormy road of life. Mrs. Almayer had at least something tangible to cling to, but Nina, brought up under the Protestant wing of the proper Mrs. Vinck, had not even a little piece of brass to remind her of past teaching. And listening to the recital of those savage glories, those barbarous fights and savage feasting, to the story of deeds valorous, albeit somewhat bloodthirsty, where men of her mother's race shone far above the Orang Blanda, she felt herself irresistibly fascinated, and saw with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilised morality, in which good-meaning people had wrapped her young soul, fall away and leave her shivering and helpless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss. Strangest of all, this abyss did not frighten her when she was under the influence of the witch-like being she called her mother. She seemed to have forgotten in civilised surroundings her life before the time when Lingard had, so to speak, kidnapped her from Brow. Since then she had had Christian teaching, social education, and a good glimpse of civilised life. Unfortunately her teachers did not understand her nature, and the education ended in a scene of humiliation, in an outburst of contempt from white people for her mixed blood. She had tasted the whole bitterness of it and remembered distinctly that the virtuous Mrs. Vinck's indignation was not so much directed against the young man from the bank as against the innocent cause of that young man's infatuation. And there was also no doubt in her mind that the principal cause of Mrs. Vinck's indignation was the thought that such a thing should happen in a white nest, where her snow-white doves, the two Misses Vinck, had just returned from Europe, to find shelter under the maternal wing, and there await the coming of irreproachable men of their destiny. Not even the thought of the money so painfully scraped together by Almayer, and so punctually sent for Nina's expenses, could dissuade Mrs. Vinck from her virtuous resolve. Nina was sent away, and in truth the girl herself wanted to go, although a little frightened by the impending change. And now she had lived on the river for three years with a savage mother and a father walking about amongst pitfalls, with his head in the clouds, weak, irresolute, and unhappy. She had lived a life devoid of all the decencies of civilisation, in miserable domestic conditions; she had breathed in the atmosphere of sordid plottings for gain, of the no less disgusting intrigues and crimes for lust or money; and those things, together with the domestic quarrels, were the only events of her three years' existence. She did not die from despair and disgust the first month, as she expected

and almost hoped for. On the contrary, at the end of half a year it had seemed to her that she had known no other life. Her young mind having been unskilfully permitted to glance at better things, and then thrown back again into the hopeless quagmire of barbarism, full of strong and uncontrolled passions, had lost the power to discriminate. It seemed to Nina that there was no change and no difference. Whether they traded in brick godowns or on the muddy river bank; whether they reached after much or little; whether they made love under the shadows of the great trees or in the shadow of the cathedral on the Singapore promenade; whether they plotted for their own ends under the protection of laws and according to the rules of Christian conduct, or whether they sought the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and the unrestrained fierceness of natures as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests, Nina saw only the same manifestations of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes. To her resolute nature, however, after all these years, the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen seemed at last preferable to the sleek hypocrisy, to the polite disguises, to the virtuous pretences of such white people as she had had the misfortune to come in contact with. After all it was her life; it was going to be her life, and so thinking she fell more and more under the influence of her mother. Seeking, in her ignorance, a better side to that life, she listened with avidity to the old woman's tales of the departed glories of the Rajahs, from whose race she had sprung, and she became gradually more indifferent, more contemptuous of the white side of her descent represented by a feeble and traditionless father.

Almayer's difficulties were by no means diminished by the girl's presence in Sambir. The stir caused by her arrival had died out, it is true, and Lakamba had not renewed his visits; but about a year after the departure of the man-of-war boats the nephew of Abdulla, Syed Reshid, returned from his pilgrimage to Mecca, rejoicing in a green jacket and the proud title of Hadji. There was a great letting off of rockets on board the steamer which brought him in, and a great beating of drums all night in Abdulla's compound, while the feast of welcome was prolonged far into the small hours of the morning. Reshid was the favourite nephew and heir of Abdulla, and that loving uncle, meeting Almayer one day by the riverside, stopped politely to exchange civilities and to ask solemnly for an interview. Almayer suspected some attempt at a swindle, or at any rate something unpleasant, but of course consented with a great show of rejoicing. Accordingly the next evening, after sunset, Abdulla came, accompanied by several other grey-beards and by his nephew. That young man — of a very rakish and dissipated appearance — affected the greatest indifference as to the whole of the proceedings. When the torch-bearers had grouped themselves below the steps, and the visitors had seated themselves on various lame chairs, Reshid stood apart in the shadow, examining his aristocratically small hands with great attention. Almayer, surprised by the great solemnity of his visitors, perched himself on the corner of the table with a characteristic want of dignity quickly noted by the Arabs with grave disapproval. But Abdulla spoke now, looking straight past Almayer at the red curtain

hanging in the doorway, where a slight tremor disclosed the presence of women on the other side. He began by neatly complimenting Almayer upon the long years they had dwelt together in cordial neighbourhood, and called upon Allah to give him many more years to gladden the eyes of his friends by his welcome presence. He made a polite allusion to the great consideration shown him (Almayer) by the Dutch "Commissie," and drew thence the flattering inference of Almayer's great importance amongst his own people. He — Abdulla — was also important amongst all the Arabs, and his nephew Reshid would be heir of that social position and of great riches. Now Reshid was a Hadji. He was possessor of several Malay women, went on Abdulla, but it was time he had a favourite wife, the first of the four allowed by the Prophet. And, speaking with well-bred politeness, he explained further to the dumbfounded Almayer that, if he would consent to the alliance of his offspring with that true believer and virtuous man Reshid, she would be the mistress of all the splendours of Reshid's house, and first wife of the first Arab in the Islands, when he — Abdulla — was called to the joys of Paradise by Allah the All-merciful. "You know, Tuan," he said, in conclusion, "the other women would be her slaves, and Reshid's house is great. From Bombay he has brought great divans, and costly carpets, and European furniture. There is also a great looking-glass in a frame shining like gold. What could a girl want more?" And while Almayer looked upon him in silent dismay Abdulla spoke in a more confidential tone, waving his attendants away, and finished his speech by pointing out the material advantages of such an alliance, and offering to settle upon Almayer three thousand dollars as a sign of his sincere friendship and the price of the girl.

Poor Almayer was nearly having a fit. Burning with the desire of taking Abdulla by the throat, he had but to think of his helpless position in the midst of lawless men to comprehend the necessity of diplomatic conciliation. He mastered his impulses, and spoke politely and coldly, saying the girl was young and as the apple of his eye. Tuan Reshid, a Faithful and a Hadji, would not want an infidel woman in his harem; and, seeing Abdulla smile sceptically at that last objection, he remained silent, not trusting himself to speak more, not daring to refuse point-blank, nor yet to say anything compromising. Abdulla understood the meaning of that silence, and rose to take leave with a grave salaam. He wished his friend Almayer "a thousand years," and moved down the steps, helped dutifully by Reshid. The torch-bearers shook their torches, scattering a shower of sparks into the river, and the cortege moved off, leaving Almayer agitated but greatly relieved by their departure. He dropped into a chair and watched the glimmer of the lights amongst the tree trunks till they disappeared and complete silence succeeded the tramp of feet and the murmur of voices. He did not move till the curtain rustled and Nina came out on the verandah and sat in the rocking-chair, where she used to spend many hours every day. She gave a slight rocking motion to her seat, leaning back with half-closed eyes, her long hair shading her face from the smoky light of the lamp on the table. Almayer looked at her furtively, but the face was as impassible as ever. She turned her head slightly towards her father, and, speaking, to his great surprise, in English, asked —

“Was that Abdulla here?”

“Yes,” said Almayer — ”just gone.”

“And what did he want, father?”

“He wanted to buy you for Reshid,” answered Almayer, brutally, his anger getting the better of him, and looking at the girl as if in expectation of some outbreak of feeling. But Nina remained apparently unmoved, gazing dreamily into the black night outside.

“Be careful, Nina,” said Almayer, after a short silence and rising from his chair, “when you go paddling alone into the creeks in your canoe. That Reshid is a violent scoundrel, and there is no saying what he may do. Do you hear me?”

She was standing now, ready to go in, one hand grasping the curtain in the doorway. She turned round, throwing her heavy tresses back by a sudden gesture.

“Do you think he would dare?” she asked, quickly, and then turned again to go in, adding in a lower tone, “He would not dare. Arabs are all cowards.”

Almayer looked after her, astonished. He did not seek the repose of his hammock. He walked the floor absently, sometimes stopping by the balustrade to think. The lamp went out. The first streak of dawn broke over the forest; Almayer shivered in the damp air. “I give it up,” he muttered to himself, lying down wearily. “Damn those women! Well! If the girl did not look as if she wanted to be kidnapped!”

And he felt a nameless fear creep into his heart, making him shiver again.

Chapter 4

That year, towards the breaking up of the south-west monsoon, disquieting rumours reached Sambir. Captain Ford, coming up to Almayer's house for an evening's chat, brought late numbers of the Straits Times giving the news of Acheen war and of the unsuccessful Dutch expedition. The Nakhodas of the rare trading praus ascending the river paid visits to Lakamba, discussing with that potentate the unsettled state of affairs, and wagged their heads gravely over the recital of Orang Blanda exaction, severity, and general tyranny, as exemplified in the total stoppage of gunpowder trade and the rigorous visiting of all suspicious craft trading in the straits of Macassar. Even the loyal soul of Lakamba was stirred into a state of inward discontent by the withdrawal of his license for powder and by the abrupt confiscation of one hundred and fifty barrels of that commodity by the gunboat Princess Amelia, when, after a hazardous voyage, it had almost reached the mouth of the river. The unpleasant news was given him by Reshid, who, after the unsuccessful issue of his matrimonial projects, had made a long voyage amongst the islands for trading purposes; had bought the powder for his friend, and was overhauled and deprived of it on his return when actually congratulating himself on his acuteness in avoiding detection. Reshid's wrath was principally directed against Almayer, whom he suspected of having notified the Dutch authorities of the desultory warfare carried on by the Arabs and the Rajah with the up-river Dyak tribes.

To Reshid's great surprise the Rajah received his complaints very coldly, and showed no signs of vengeful disposition towards the white man. In truth, Lakamba knew very well that Almayer was perfectly innocent of any meddling in state affairs; and besides, his attitude towards that much persecuted individual was wholly changed in consequence of a reconciliation effected between him and his old enemy by Almayer's newly-found friend, Dain Maroola.

Almayer had now a friend. Shortly after Reshid's departure on his commercial journey, Nina, drifting slowly with the tide in the canoe on her return home after one of her solitary excursions, heard in one of the small creeks a splashing, as if of heavy ropes dropping in the water, and the prolonged song of Malay seamen when some heavy pulling is to be done. Through the thick fringe of bushes hiding the mouth of the creek she saw the tall spars of some European-rigged sailing vessel overtopping the summits of the Nipa palms. A brig was being hauled out of the small creek into the main stream. The sun had set, and during the short moments of twilight Nina saw the brig, aided by the evening breeze and the flowing tide, head towards Sambir under her set foresail. The girl turned her canoe out of the main river into one of

the many narrow channels amongst the wooded islets, and paddled vigorously over the black and sleepy backwaters towards Sambir. Her canoe brushed the water-palms, skirted the short spaces of muddy bank where sedate alligators looked at her with lazy unconcern, and, just as darkness was setting in, shot out into the broad junction of the two main branches of the river, where the brig was already at anchor with sails furled, yards squared, and decks seemingly untenanted by any human being. Nina had to cross the river and pass pretty close to the brig in order to reach home on the low promontory between the two branches of the Pantai. Up both branches, in the houses built on the banks and over the water, the lights twinkled already, reflected in the still waters below. The hum of voices, the occasional cry of a child, the rapid and abruptly interrupted roll of a wooden drum, together with some distant hailing in the darkness by the returning fishermen, reached her over the broad expanse of the river. She hesitated a little before crossing, the sight of such an unusual object as an European-rigged vessel causing her some uneasiness, but the river in its wide expansion was dark enough to render a small canoe invisible. She urged her small craft with swift strokes of her paddle, kneeling in the bottom and bending forward to catch any suspicious sound while she steered towards the little jetty of Lingard and Co., to which the strong light of the paraffin lamp shining on the whitewashed verandah of Almayer's bungalow served as a convenient guide. The jetty itself, under the shadow of the bank overgrown by drooping bushes, was hidden in darkness. Before even she could see it she heard the hollow bumping of a large boat against its rotten posts, and heard also the murmur of whispered conversation in that boat whose white paint and great dimensions, faintly visible on nearer approach, made her rightly guess that it belonged to the brig just anchored. Stopping her course by a rapid motion of her paddle, with another swift stroke she sent it whirling away from the wharf and steered for a little rivulet which gave access to the back courtyard of the house. She landed at the muddy head of the creek and made her way towards the house over the trodden grass of the courtyard. To the left, from the cooking shed, shone a red glare through the banana plantation she skirted, and the noise of feminine laughter reached her from there in the silent evening. She rightly judged her mother was not near, laughter and Mrs. Almayer not being close neighbours. She must be in the house, thought Nina, as she ran lightly up the inclined plane of shaky planks leading to the back door of the narrow passage dividing the house in two. Outside the doorway, in the black shadow, stood the faithful Ali.

"Who is there?" asked Nina.

"A great Malay man has come," answered Ali, in a tone of suppressed excitement. "He is a rich man. There are six men with lances. Real Soldat, you understand. And his dress is very brave. I have seen his dress. It shines! What jewels! Don't go there, Mem Nina. Tuan said not; but the old Mem is gone. Tuan will be angry. Merciful Allah! what jewels that man has got!"

Nina slipped past the outstretched hand of the slave into the dark passage where, in the crimson glow of the hanging curtain, close by its other end, she could see a small

dark form crouching near the wall. Her mother was feasting her eyes and ears with what was taking place on the front verandah, and Nina approached to take her share in the rare pleasure of some novelty. She was met by her mother's extended arm and by a low murmured warning not to make a noise.

"Have you seen them, mother?" asked Nina, in a breathless whisper.

Mrs. Almayer turned her face towards the girl, and her sunken eyes shone strangely in the red half-light of the passage.

"I saw him," she said, in an almost inaudible tone, pressing her daughter's hand with her bony fingers. "A great Rajah has come to Sambir — a Son of Heaven," muttered the old woman to herself. "Go away, girl!"

The two women stood close to the curtain, Nina wishing to approach the rent in the stuff, and her mother defending the position with angry obstinacy. On the other side there was a lull in the conversation, but the breathing of several men, the occasional light tinkling of some ornaments, the clink of metal scabbards, or of brass siri-vessels passed from hand to hand, was audible during the short pause. The women struggled silently, when there was a shuffling noise and the shadow of Almayer's burly form fell on the curtain.

The women ceased struggling and remained motionless. Almayer had stood up to answer his guest, turning his back to the doorway, unaware of what was going on on the other side. He spoke in a tone of regretful irritation.

"You have come to the wrong house, Tuan Maroola, if you want to trade as you say. I was a trader once, not now, whatever you may have heard about me in Macassar. And if you want anything, you will not find it here; I have nothing to give, and want nothing myself. You should go to the Rajah here; you can see in the daytime his houses across the river, there, where those fires are burning on the shore. He will help you and trade with you. Or, better still, go to the Arabs over there," he went on bitterly, pointing with his hand towards the houses of Sambir. "Abdulla is the man you want. There is nothing he would not buy, and there is nothing he would not sell; believe me, I know him well."

He waited for an answer a short time, then added —

"All that I have said is true, and there is nothing more."

Nina, held back by her mother, heard a soft voice reply with a calm evenness of intonation peculiar to the better class Malays —

"Who would doubt a white Tuan's words? A man seeks his friends where his heart tells him. Is this not true also? I have come, although so late, for I have something to say which you may be glad to hear. To-morrow I will go to the Sultan; a trader wants the friendship of great men. Then I shall return here to speak serious words, if Tuan permits. I shall not go to the Arabs; their lies are very great! What are they? Chelakka!"

Almayer's voice sounded a little more pleasantly in reply.

"Well, as you like. I can hear you to-morrow at any time if you have anything to say. Bah! After you have seen the Sultan Lakamba you will not want to return here, Inchi

Dain. You will see. Only mind, I will have nothing to do with Lakamba. You may tell him so. What is your business with me, after all?"

"To-morrow we talk, Tuan, now I know you," answered the Malay. "I speak English a little, so we can talk and nobody will understand, and then — "

He interrupted himself suddenly, asking surprised, "What's that noise, Tuan?"

Almayer had also heard the increasing noise of the scuffle recommenced on the women's side of the curtain. Evidently Nina's strong curiosity was on the point of overcoming Mrs. Almayer's exalted sense of social proprieties. Hard breathing was distinctly audible, and the curtain shook during the contest, which was mainly physical, although Mrs. Almayer's voice was heard in angry remonstrance with its usual want of strictly logical reasoning, but with the well-known richness of invective.

"You shameless woman! Are you a slave?" shouted shrilly the irate matron. "Veil your face, abandoned wretch! You white snake, I will not let you!"

Almayer's face expressed annoyance and also doubt as to the advisability of interfering between mother and daughter. He glanced at his Malay visitor, who was waiting silently for the end of the uproar in an attitude of amused expectation, and waving his hand contemptuously he murmured —

"It is nothing. Some women."

The Malay nodded his head gravely, and his face assumed an expression of serene indifference, as etiquette demanded after such an explanation. The contest was ended behind the curtain, and evidently the younger will had its way, for the rapid shuffle and click of Mrs. Almayer's high-heeled sandals died away in the distance. The tranquillised master of the house was going to resume the conversation when, struck by an unexpected change in the expression of his guest's countenance, he turned his head and saw Nina standing in the doorway.

After Mrs. Almayer's retreat from the field of battle, Nina, with a contemptuous exclamation, "It's only a trader," had lifted the conquered curtain and now stood in full light, framed in the dark background on the passage, her lips slightly parted, her hair in disorder after the exertion, the angry gleam not yet faded out of her glorious and sparkling eyes. She took in at a glance the group of white-clad lancemen standing motionless in the shadow of the far-off end of the verandah, and her gaze rested curiously on the chief of that imposing cortège. He stood, almost facing her, a little on one side, and struck by the beauty of the unexpected apparition had bent low, elevating his joint hands above his head in a sign of respect accorded by Malays only to the great of this earth. The crude light of the lamp shone on the gold embroidery of his black silk jacket, broke in a thousand sparkling rays on the jewelled hilt of his kris protruding from under the many folds of the red sarong gathered into a sash round his waist, and played on the precious stones of the many rings on his dark fingers. He straightened himself up quickly after the low bow, putting his hand with a graceful ease on the hilt of his heavy short sword ornamented with brilliantly dyed fringes of horsehair. Nina, hesitating on the threshold, saw an erect lithe figure of medium height with a breadth of shoulder suggesting great power. Under the folds of a blue turban,

whose fringed ends hung gracefully over the left shoulder, was a face full of determination and expressing a reckless good-humour, not devoid, however, of some dignity. The squareness of lower jaw, the full red lips, the mobile nostrils, and the proud carriage of the head gave the impression of a being half-savage, untamed, perhaps cruel, and corrected the liquid softness of the almost feminine eye, that general characteristic of the race. Now, the first surprise over, Nina saw those eyes fixed upon her with such an uncontrolled expression of admiration and desire that she felt a hitherto unknown feeling of shyness, mixed with alarm and some delight, enter and penetrate her whole being.

Confused by those unusual sensations she stopped in the doorway and instinctively drew the lower part of the curtain across her face, leaving only half a rounded cheek, a stray tress, and one eye exposed, wherewith to contemplate the gorgeous and bold being so unlike in appearance to the rare specimens of traders she had seen before on that same verandah.

Dain Maroola, dazzled by the unexpected vision, forgot the confused Almayer, forgot his brig, his escort staring in open-mouthed admiration, the object of his visit and all things else, in his overpowering desire to prolong the contemplation of so much loveliness met so suddenly in such an unlikely place — as he thought.

“It is my daughter,” said Almayer, in an embarrassed manner. “It is of no consequence. White women have their customs, as you know Tuan, having travelled much, as you say. However, it is late; we will finish our talk to-morrow.”

Dain bent low trying to convey in a last glance towards the girl the bold expression of his overwhelming admiration. The next minute he was shaking Almayer’s hand with grave courtesy, his face wearing a look of stolid unconcern as to any feminine presence. His men filed off, and he followed them quickly, closely attended by a thick-set, savage-looking Sumatrese he had introduced before as the commander of his brig. Nina walked to the balustrade of the verandah and saw the sheen of moonlight on the steel spear-heads and heard the rhythmic jingle of brass anklets as the men moved in single file towards the jetty. The boat shoved off after a little while, looming large in the full light of the moon, a black shapeless mass in the slight haze hanging over the water. Nina fancied she could distinguish the graceful figure of the trader standing erect in the stern sheets, but in a little while all the outlines got blurred, confused, and soon disappeared in the folds of white vapour shrouding the middle of the river.

Almayer had approached his daughter, and leaning with both arms over the rail, was looking moodily down on the heap of rubbish and broken bottles at the foot of the verandah.

“What was all that noise just now?” he growled peevishly, without looking up. “Confound you and your mother! What did she want? What did you come out for?”

“She did not want to let me come out,” said Nina. “She is angry. She says the man just gone is some Rajah. I think she is right now.”

“I believe all you women are crazy,” snarled Almayer. “What’s that to you, to her, to anybody? The man wants to collect trepang and birds’ nests on the islands. He told

me so, that Rajah of yours. He will come to-morrow. I want you both to keep away from the house, and let me attend to my business in peace.”

Dain Maroola came the next day and had a long conversation with Almayer. This was the beginning of a close and friendly intercourse which, at first, was much remarked in Sambir, till the population got used to the frequent sight of many fires burning in Almayer’s campong, where Maroola’s men were warming themselves during the cold nights of the north-east monsoon, while their master had long conferences with the Tuan Putih — as they styled Almayer amongst themselves. Great was the curiosity in Sambir on the subject of the new trader. Had he seen the Sultan? What did the Sultan say? Had he given any presents? What would he sell? What would he buy? Those were the questions broached eagerly by the inhabitants of bamboo houses built over the river. Even in more substantial buildings, in Abdulla’s house, in the residences of principal traders, Arab, Chinese, and Bugis, the excitement ran high, and lasted many days. With inborn suspicion they would not believe the simple account of himself the young trader was always ready to give. Yet it had all the appearance of truth. He said he was a trader, and sold rice. He did not want to buy gutta-percha or beeswax, because he intended to employ his numerous crew in collecting trepang on the coral reefs outside the river, and also in seeking for bird’s nests on the mainland. Those two articles he professed himself ready to buy if there were any to be obtained in that way. He said he was from Bali, and a Brahmin, which last statement he made good by refusing all food during his often repeated visits to Lakamba’s and Almayer’s houses. To Lakamba he went generally at night and had long audiences. Babalatchi, who was always a third party at those meetings of potentate and trader, knew how to resist all attempts on the part of the curious to ascertain the subject of so many long talks. When questioned with languid courtesy by the grave Abdulla he sought refuge in a vacant stare of his one eye, and in the affectation of extreme simplicity.

“I am only my master’s slave,” murmured Babalatchi, in a hesitating manner. Then as if making up his mind suddenly for a reckless confidence he would inform Abdulla of some transaction in rice, repeating the words, “A hundred big bags the Sultan bought; a hundred, Tuan!” in a tone of mysterious solemnity. Abdulla, firmly persuaded of the existence of some more important dealings, received, however, the information with all the signs of respectful astonishment. And the two would separate, the Arab cursing inwardly the wily dog, while Babalatchi went on his way walking on the dusty path, his body swaying, his chin with its few grey hairs pushed forward, resembling an inquisitive goat bent on some unlawful expedition. Attentive eyes watched his movements. Jim-Eng, descrying Babalatchi far away, would shake off the stupor of an habitual opium smoker and, tottering on to the middle of the road, would await the approach of that important person, ready with hospitable invitation. But Babalatchi’s discretion was proof even against the combined assaults of good fellowship and of strong gin generously administered by the open-hearted Chinaman. Jim-Eng, owning himself beaten, was left uninformed with the empty bottle, and gazed sadly after the departing form of the statesman of Sambir pursuing his devious and unsteady way, which, as usual,

led him to Almayer's compound. Ever since a reconciliation had been effected by Dain Maroola between his white friend and the Rajah, the one-eyed diplomatist had again become a frequent guest in the Dutchman's house. To Almayer's great disgust he was to be seen there at all times, strolling about in an abstracted kind of way on the verandah, skulking in the passages, or else popping round unexpected corners, always willing to engage Mrs. Almayer in confidential conversation. He was very shy of the master himself, as if suspicious that the pent-up feelings of the white man towards his person might find vent in a sudden kick. But the cooking shed was his favourite place, and he became an habitual guest there, squatting for hours amongst the busy women, with his chin resting on his knees, his lean arms clasped round his legs, and his one eye roving uneasily — the very picture of watchful ugliness. Almayer wanted more than once to complain to Lakamba of his Prime Minister's intrusion, but Dain dissuaded him. "We cannot say a word here that he does not hear," growled Almayer.

"Then come and talk on board the brig," retorted Dain, with a quiet smile. "It is good to let the man come here. Lakamba thinks he knows much. Perhaps the Sultan thinks I want to run away. Better let the one-eyed crocodile sun himself in your campong, Tuan."

And Almayer assented unwillingly muttering vague threats of personal violence, while he eyed malevolently the aged statesman sitting with quiet obstinacy by his domestic rice-pot.

Chapter 5

At last the excitement had died out in Sambir. The inhabitants got used to the sight of comings and goings between Almayer's house and the vessel, now moored to the opposite bank, and speculation as to the feverish activity displayed by Almayer's boatmen in repairing old canoes ceased to interfere with the due discharge of domestic duties by the women of the Settlement. Even the baffled Jim-Eng left off troubling his muddled brain with secrets of trade, and relapsed by the aid of his opium pipe into a state of stupefied bliss, letting Babalatchi pursue his way past his house uninvited and seemingly unnoticed.

So on that warm afternoon, when the deserted river sparkled under the vertical sun, the statesman of Sambir could, without any hindrance from friendly inquirers, shove off his little canoe from under the bushes, where it was usually hidden during his visits to Almayer's compound. Slowly and languidly Babalatchi paddled, crouching low in the boat, making himself small under his enormous sun hat to escape the scorching heat reflected from the water. He was not in a hurry; his master, Lakamba, was surely reposing at this time of the day. He would have ample time to cross over and greet him on his waking with important news. Will he be displeased? Will he strike his ebony wood staff angrily on the floor, frightening him by the incoherent violence of his exclamations; or will he squat down with a good-humoured smile, and, rubbing his hands gently over his stomach with a familiar gesture, expectorate copiously into the brass siri-vessel, giving vent to a low, approbative murmur? Such were Babalatchi's thoughts as he skilfully handled his paddle, crossing the river on his way to the Rajah's campong, whose stockades showed from behind the dense foliage of the bank just opposite to Almayer's bungalow.

Indeed, he had a report to make. Something certain at last to confirm the daily tale of suspicions, the daily hints of familiarity, of stolen glances he had seen, of short and burning words he had overheard exchanged between Dain Maroola and Almayer's daughter.

Lakamba had, till then, listened to it all, calmly and with evident distrust; now he was going to be convinced, for Babalatchi had the proof; had it this very morning, when fishing at break of day in the creek over which stood Bulangi's house. There from his skiff he saw Nina's long canoe drift past, the girl sitting in the stern bending over Dain, who was stretched in the bottom with his head resting on the girl's knees. He saw it. He followed them, but in a short time they took to the paddles and got away from under his observant eye. A few minutes afterwards he saw Bulangi's slave-girl paddling in a small dug-out to the town with her cakes for sale. She also had seen them in the

grey dawn. And Babalatchi grinned confidentially to himself at the recollection of the slave-girl's discomposed face, of the hard look in her eyes, of the tremble in her voice, when answering his questions. That little Taminah evidently admired Dain Maroola. That was good! And Babalatchi laughed aloud at the notion; then becoming suddenly serious, he began by some strange association of ideas to speculate upon the price for which Bulangi would, possibly, sell the girl. He shook his head sadly at the thought that Bulangi was a hard man, and had refused one hundred dollars for that same Taminah only a few weeks ago; then he became suddenly aware that the canoe had drifted too far down during his meditation. He shook off the despondency caused by the certitude of Bulangi's mercenary disposition, and, taking up his paddle, in a few strokes sheered alongside the water-gate of the Rajah's house.

That afternoon Almayer, as was his wont lately, moved about on the water-side, overlooking the repairs to his boats. He had decided at last. Guided by the scraps of information contained in old Lingard's pocket-book, he was going to seek for the rich gold-mine, for that place where he had only to stoop to gather up an immense fortune and realise the dream of his young days. To obtain the necessary help he had shared his knowledge with Dain Maroola, he had consented to be reconciled with Lakamba, who gave his support to the enterprise on condition of sharing the profits; he had sacrificed his pride, his honour, and his loyalty in the face of the enormous risk of his undertaking, dazzled by the greatness of the results to be achieved by this alliance so distasteful yet so necessary. The dangers were great, but Maroola was brave; his men seemed as reckless as their chief, and with Lakamba's aid success seemed assured.

For the last fortnight Almayer was absorbed in the preparations, walking amongst his workmen and slaves in a kind of waking trance, where practical details as to the fitting out of the boats were mixed up with vivid dreams of untold wealth, where the present misery of burning sun, of the muddy and malodorous river bank disappeared in a gorgeous vision of a splendid future existence for himself and Nina. He hardly saw Nina during these last days, although the beloved daughter was ever present in his thoughts. He hardly took notice of Dain, whose constant presence in his house had become a matter of course to him now they were connected by a community of interests. When meeting the young chief he gave him an absent greeting and passed on, seemingly wishing to avoid him, bent upon forgetting the hated reality of the present by absorbing himself in his work, or else by letting his imagination soar far above the tree-tops into the great white clouds away to the westward, where the paradise of Europe was awaiting the future Eastern millionaire. And Maroola, now the bargain was struck and there was no more business to be talked over, evidently did not care for the white man's company. Yet Dain was always about the house, but he seldom stayed long by the riverside. On his daily visits to the white man the Malay chief preferred to make his way quietly through the central passage of the house, and would come out into the garden at the back, where the fire was burning in the cooking shed, with the rice kettle swinging over it, under the watchful supervision of Mrs. Almayer. Avoiding that shed, with its black smoke and the warbling of soft, feminine voices, Dain would

turn to the left. There, on the edge of a banana plantation, a clump of palms and mango trees formed a shady spot, a few scattered bushes giving it a certain seclusion into which only the serving women's chatter or an occasional burst of laughter could penetrate. Once in, he was invisible; and hidden there, leaning against the smooth trunk of a tall palm, he waited with gleaming eyes and an assured smile to hear the faint rustle of dried grass under the light footsteps of Nina.

From the very first moment when his eyes beheld this — to him — perfection of loveliness he felt in his inmost heart the conviction that she would be his; he felt the subtle breath of mutual understanding passing between their two savage natures, and he did not want Mrs. Almayer's encouraging smiles to take every opportunity of approaching the girl; and every time he spoke to her, every time he looked into her eyes, Nina, although averting her face, felt as if this bold-looking being who spoke burning words into her willing ear was the embodiment of her fate, the creature of her dreams — reckless, ferocious, ready with flashing kriss for his enemies, and with passionate embrace for his beloved — the ideal Malay chief of her mother's tradition.

She recognised with a thrill of delicious fear the mysterious consciousness of her identity with that being. Listening to his words, it seemed to her she was born only then to a knowledge of a new existence, that her life was complete only when near him, and she abandoned herself to a feeling of dreamy happiness, while with half-veiled face and in silence — as became a Malay girl — she listened to Dain's words giving up to her the whole treasure of love and passion his nature was capable of with all the unrestrained enthusiasm of a man totally untrammelled by any influence of civilised self-discipline.

And they used to pass many a delicious and fast fleeting hour under the mango trees behind the friendly curtain of bushes till Mrs. Almayer's shrill voice gave the signal of unwilling separation. Mrs. Almayer had undertaken the easy task of watching her husband lest he should interrupt the smooth course of her daughter's love affair, in which she took a great and benignant interest. She was happy and proud to see Dain's infatuation, believing him to be a great and powerful chief, and she found also a gratification of her mercenary instincts in Dain's open-handed generosity.

On the eve of the day when Babalatchi's suspicions were confirmed by ocular demonstration, Dain and Nina had remained longer than usual in their shady retreat. Only Almayer's heavy step on the verandah and his querulous clamour for food decided Mrs. Almayer to lift a warning cry. Maroola leaped lightly over the low bamboo fence, and made his way stealthily through the banana plantation down to the muddy shore of the back creek, while Nina walked slowly towards the house to minister to her father's wants, as was her wont every evening. Almayer felt happy enough that evening; the preparations were nearly completed; to-morrow he would launch his boats. In his mind's eye he saw the rich prize in his grasp; and, with tin spoon in his hand, he was forgetting the plateful of rice before him in the fanciful arrangement of some splendid banquet to take place on his arrival in Amsterdam. Nina, reclining in the long chair, listened absently to the few disconnected words escaping from her father's lips. Expe-

dition! Gold! What did she care for all that? But at the name of Maroola mentioned by her father she was all attention. Dain was going down the river with his brig to-morrow to remain away for a few days, said Almayer. It was very annoying, this delay. As soon as Dain returned they would have to start without loss of time, for the river was rising. He would not be surprised if a great flood was coming. And he pushed away his plate with an impatient gesture on rising from the table. But now Nina heard him not. Dain going away! That's why he had ordered her, with that quiet masterfulness it was her delight to obey, to meet him at break of day in Bulangi's creek. Was there a paddle in her canoe? she thought. Was it ready? She would have to start early — at four in the morning, in a very few hours.

She rose from her chair, thinking she would require rest before the long pull in the early morning. The lamp was burning dimly, and her father, tired with the day's labour, was already in his hammock. Nina put the lamp out and passed into a large room she shared with her mother on the left of the central passage. Entering, she saw that Mrs. Almayer had deserted the pile of mats serving her as bed in one corner of the room, and was now bending over the opened lid of her large wooden chest. Half a shell of cocoon filled with oil, where a cotton rag floated for a wick, stood on the floor, surrounding her with a ruddy halo of light shining through the black and odorous smoke. Mrs. Almayer's back was bent, and her head and shoulders hidden in the deep box. Her hands rummaged in the interior, where a soft clink as of silver money could be heard. She did not notice at first her daughter's approach, and Nina, standing silently by her, looked down on many little canvas bags ranged in the bottom of the chest, wherefrom her mother extracted handfuls of shining guilders and Mexican dollars, letting them stream slowly back again through her claw-like fingers. The music of tinkling silver seemed to delight her, and her eyes sparkled with the reflected gleam of freshly-minted coins. She was muttering to herself: "And this, and this, and yet this! Soon he will give more — as much more as I ask. He is a great Rajah — a Son of Heaven! And she will be a Ranee — he gave all this for her! Who ever gave anything for me? I am a slave! Am I? I am the mother of a great Ranee!" She became aware suddenly of her daughter's presence, and ceased her droning, shutting the lid down violently; then, without rising from her crouching position, she looked up at the girl standing by with a vague smile on her dreamy face.

"You have seen. Have you?" she shouted, shrilly. "That is all mine, and for you. It is not enough! He will have to give more before he takes you away to the southern island where his father is king. You hear me? You are worth more, granddaughter of Rajahs! More! More!"

The sleepy voice of Almayer was heard on the verandah recommending silence. Mrs. Almayer extinguished the light and crept into her corner of the room. Nina laid down on her back on a pile of soft mats, her hands entwined under her head, gazing through the shutterless hole, serving as a window at the stars twinkling on the black sky; she was awaiting the time of start for her appointed meeting-place. With quiet happiness she thought of that meeting in the great forest, far from all human eyes and sounds.

Her soul, lapsing again into the savage mood, which the genius of civilisation working by the hand of Mrs. Vinck could never destroy, experienced a feeling of pride and of some slight trouble at the high value her worldly-wise mother had put upon her person; but she remembered the expressive glances and words of Dain, and, tranquillised, she closed her eyes in a shiver of pleasant anticipation.

There are some situations where the barbarian and the, so-called, civilised man meet upon the same ground. It may be supposed that Dain Maroola was not exceptionally delighted with his prospective mother-in-law, nor that he actually approved of that worthy woman's appetite for shining dollars. Yet on that foggy morning when Babalatchi, laying aside the cares of state, went to visit his fish-baskets in the Bulangi creek, Maroola had no misgivings, experienced no feelings but those of impatience and longing, when paddling to the east side of the island forming the back-water in question. He hid his canoe in the bushes and strode rapidly across the islet, pushing with impatience through the twigs of heavy undergrowth intercrossed over his path. From motives of prudence he would not take his canoe to the meeting-place, as Nina had done. He had left it in the main stream till his return from the other side of the island. The heavy warm fog was closing rapidly round him, but he managed to catch a fleeting glimpse of a light away to the left, proceeding from Bulangi's house. Then he could see nothing in the thickening vapour, and kept to the path only by a sort of instinct, which also led him to the very point on the opposite shore he wished to reach. A great log had stranded there, at right angles to the bank, forming a kind of jetty against which the swiftly flowing stream broke with a loud ripple. He stepped on it with a quick but steady motion, and in two strides found himself at the outer end, with the rush and swirl of the foaming water at his feet.

Standing there alone, as if separated from the world; the heavens, earth; the very water roaring under him swallowed up in the thick veil of the morning fog, he breathed out the name of Nina before him into the apparently limitless space, sure of being heard, instinctively sure of the nearness of the delightful creature; certain of her being aware of his near presence as he was aware of hers.

The bow of Nina's canoe loomed up close to the log, canted high out of the water by the weight of the sitter in the stern. Maroola laid his hand on the stem and leaped lightly in, giving it a vigorous shove off. The light craft, obeying the new impulse, cleared the log by a hair's breadth, and the river, with obedient complicity, swung it broadside to the current, and bore it off silently and rapidly between the invisible banks. And once more Dain, at the feet of Nina, forgot the world, felt himself carried away helpless by a great wave of supreme emotion, by a rush of joy, pride, and desire; understood once more with overpowering certitude that there was no life possible without that being he held clasped in his arms with passionate strength in a prolonged embrace.

Nina disengaged herself gently with a low laugh.

"You will overturn the boat, Dain," she whispered.

He looked into her eyes eagerly for a minute and let her go with a sigh, then lying down in the canoe he put his head on her knees, gazing upwards and stretching his arms backwards till his hands met round the girl's waist. She bent over him, and, shaking her head, framed both their faces in the falling locks of her long black hair.

And so they drifted on, he speaking with all the rude eloquence of a savage nature giving itself up without restraint to an overmastering passion, she bending low to catch the murmur of words sweeter to her than life itself. To those two nothing existed then outside the gunwales of the narrow and fragile craft. It was their world, filled with their intense and all-absorbing love. They took no heed of thickening mist, or of the breeze dying away before sunrise; they forgot the existence of the great forests surrounding them, of all the tropical nature awaiting the advent of the sun in a solemn and impressive silence.

Over the low river-mist hiding the boat with its freight of young passionate life and all-forgetful happiness, the stars paled, and a silvery-grey tint crept over the sky from the eastward. There was not a breath of wind, not a rustle of stirring leaf, not a splash of leaping fish to disturb the serene repose of all living things on the banks of the great river. Earth, river, and sky were wrapped up in a deep sleep, from which it seemed there would be no waking. All the seething life and movement of tropical nature seemed concentrated in the ardent eyes, in the tumultuously beating hearts of the two beings drifting in the canoe, under the white canopy of mist, over the smooth surface of the river.

Suddenly a great sheaf of yellow rays shot upwards from behind the black curtain of trees lining the banks of the Pantai. The stars went out; the little black clouds at the zenith glowed for a moment with crimson tints, and the thick mist, stirred by the gentle breeze, the sigh of waking nature, whirled round and broke into fantastically torn pieces, disclosing the wrinkled surface of the river sparkling in the broad light of day. Great flocks of white birds wheeled screaming above the swaying tree-tops. The sun had risen on the east coast.

Dain was the first to return to the cares of everyday life. He rose and glanced rapidly up and down the river. His eye detected Babalatchi's boat astern, and another small black speck on the glittering water, which was Taminah's canoe. He moved cautiously forward, and, kneeling, took up a paddle; Nina at the stern took hers. They bent their bodies to the work, throwing up the water at every stroke, and the small craft went swiftly ahead, leaving a narrow wake fringed with a lace-like border of white and gleaming foam. Without turning his head, Dain spoke.

"Somebody behind us, Nina. We must not let him gain. I think he is too far to recognise us."

"Somebody before us also," panted out Nina, without ceasing to paddle.

"I think I know," rejoined Dain. "The sun shines over there, but I fancy it is the girl Taminah. She comes down every morning to my brig to sell cakes — stays often all day. It does not matter; steer more into the bank; we must get under the bushes. My canoe is hidden not far from here."

As he spoke his eyes watched the broad-leaved nipas which they were brushing in their swift and silent course.

“Look out, Nina,” he said at last; “there, where the water palms end and the twigs hang down under the leaning tree. Steer for the big green branch.”

He stood up attentive, and the boat drifted slowly in shore, Nina guiding it by a gentle and skilful movement of her paddle. When near enough Dain laid hold of the big branch, and leaning back shot the canoe under a low green archway of thickly matted creepers giving access to a miniature bay formed by the caving in of the bank during the last great flood. His own boat was there anchored by a stone, and he stepped into it, keeping his hand on the gunwale of Nina’s canoe. In a moment the two little nutshells with their occupants floated quietly side by side, reflected by the black water in the dim light struggling through a high canopy of dense foliage; while above, away up in the broad day, flamed immense red blossoms sending down on their heads a shower of great dew-sparkling petals that descended rotating slowly in a continuous and perfumed stream; and over them, under them, in the sleeping water; all around them in a ring of luxuriant vegetation bathed in the warm air charged with strong and harsh perfumes, the intense work of tropical nature went on: plants shooting upward, entwined, interlaced in inextricable confusion, climbing madly and brutally over each other in the terrible silence of a desperate struggle towards the life-giving sunshine above — as if struck with sudden horror at the seething mass of corruption below, at the death and decay from which they sprang.

“We must part now,” said Dain, after a long silence. “You must return at once, Nina. I will wait till the brig drifts down here, and shall get on board then.”

“And will you be long away, Dain?” asked Nina, in a low voice.

“Long!” exclaimed Dain. “Would a man willingly remain long in a dark place? When I am not near you, Nina, I am like a man that is blind. What is life to me without light?”

Nina leaned over, and with a proud and happy smile took Dain’s face between her hands, looking into his eyes with a fond yet questioning gaze. Apparently she found there the confirmation of the words just said, for a feeling of grateful security lightened for her the weight of sorrow at the hour of parting. She believed that he, the descendant of many great Rajahs, the son of a great chief, the master of life and death, knew the sunshine of life only in her presence. An immense wave of gratitude and love welled forth out of her heart towards him. How could she make an outward and visible sign of all she felt for the man who had filled her heart with so much joy and so much pride? And in the great tumult of passion, like a flash of lightning came to her the reminiscence of that despised and almost forgotten civilisation she had only glanced at in her days of restraint, of sorrow, and of anger. In the cold ashes of that hateful and miserable past she would find the sign of love, the fitting expression of the boundless felicity of the present, the pledge of a bright and splendid future. She threw her arms around Dain’s neck and pressed her lips to his in a long and burning kiss. He closed his eyes, surprised and frightened at the storm raised in his breast by the strange and to

him hitherto unknown contact, and long after Nina had pushed her canoe into the river he remained motionless, without daring to open his eyes, afraid to lose the sensation of intoxicating delight he had tasted for the first time.

Now he wanted but immortality, he thought, to be the equal of gods, and the creature that could open so the gates of paradise must be his — soon would be his for ever!

He opened his eyes in time to see through the archway of creepers the bows of his brig come slowly into view, as the vessel drifted past on its way down the river. He must go on board now, he thought; yet he was loth to leave the place where he had learned to know what happiness meant. "Time yet. Let them go," he muttered to himself; and he closed his eyes again under the red shower of scented petals, trying to recall the scene with all its delight and all its fear.

He must have been able to join his brig in time, after all, and found much occupation outside, for it was in vain that Almayer looked for his friend's speedy return. The lower reach of the river where he so often and so impatiently directed his eyes remained deserted, save for the rapid flitting of some fishing canoe; but down the upper reaches came black clouds and heavy showers heralding the final setting in of the rainy season with its thunderstorms and great floods making the river almost impossible of ascent for native canoes.

Almayer, strolling along the muddy beach between his houses, watched uneasily the river rising inch by inch, creeping slowly nearer to the boats, now ready and hauled up in a row under the cover of dripping Kajang-mats. Fortune seemed to elude his grasp, and in his weary tramp backwards and forwards under the steady rain falling from the lowering sky, a sort of despairing indifference took possession of him. What did it matter? It was just his luck! Those two infernal savages, Lakamba and Dain, induced him, with their promises of help, to spend his last dollar in the fitting out of boats, and now one of them was gone somewhere, and the other shut up in his stockade would give no sign of life. No, not even the scoundrelly Babalatchi, thought Almayer, would show his face near him, now they had sold him all the rice, brass gongs, and cloth necessary for his expedition. They had his very last coin, and did not care whether he went or stayed. And with a gesture of abandoned discouragement Almayer would climb up slowly to the verandah of his new house to get out of the rain, and leaning on the front rail with his head sunk between his shoulders he would abandon himself to the current of bitter thoughts, oblivious of the flight of time and the pangs of hunger, deaf to the shrill cries of his wife calling him to the evening meal. When, roused from his sad meditations by the first roll of the evening thunderstorm, he stumbled slowly towards the glimmering light of his old house, his half-dead hope made his ears preternaturally acute to any sound on the river. Several nights in succession he had heard the splash of paddles and had seen the indistinct form of a boat, but when hailing the shadowy apparition, his heart bounding with sudden hope of hearing Dain's voice, he was disappointed each time by the sulky answer conveying to him the intelligence that the Arabs were on the river, bound on a visit to the home-staying Lakamba. This

caused him many sleepless nights, spent in speculating upon the kind of villainy those estimable personages were hatching now. At last, when all hope seemed dead, he was overjoyed on hearing Dain's voice; but Dain also appeared very anxious to see Lakamba, and Almayer felt uneasy owing to a deep and ineradicable distrust as to that ruler's disposition towards himself. Still, Dain had returned at last. Evidently he meant to keep to his bargain. Hope revived, and that night Almayer slept soundly, while Nina watched the angry river under the lash of the thunderstorm sweeping onward towards the sea.

Chapter 6

Dain was not long in crossing the river after leaving Almayer. He landed at the water-gate of the stockade enclosing the group of houses which composed the residence of the Rajah of Sambir. Evidently somebody was expected there, for the gate was open, and men with torches were ready to precede the visitor up the inclined plane of planks leading to the largest house where Lakamba actually resided, and where all the business of state was invariably transacted. The other buildings within the enclosure served only to accommodate the numerous household and the wives of the ruler.

Lakamba's own house was a strong structure of solid planks, raised on high piles, with a verandah of split bamboos surrounding it on all sides; the whole was covered in by an immensely high-pitched roof of palm-leaves, resting on beams blackened by the smoke of many torches.

The building stood parallel to the river, one of its long sides facing the water-gate of the stockade. There was a door in the short side looking up the river, and the inclined plank-way led straight from the gate to that door. By the uncertain light of smoky torches, Dain noticed the vague outlines of a group of armed men in the dark shadows to his right. From that group Babalatchi stepped forward to open the door, and Dain entered the audience chamber of the Rajah's residence. About one-third of the house was curtained off, by heavy stuff of European manufacture, for that purpose; close to the curtain there was a big arm-chair of some black wood, much carved, and before it a rough deal table. Otherwise the room was only furnished with mats in great profusion. To the left of the entrance stood a rude arm-rack, with three rifles with fixed bayonets in it. By the wall, in the shadow, the body-guard of Lakamba — all friends or relations — slept in a confused heap of brown arms, legs, and multi-coloured garments, from whence issued an occasional snore or a subdued groan of some uneasy sleeper. An European lamp with a green shade standing on the table made all this indistinctly visible to Dain.

"You are welcome to your rest here," said Babalatchi, looking at Dain interrogatively.

"I must speak to the Rajah at once," answered Dain.

Babalatchi made a gesture of assent, and, turning to the brass gong suspended under the arm-rack, struck two sharp blows.

The ear-splitting din woke up the guard. The snores ceased; outstretched legs were drawn in; the whole heap moved, and slowly resolved itself into individual forms, with much yawning and rubbing of sleepy eyes; behind the curtains there was a burst of feminine chatter; then the bass voice of Lakamba was heard.

"Is that the Arab trader?"

“No, Tuan,” answered Babalatchi; “Dain has returned at last. He is here for an important talk, bitcharra — if you mercifully consent.”

Evidently Lakamba’s mercy went so far — for in a short while he came out from behind the curtain — but it did not go to the length of inducing him to make an extensive toilet. A short red sarong tightened hastily round his hips was his only garment. The merciful ruler of Sambir looked sleepy and rather sulky. He sat in the arm-chair, his knees well apart, his elbows on the arm-rests, his chin on his breast, breathing heavily and waiting malevolently for Dain to open the important talk.

But Dain did not seem anxious to begin. He directed his gaze towards Babalatchi, squatting comfortably at the feet of his master, and remained silent with a slightly bent head as if in attentive expectation of coming words of wisdom.

Babalatchi coughed discreetly, and, leaning forward, pushed over a few mats for Dain to sit upon, then lifting up his squeaky voice he assured him with eager volubility of everybody’s delight at this long-looked-for return. His heart had hungered for the sight of Dain’s face, and his ears were withering for the want of the refreshing sound of his voice. Everybody’s hearts and ears were in the same sad predicament, according to Babalatchi, as he indicated with a sweeping gesture the other bank of the river where the settlement slumbered peacefully, unconscious of the great joy awaiting it on the morrow when Dain’s presence amongst them would be disclosed. “For” — went on Babalatchi — ”what is the joy of a poor man if not the open hand of a generous trader or of a great — ”

Here he checked himself abruptly with a calculated embarrassment of manner, and his roving eye sought the floor, while an apologetic smile dwelt for a moment on his misshapen lips. Once or twice during this opening speech an amused expression flitted across Dain’s face, soon to give way, however, to an appearance of grave concern. On Lakamba’s brow a heavy frown had settled, and his lips moved angrily as he listened to his Prime Minister’s oratory. In the silence that fell upon the room when Babalatchi ceased speaking arose a chorus of varied snores from the corner where the body-guard had resumed their interrupted slumbers, but the distant rumble of thunder filling then Nina’s heart with apprehension for the safety of her lover passed unheeded by those three men intent each on their own purposes, for life or death.

After a short silence, Babalatchi, discarding now the flowers of polite eloquence, spoke again, but in short and hurried sentences and in a low voice. They had been very uneasy. Why did Dain remain so long absent? The men dwelling on the lower reaches of the river heard the reports of big guns and saw a fire-ship of the Dutch amongst the islands of the estuary. So they were anxious. Rumours of a disaster had reached Abdulla a few days ago, and since then they had been waiting for Dain’s return under the apprehension of some misfortune. For days they had closed their eyes in fear, and woke up alarmed, and walked abroad trembling, like men before an enemy. And all on account of Dain. Would he not allay their fears for his safety, not for themselves? They were quiet and faithful, and devoted to the great Rajah in Batavia — may his fate lead him ever to victory for the joy and profit of his servants! “And here,” went

on Babalatchi, "Lakamba my master was getting thin in his anxiety for the trader he had taken under his protection; and so was Abdulla, for what would wicked men not say if perchance — "

"Be silent, fool!" growled Lakamba, angrily.

Babalatchi subsided into silence with a satisfied smile, while Dain, who had been watching him as if fascinated, turned with a sigh of relief towards the ruler of Sambir. Lakamba did not move, and, without raising his head, looked at Dain from under his eyebrows, breathing audibly, with pouted lips, in an air of general discontent.

"Speak! O Dain!" he said at last. "We have heard many rumours. Many nights in succession has my friend Reshid come here with bad tidings. News travels fast along the coast. But they may be untrue; there are more lies in men's mouths in these days than when I was young, but I am not easier to deceive now."

"All my words are true," said Dain, carelessly. "If you want to know what befell my brig, then learn that it is in the hands of the Dutch. Believe me, Rajah," he went on, with sudden energy, "the Orang Blanda have good friends in Sambir, or else how did they know I was coming thence?"

Lakamba gave Dain a short and hostile glance. Babalatchi rose quietly, and, going to the arm-rack, struck the gong violently.

Outside the door there was a shuffle of bare feet; inside, the guard woke up and sat staring in sleepy surprise.

"Yes, you faithful friend of the white Rajah," went on Dain, scornfully, turning to Babalatchi, who had returned to his place, "I have escaped, and I am here to gladden your heart. When I saw the Dutch ship I ran the brig inside the reefs and put her ashore. They did not dare to follow with the ship, so they sent the boats. We took to ours and tried to get away, but the ship dropped fireballs at us, and killed many of my men. But I am left, O Babalatchi! The Dutch are coming here. They are seeking for me. They are coming to ask their faithful friend Lakamba and his slave Babalatchi. Rejoice!"

But neither of his hearers appeared to be in a joyful mood. Lakamba had put one leg over his knee, and went on gently scratching it with a meditative air, while Babalatchi, sitting cross-legged, seemed suddenly to become smaller and very limp, staring straight before him vacantly. The guard evinced some interest in the proceedings, stretching themselves full length on the mats to be nearer the speaker. One of them got up and now stood leaning against the arm-rack, playing absently with the fringes of his sword-hilt.

Dain waited till the crash of thunder had died away in distant mutterings before he spoke again.

"Are you dumb, O ruler of Sambir, or is the son of a great Rajah unworthy of your notice? I am come here to seek refuge and to warn you, and want to know what you intend doing."

"You came here because of the white man's daughter," retorted Lakamba, quickly. "Your refuge was with your father, the Rajah of Bali, the Son of Heaven, the 'Anak

Agong' himself. What am I to protect great princes? Only yesterday I planted rice in a burnt clearing; to-day you say I hold your life in my hand."

Babalatchi glanced at his master. "No man can escape his fate," he murmured piously. "When love enters a man's heart he is like a child — without any understanding. Be merciful, Lakamba," he added, twitching the corner of the Rajah's sarong warningly.

Lakamba snatched away the skirt of the sarong angrily. Under the dawning comprehension of intolerable embarrassments caused by Dain's return to Sambir he began to lose such composure as he had been, till then, able to maintain; and now he raised his voice loudly above the whistling of the wind and the patter of rain on the roof in the hard squall passing over the house.

"You came here first as a trader with sweet words and great promises, asking me to look the other way while you worked your will on the white man there. And I did. What do you want now? When I was young I fought. Now I am old, and want peace. It is easier for me to have you killed than to fight the Dutch. It is better for me."

The squall had now passed, and, in the short stillness of the lull in the storm, Lakamba repeated softly, as if to himself, "Much easier. Much better."

Dain did not seem greatly discomposed by the Rajah's threatening words. While Lakamba was speaking he had glanced once rapidly over his shoulder, just to make sure that there was nobody behind him, and, tranquillised in that respect, he had extracted a siri-box out of the folds of his waist-cloth, and was wrapping carefully the little bit of betel-nut and a small pinch of lime in the green leaf tendered him politely by the watchful Babalatchi. He accepted this as a peace-offering from the silent statesman — a kind of mute protest against his master's undiplomatic violence, and as an omen of a possible understanding to be arrived at yet. Otherwise Dain was not uneasy. Although recognising the justice of Lakamba's surmise that he had come back to Sambir only for the sake of the white man's daughter, yet he was not conscious of any childish lack of understanding, as suggested by Babalatchi. In fact, Dain knew very well that Lakamba was too deeply implicated in the gunpowder smuggling to care for an investigation the Dutch authorities into that matter. When sent off by his father, the independent Rajah of Bali, at the time when the hostilities between Dutch and Malays threatened to spread from Sumatra over the whole archipelago, Dain had found all the big traders deaf to his guarded proposals, and above the temptation of the great prices he was ready to give for gunpowder. He went to Sambir as a last and almost hopeless resort, having heard in Macassar of the white man there, and of the regular steamer trading from Singapore — allured also by the fact that there was no Dutch resident on the river, which would make things easier, no doubt. His hopes got nearly wrecked against the stubborn loyalty of Lakamba arising from well-understood self-interest; but at last the young man's generosity, his persuasive enthusiasm, the prestige of his father's great name, overpowered the prudent hesitation of the ruler of Sambir. Lakamba would have nothing to do himself with any illegal traffic. He also objected to the Arabs being made use of in that matter; but he suggested Almayer, saying that he was a weak man easily persuaded, and that his friend, the English

captain of the steamer, could be made very useful — very likely even would join in the business, smuggling the powder in the steamer without Abdulla's knowledge. There again Dain met in Almayer with unexpected resistance; Lakamba had to send Babalatchi over with the solemn promise that his eyes would be shut in friendship for the white man, Dain paying for the promise and the friendship in good silver guilders of the hated Orang Blanda. Almayer, at last consenting, said the powder would be obtained, but Dain must trust him with dollars to send to Singapore in payment for it. He would induce Ford to buy and smuggle it in the steamer on board the brig. He did not want any money for himself out of the transaction, but Dain must help him in his great enterprise after sending off the brig. Almayer had explained to Dain that he could not trust Lakamba alone in that matter; he would be afraid of losing his treasure and his life through the cupidity of the Rajah; yet the Rajah had to be told, and insisted on taking a share in that operation, or else his eyes would remain shut no longer. To this Almayer had to submit. Had Dain not seen Nina he would have probably refused to engage himself and his men in the projected expedition to Gunong Mas — the mountain of gold. As it was he intended to return with half of his men as soon as the brig was clear of the reefs, but the persistent chase given him by the Dutch frigate had forced him to run south and ultimately to wreck and destroy his vessel in order to preserve his liberty or perhaps even his life. Yes, he had come back to Sambir for Nina, although aware that the Dutch would look for him there, but he had also calculated his chances of safety in Lakamba's hands. For all his ferocious talk, the merciful ruler would not kill him, for he had long ago been impressed with the notion that Dain possessed the secret of the white man's treasure; neither would he give him up to the Dutch, for fear of some fatal disclosure of complicity in the treasonable trade. So Dain felt tolerably secure as he sat meditating quietly his answer to the Rajah's bloodthirsty speech. Yes, he would point out to him the aspect of his position should he — Dain — fall into the hands of the Dutch and should he speak the truth. He would have nothing more to lose then, and he would speak the truth. And if he did return to Sambir, disturbing thereby Lakamba's peace of mind, what then? He came to look after his property. Did he not pour a stream of silver into Mrs. Almayer's greedy lap? He had paid, for the girl, a price worthy of a great prince, although unworthy of that delightfully maddening creature for whom his untamed soul longed in an intensity of desire far more tormenting than the sharpest pain. He wanted his happiness. He had the right to be in Sambir.

He rose, and, approaching the table, leaned both his elbows on it; Lakamba responsively edged his seat a little closer, while Babalatchi scrambled to his feet and thrust his inquisitive head between his master's and Dain's. They interchanged their ideas rapidly, speaking in whispers into each other's faces, very close now, Dain suggesting, Lakamba contradicting, Babalatchi conciliating and anxious in his vivid apprehension of coming difficulties. He spoke most, whispering earnestly, turning his head slowly from side to side so as to bring his solitary eye to bear upon each of his interlocutors in turn. Why should there be strife? said he. Let Tuan Dain, whom he loved only less

than his master, go trustfully into hiding. There were many places for that. Bulangi's house away in the clearing was best.

Bulangi was a safe man. In the network of crooked channels no white man could find his way. White men were strong, but very foolish. It was undesirable to fight them, but deception was easy. They were like silly women — they did not know the use of reason, and he was a match for any of them — went on Babalatchi, with all the confidence of deficient experience. Probably the Dutch would seek Almayer. Maybe they would take away their countryman if they were suspicious of him. That would be good. After the Dutch went away Lakamba and Dain would get the treasure without any trouble, and there would be one person less to share it. Did he not speak wisdom? Will Tuan Dain go to Bulangi's house till the danger is over, go at once?

Dain accepted this suggestion of going into hiding with a certain sense of conferring a favour upon Lakamba and the anxious statesman, but he met the proposal of going at once with a decided no, looking Babalatchi meaningly in the eye. The statesman sighed as a man accepting the inevitable would do, and pointed silently towards the other bank of the river. Dain bent his head slowly.

"Yes, I am going there," he said.

"Before the day comes?" asked Babalatchi.

"I am going there now," answered Dain, decisively. "The Orang Blanda will not be here before to-morrow night, perhaps, and I must tell Almayer of our arrangements."

"No, Tuan. No; say nothing," protested Babalatchi. "I will go over myself at sunrise and let him know."

"I will see," said Dain, preparing to go.

The thunderstorm was recommencing outside, the heavy clouds hanging low overhead now.

There was a constant rumble of distant thunder punctuated by the nearer sharp crashes, and in the continuous play of blue lightning the woods and the river showed fitfully, with all the elusive distinctness of detail characteristic of such a scene. Outside the door of the Rajah's house Dain and Babalatchi stood on the shaking verandah as if dazed and stunned by the violence of the storm. They stood there amongst the cowering forms of the Rajah's slaves and retainers seeking shelter from the rain, and Dain called aloud to his boatmen, who responded with an unanimous "Ada! Tuan!" while they looked uneasily at the river.

"This is a great flood!" shouted Babalatchi into Dain's ear. "The river is very angry. Look! Look at the drifting logs! Can you go?"

Dain glanced doubtfully on the livid expanse of seething water bounded far away on the other side by the narrow black line of the forests. Suddenly, in a vivid white flash, the low point of land with the bending trees on it and Almayer's house, leaped into view, flickered and disappeared. Dain pushed Babalatchi aside and ran down to the water-gate followed by his shivering boatmen.

Babalatchi backed slowly in and closed the door, then turned round and looked silently upon Lakamba. The Rajah sat still, glaring stonily upon the table, and Babal-

atchi gazed curiously at the perplexed mood of the man he had served so many years through good and evil fortune. No doubt the one-eyed statesman felt within his savage and much sophisticated breast the unwonted feelings of sympathy with, and perhaps even pity for, the man he called his master. From the safe position of a confidential adviser, he could, in the dim vista of past years, see himself — a casual cut-throat — finding shelter under that man's roof in the modest rice-clearing of early beginnings. Then came a long period of unbroken success, of wise counsels, and deep plottings resolutely carried out by the fearless Lakamba, till the whole east coast from Poulo Laut to Tanjong Batu listened to Babalatchi's wisdom speaking through the mouth of the ruler of Sambir. In those long years how many dangers escaped, how many enemies bravely faced, how many white men successfully circumvented! And now he looked upon the result of so many years of patient toil: the fearless Lakamba cowed by the shadow of an impending trouble. The ruler was growing old, and Babalatchi, aware of an uneasy feeling at the pit of his stomach, put both his hands there with a suddenly vivid and sad perception of the fact that he himself was growing old too; that the time of reckless daring was past for both of them, and that they had to seek refuge in prudent cunning. They wanted peace; they were disposed to reform; they were ready even to retrench, so as to have the wherewithal to bribe the evil days away, if bribed away they could be. Babalatchi sighed for the second time that night as he squatted again at his master's feet and tendered him his betel-nut box in mute sympathy. And they sat there in close yet silent communion of betel-nut chewers, moving their jaws slowly, expectorating decorously into the wide-mouthed brass vessel they passed to one another, and listening to the awful din of the battling elements outside.

"There is a very great flood," remarked Babalatchi, sadly.

"Yes," said Lakamba. "Did Dain go?"

"He went, Tuan. He ran down to the river like a man possessed of the Sheitan himself."

There was another long pause.

"He may get drowned," suggested Lakamba at last, with some show of interest.

"The floating logs are many," answered Babalatchi, "but he is a good swimmer," he added languidly.

"He ought to live," said Lakamba; "he knows where the treasure is."

Babalatchi assented with an ill-humoured grunt. His want of success in penetrating the white man's secret as to the locality where the gold was to be found was a sore point with the statesman of Sambir, as the only conspicuous failure in an otherwise brilliant career.

A great peace had now succeeded the turmoil of the storm. Only the little belated clouds, which hurried past overhead to catch up the main body flashing silently in the distance, sent down short showers that pattered softly with a soothing hiss over the palm-leaf roof.

Lakamba roused himself from his apathy with an appearance of having grasped the situation at last.

“Babalatchi,” he called briskly, giving him a slight kick.

“Ada Tuan! I am listening.”

“If the Orang Blanda come here, Babalatchi, and take Almayer to Batavia to punish him for smuggling gunpowder, what will he do, you think?”

“I do not know, Tuan.”

“You are a fool,” commented Lakamba, exultingly. “He will tell them where the treasure is, so as to find mercy. He will.”

Babalatchi looked up at his master and nodded his head with by no means a joyful surprise. He had not thought of this; there was a new complication.

“Almayer must die,” said Lakamba, decisively, “to make our secret safe. He must die quietly, Babalatchi. You must do it.”

Babalatchi assented, and rose wearily to his feet. “To-morrow?” he asked.

“Yes; before the Dutch come. He drinks much coffee,” answered Lakamba, with seeming irrelevancy.

Babalatchi stretched himself yawning, but Lakamba, in the flattering consciousness of a knotty problem solved by his own unaided intellectual efforts, grew suddenly very wakeful.

“Babalatchi,” he said to the exhausted statesman, “fetch the box of music the white captain gave me. I cannot sleep.”

At this order a deep shade of melancholy settled upon Babalatchi’s features. He went reluctantly behind the curtain and soon reappeared carrying in his arms a small hand-organ, which he put down on the table with an air of deep dejection. Lakamba settled himself comfortably in his arm-chair.

“Turn, Babalatchi, turn,” he murmured, with closed eyes.

Babalatchi’s hand grasped the handle with the energy of despair, and as he turned, the deep gloom on his countenance changed into an expression of hopeless resignation. Through the open shutter the notes of Verdi’s music floated out on the great silence over the river and forest. Lakamba listened with closed eyes and a delighted smile; Babalatchi turned, at times dozing off and swaying over, then catching himself up in a great fright with a few quick turns of the handle. Nature slept in an exhausted repose after the fierce turmoil, while under the unsteady hand of the statesman of Sambir the Trovatore fitfully wept, wailed, and bade good-bye to his Leonore again and again in a mournful round of tearful and endless iteration.

Chapter 7

The bright sunshine of the clear mistless morning, after the stormy night, flooded the main path of the settlement leading from the low shore of the Pantai branch of the river to the gate of Abdulla's compound. The path was deserted this morning; it stretched its dark yellow surface, hard beaten by the tramp of many bare feet, between the clusters of palm trees, whose tall trunks barred it with strong black lines at irregular intervals, while the newly risen sun threw the shadows of their leafy heads far away over the roofs of the buildings lining the river, even over the river itself as it flowed swiftly and silently past the deserted houses. For the houses were deserted too. On the narrow strip of trodden grass intervening between their open doors and the road, the morning fires smouldered untended, sending thin fluted columns of smoke into the cool air, and spreading the thinnest veil of mysterious blue haze over the sunlit solitude of the settlement. Almayer, just out of his hammock, gazed sleepily at the unwonted appearance of Sambir, wondering vaguely at the absence of life. His own house was very quiet; he could not hear his wife's voice, nor the sound of Nina's footsteps in the big room, opening on the verandah, which he called his sitting-room, whenever, in the company of white men, he wished to assert his claims to the commonplace decencies of civilisation. Nobody ever sat there; there was nothing there to sit upon, for Mrs. Almayer in her savage moods, when excited by the reminiscences of the piratical period of her life, had torn off the curtains to make sarongs for the slave-girls, and had burnt the showy furniture piecemeal to cook the family rice. But Almayer was not thinking of his furniture now. He was thinking of Dain's return, of Dain's nocturnal interview with Lakamba, of its possible influence on his long-matured plans, now nearing the period of their execution. He was also uneasy at the non-appearance of Dain who had promised him an early visit. "The fellow had plenty of time to cross the river," he mused, "and there was so much to be done to-day. The settling of details for the early start on the morrow; the launching of the boats; the thousand and one finishing touches. For the expedition must start complete, nothing should be forgotten, nothing should — "

The sense of the unwonted solitude grew upon him suddenly, and in the unusual silence he caught himself longing even for the usually unwelcome sound of his wife's voice to break the oppressive stillness which seemed, to his frightened fancy, to portend the advent of some new misfortune. "What has happened?" he muttered half aloud, as he shuffled in his imperfectly adjusted slippers towards the balustrade of the verandah. "Is everybody asleep or dead?"

The settlement was alive and very much awake. It was awake ever since the early break of day, when Mahmat Banjer, in a fit of unheard-of energy, arose and, taking

up his hatchet, stepped over the sleeping forms of his two wives and walked shivering to the water's edge to make sure that the new house he was building had not floated away during the night.

The house was being built by the enterprising Mahmat on a large raft, and he had securely moored it just inside the muddy point of land at the junction of the two branches of the Pantai so as to be out of the way of drifting logs that would no doubt strand on the point during the freshet. Mahmat walked through the wet grass saying *bourrouh*, and cursing softly to himself the hard necessities of active life that drove him from his warm couch into the cold of the morning. A glance showed him that his house was still there, and he congratulated himself on his foresight in hauling it out of harm's way, for the increasing light showed him a confused wrack of drift-logs, half-stranded on the muddy flat, interlocked into a shapeless raft by their branches, tossing to and fro and grinding together in the eddy caused by the meeting currents of the two branches of the river. Mahmat walked down to the water's edge to examine the rattan moorings of his house just as the sun cleared the trees of the forest on the opposite shore. As he bent over the fastenings he glanced again carelessly at the unquiet jumble of logs and saw there something that caused him to drop his hatchet and stand up, shading his eyes with his hand from the rays of the rising sun. It was something red, and the logs rolled over it, at times closing round it, sometimes hiding it. It looked to him at first like a strip of red cloth. The next moment Mahmat had made it out and raised a great shout.

"Ah ya! There!" yelled Mahmat. "There's a man amongst the logs." He put the palms of his hand to his lips and shouted, enunciating distinctly, his face turned towards the settlement: "There's a body of a man in the river! Come and see! A dead — stranger!"

The women of the nearest house were already outside kindling the fires and husking the morning rice. They took up the cry shrilly, and it travelled so from house to house, dying away in the distance. The men rushed out excited but silent, and ran towards the muddy point where the unconscious logs tossed and ground and bumped and rolled over the dead stranger with the stupid persistency of inanimate things. The women followed, neglecting their domestic duties and disregarding the possibilities of domestic discontent, while groups of children brought up the rear, warbling joyously, in the delight of unexpected excitement.

Almayer called aloud for his wife and daughter, but receiving no response, stood listening intently. The murmur of the crowd reached him faintly, bringing with it the assurance of some unusual event. He glanced at the river just as he was going to leave the verandah and checked himself at the sight of a small canoe crossing over from the Rajah's landing-place. The solitary occupant (in whom Almayer soon recognised Babalatchi) effected the crossing a little below the house and paddled up to the Lingard jetty in the dead water under the bank. Babalatchi clambered out slowly and went on fastening his canoe with fastidious care, as if not in a hurry to meet Almayer, whom he saw looking at him from the verandah. This delay gave Almayer time to notice and greatly wonder at Babalatchi's official get-up. The statesman of Sambir was clad

in a costume befitting his high rank. A loudly checkered sarong encircled his waist, and from its many folds peeped out the silver hilt of the kriss that saw the light only on great festivals or during official receptions. Over the left shoulder and across the otherwise unclad breast of the aged diplomatist glistened a patent leather belt bearing a brass plate with the arms of Netherlands under the inscription, "Sultan of Sambir." Babalatchi's head was covered by a red turban, whose fringed ends falling over the left cheek and shoulder gave to his aged face a ludicrous expression of joyous recklessness. When the canoe was at last fastened to his satisfaction he straightened himself up, shaking down the folds of his sarong, and moved with long strides towards Almayer's house, swinging regularly his long ebony staff, whose gold head ornamented with precious stones flashed in the morning sun. Almayer waved his hand to the right towards the point of land, to him invisible, but in full view from the jetty.

"Oh, Babalatchi! oh!" he called out; "what is the matter there? can you see?"

Babalatchi stopped and gazed intently at the crowd on the river bank, and after a little while the astonished Almayer saw him leave the path, gather up his sarong in one hand, and break into a trot through the grass towards the muddy point. Almayer, now greatly interested, ran down the steps of the verandah. The murmur of men's voices and the shrill cries of women reached him quite distinctly now, and as soon as he turned the corner of his house he could see the crowd on the low promontory swaying and pushing round some object of interest. He could indistinctly hear Babalatchi's voice, then the crowd opened before the aged statesman and closed after him with an excited hum, ending in a loud shout.

As Almayer approached the throng a man ran out and rushed past him towards the settlement, unheeding his call to stop and explain the cause of this excitement. On the very outskirts of the crowd Almayer found himself arrested by an unyielding mass of humanity, regardless of his entreaties for a passage, insensible to his gentle pushes as he tried to work his way through it towards the riverside.

In the midst of his gentle and slow progress he fancied suddenly he had heard his wife's voice in the thickest of the throng. He could not mistake very well Mrs. Almayer's high-pitched tones, yet the words were too indistinct for him to understand their purport. He paused in his endeavours to make a passage for himself, intending to get some intelligence from those around him, when a long and piercing shriek rent the air, silencing the murmurs of the crowd and the voices of his informants. For a moment Almayer remained as if turned into stone with astonishment and horror, for he was certain now that he had heard his wife wailing for the dead. He remembered Nina's unusual absence, and maddened by his apprehensions as to her safety, he pushed blindly and violently forward, the crowd falling back with cries of surprise and pain before his frantic advance.

On the point of land in a little clear space lay the body of the stranger just hauled out from amongst the logs. On one side stood Babalatchi, his chin resting on the head of his staff and his one eye gazing steadily at the shapeless mass of broken limbs, torn flesh, and bloodstained rags. As Almayer burst through the ring of horrified spectators,

Mrs. Almayer threw her own head-veil over the upturned face of the drowned man, and, squatting by it, with another mournful howl, sent a shiver through the now silent crowd. Mahmat, dripping wet, turned to Almayer, eager to tell his tale.

In the first moment of reaction from the anguish of his fear the sunshine seemed to waver before Almayer's eyes, and he listened to words spoken around him without comprehending their meaning. When, by a strong effort of will, he regained the possession of his senses, Mahmat was saying —

“That is the way, Tuan. His sarong was caught in the broken branch, and he hung with his head under water. When I saw what it was I did not want it here. I wanted it to get clear and drift away. Why should we bury a stranger in the midst of our houses for his ghost to frighten our women and children? Have we not enough ghosts about this place?”

A murmur of approval interrupted him here. Mahmat looked reproachfully at Babalatchi.

“But the Tuan Babalatchi ordered me to drag the body ashore” — he went on looking round at his audience, but addressing himself only to Almayer — ”and I dragged him by the feet; in through the mud I have dragged him, although my heart longed to see him float down the river to strand perchance on Bulangi's clearing — may his father's grave be defiled!”

There was subdued laughter at this, for the enmity of Mahmat and Bulangi was a matter of common notoriety and of undying interest to the inhabitants of Sambir. In the midst of that mirth Mrs. Almayer wailed suddenly again.

“Allah! What ails the woman!” exclaimed Mahmat, angrily. “Here, I have touched this carcass which came from nobody knows where, and have most likely defiled myself before eating rice. By orders of Tuan Babalatchi I did this thing to please the white man. Are you pleased, O Tuan Almayer? And what will be my recompense? Tuan Babalatchi said a recompense there will be, and from you. Now consider. I have been defiled, and if not defiled I may be under the spell. Look at his anklets! Who ever heard of a corpse appearing during the night amongst the logs with gold anklets on its legs? There is witchcraft there. However,” added Mahmat, after a reflective pause, “I will have the anklet if there is permission, for I have a charm against the ghosts and am not afraid. God is great!”

A fresh outburst of noisy grief from Mrs. Almayer checked the flow of Mahmat's eloquence. Almayer, bewildered, looked in turn at his wife, at Mahmat, at Babalatchi, and at last arrested his fascinated gaze on the body lying on the mud with covered face in a grotesquely unnatural contortion of mangled and broken limbs, one twisted and lacerated arm, with white bones protruding in many places through the torn flesh, stretched out; the hand with outspread fingers nearly touching his foot.

“Do you know who this is?” he asked of Babalatchi, in a low voice.

Babalatchi, staring straight before him, hardly moved his lips, while Mrs. Almayer's persistent lamentations drowned the whisper of his murmured reply intended only for Almayer's ear.

"It was fate. Look at your feet, white man. I can see a ring on those torn fingers which I know well."

Saying this, Babalatchi stepped carelessly forward, putting his foot as if accidentally on the hand of the corpse and pressing it into the soft mud. He swung his staff menacingly towards the crowd, which fell back a little.

"Go away," he said sternly, "and send your women to their cooking fires, which they ought not to have left to run after a dead stranger. This is men's work here. I take him now in the name of the Rajah. Let no man remain here but Tuan Almayer's slaves. Now go!"

The crowd reluctantly began to disperse. The women went first, dragging away the children that hung back with all their weight on the maternal hand. The men strolled slowly after them in ever forming and changing groups that gradually dissolved as they neared the settlement and every man regained his own house with steps quickened by the hungry anticipation of the morning rice. Only on the slight elevation where the land sloped down towards the muddy point a few men, either friends or enemies of Mahmat, remained gazing curiously for some time longer at the small group standing around the body on the river bank.

"I do not understand what you mean, Babalatchi," said Almayer. "What is the ring you are talking about? Whoever he is, you have trodden the poor fellow's hand right into the mud. Uncover his face," he went on, addressing Mrs. Almayer, who, squatting by the head of the corpse, rocked herself to and fro, shaking from time to time her dishevelled grey locks, and muttering mournfully.

"Hai!" exclaimed Mahmat, who had lingered close by. "Look, Tuan; the logs came together so," and here he pressed the palms of his hands together, "and his head must have been between them, and now there is no face for you to look at. There are his flesh and his bones, the nose, and the lips, and maybe his eyes, but nobody could tell the one from the other. It was written the day he was born that no man could look at him in death and be able to say, 'This is my friend's face.'"

"Silence, Mahmat; enough!" said Babalatchi, "and take thy eyes off his anklet, thou eater of pigs flesh. Tuan Almayer," he went on, lowering his voice, "have you seen Dain this morning?"

Almayer opened his eyes wide and looked alarmed. "No," he said quickly; "haven't you seen him? Is he not with the Rajah? I am waiting; why does he not come?"

Babalatchi nodded his head sadly.

"He is come, Tuan. He left last night when the storm was great and the river spoke angrily. The night was very black, but he had within him a light that showed the way to your house as smooth as a narrow backwater, and the many logs no bigger than wisps of dried grass. Therefore he went; and now he lies here." And Babalatchi nodded his head towards the body.

"How can you tell?" said Almayer, excitedly, pushing his wife aside. He snatched the cover off and looked at the formless mass of flesh, hair, and drying mud, where the

face of the drowned man should have been. "Nobody can tell," he added, turning away with a shudder.

Babalatchi was on his knees wiping the mud from the stiffened fingers of the outstretched hand. He rose to his feet and flashed before Almayer's eyes a gold ring set with a large green stone.

"You know this well," he said. "This never left Dain's hand. I had to tear the flesh now to get it off. Do you believe now?"

Almayer raised his hands to his head and let them fall listlessly by his side in the utter abandonment of despair. Babalatchi, looking at him curiously, was astonished to see him smile. A strange fancy had taken possession of Almayer's brain, distracted by this new misfortune. It seemed to him that for many years he had been falling into a deep precipice. Day after day, month after month, year after year, he had been falling, falling, falling; it was a smooth, round, black thing, and the black walls had been rushing upwards with wearisome rapidity. A great rush, the noise of which he fancied he could hear yet; and now, with an awful shock, he had reached the bottom, and behold! he was alive and whole, and Dain was dead with all his bones broken. It struck him as funny. A dead Malay; he had seen many dead Malays without any emotion; and now he felt inclined to weep, but it was over the fate of a white man he knew; a man that fell over a deep precipice and did not die. He seemed somehow to himself to be standing on one side, a little way off, looking at a certain Almayer who was in great trouble. Poor, poor fellow! Why doesn't he cut his throat? He wished to encourage him; he was very anxious to see him lying dead over that other corpse. Why does he not die and end this suffering? He groaned aloud unconsciously and started with affright at the sound of his own voice. Was he going mad? Terrified by the thought he turned away and ran towards his house repeating to himself, I am not going mad; of course not, no, no, no! He tried to keep a firm hold of the idea.

Not mad, not mad. He stumbled as he ran blindly up the steps repeating fast and ever faster those words wherein seemed to lie his salvation. He saw Nina standing there, and wished to say something to her, but could not remember what, in his extreme anxiety not to forget that he was not going mad, which he still kept repeating mentally as he ran round the table, till he stumbled against one of the arm-chairs and dropped into it exhausted. He sat staring wildly at Nina, still assuring himself mentally of his own sanity and wondering why the girl shrank from him in open-eyed alarm. What was the matter with her? This was foolish. He struck the table violently with his clenched fist and shouted hoarsely, "Give me some gin! Run!" Then, while Nina ran off, he remained in the chair, very still and quiet, astonished at the noise he had made.

Nina returned with a tumbler half filled with gin, and found her father staring absently before him. Almayer felt very tired now, as if he had come from a long journey. He felt as if he had walked miles and miles that morning and now wanted to rest very much. He took the tumbler with a shaking hand, and as he drank his teeth

chattered against the glass which he drained and set down heavily on the table. He turned his eyes slowly towards Nina standing beside him, and said steadily —

“Now all is over, Nina. He is dead, and I may as well burn all my boats.”

He felt very proud of being able to speak so calmly. Decidedly he was not going mad. This certitude was very comforting, and he went on talking about the finding of the body, listening to his own voice complacently. Nina stood quietly, her hand resting lightly on her father’s shoulder, her face unmoved, but every line of her features, the attitude of her whole body expressing the most keen and anxious attention.

“And so Dain is dead,” she said coldly, when her father ceased speaking.

Almayer’s elaborately calm demeanour gave way in a moment to an outburst of violent indignation.

“You stand there as if you were only half alive, and talk to me,” he exclaimed angrily, “as if it was a matter of no importance. Yes, he is dead! Do you understand? Dead! What do you care? You never cared; you saw me struggle, and work, and strive, unmoved; and my suffering you could never see. No, never. You have no heart, and you have no mind, or you would have understood that it was for you, for your happiness I was working. I wanted to be rich; I wanted to get away from here. I wanted to see white men bowing low before the power of your beauty and your wealth. Old as I am I wished to seek a strange land, a civilisation to which I am a stranger, so as to find a new life in the contemplation of your high fortunes, of your triumphs, of your happiness. For that I bore patiently the burden of work, of disappointment, of humiliation amongst these savages here, and I had it all nearly in my grasp.”

He looked at his daughter’s attentive face and jumped to his feet upsetting the chair.

“Do you hear? I had it all there; so; within reach of my hand.”

He paused, trying to keep down his rising anger, and failed.

“Have you no feeling?” he went on. “Have you lived without hope?” Nina’s silence exasperated him; his voice rose, although he tried to master his feelings.

“Are you content to live in this misery and die in this wretched hole? Say something, Nina; have you no sympathy? Have you no word of comfort for me? I that loved you so.”

He waited for a while for an answer, and receiving none shook his fist in his daughter’s face.

“I believe you are an idiot!” he yelled.

He looked round for the chair, picked it up and sat down stiffly. His anger was dead within him, and he felt ashamed of his outburst, yet relieved to think that now he had laid clear before his daughter the inner meaning of his life. He thought so in perfect good faith, deceived by the emotional estimate of his motives, unable to see the crookedness of his ways, the unreality of his aims, the futility of his regrets. And now his heart was filled only with a great tenderness and love for his daughter. He wanted to see her miserable, and to share with her his despair; but he wanted it only as all weak natures long for a companionship in misfortune with beings innocent of its

cause. If she suffered herself she would understand and pity him; but now she would not, or could not, find one word of comfort or love for him in his dire extremity. The sense of his absolute loneliness came home to his heart with a force that made him shudder. He swayed and fell forward with his face on the table, his arms stretched straight out, extended and rigid. Nina made a quick movement towards her father and stood looking at the grey head, on the broad shoulders shaken convulsively by the violence of feelings that found relief at last in sobs and tears.

Nina sighed deeply and moved away from the table. Her features lost the appearance of stony indifference that had exasperated her father into his outburst of anger and sorrow. The expression of her face, now unseen by her father, underwent a rapid change. She had listened to Almayer's appeal for sympathy, for one word of comfort, apparently indifferent, yet with her breast torn by conflicting impulses raised unexpectedly by events she had not foreseen, or at least did not expect to happen so soon. With her heart deeply moved by the sight of Almayer's misery, knowing it in her power to end it with a word, longing to bring peace to that troubled heart, she heard with terror the voice of her overpowering love commanding her to be silent. And she submitted after a short and fierce struggle of her old self against the new principle of her life. She wrapped herself up in absolute silence, the only safeguard against some fatal admission. She could not trust herself to make a sign, to murmur a word for fear of saying too much; and the very violence of the feelings that stirred the innermost recesses of her soul seemed to turn her person into a stone. The dilated nostrils and the flashing eyes were the only signs of the storm raging within, and those signs of his daughter's emotion Almayer did not see, for his sight was dimmed by self-pity, by anger, and by despair.

Had Almayer looked at his daughter as she leant over the front rail of the verandah he could have seen the expression of indifference give way to a look of pain, and that again pass away, leaving the glorious beauty of her face marred by deep-drawn lines of watchful anxiety. The long grass in the neglected courtyard stood very straight before her eyes in the noonday heat. From the river-bank there were voices and a shuffle of bare feet approaching the house; Babalatchi could be heard giving directions to Almayer's men, and Mrs. Almayer's subdued wailing became audible as the small procession bearing the body of the drowned man and headed by that sorrowful matron turned the corner of the house. Babalatchi had taken the broken anklet off the man's leg, and now held it in his hand as he moved by the side of the bearers, while Mahmat lingered behind timidly, in the hopes of the promised reward.

"Lay him there," said Babalatchi to Almayer's men, pointing to a pile of drying planks in front of the verandah. "Lay him there. He was a Kaffir and the son of a dog, and he was the white man's friend. He drank the white man's strong water," he added, with affected horror. "That I have seen myself."

The men stretched out the broken limbs on two planks they had laid level, while Mrs. Almayer covered the body with a piece of white cotton cloth, and after whispering for some time with Babalatchi departed to her domestic duties. Almayer's men, after

laying down their burden, dispersed themselves in quest of shady spots wherein to idle the day away. Babalatchi was left alone by the corpse that laid rigid under the white cloth in the bright sunshine.

Nina came down the steps and joined Babalatchi, who put his hand to his forehead, and squatted down with great deference.

"You have a bangle there," said Nina, looking down on Babalatchi's upturned face and into his solitary eye.

"I have, Mem Putih," returned the polite statesman. Then turning towards Mahmat he beckoned him closer, calling out, "Come here!"

Mahmat approached with some hesitation. He avoided looking at Nina, but fixed his eyes on Babalatchi.

"Now, listen," said Babalatchi, sharply. "The ring and the anklet you have seen, and you know they belonged to Dain the trader, and to no other. Dain returned last night in a canoe. He spoke with the Rajah, and in the middle of the night left to cross over to the white man's house. There was a great flood, and this morning you found him in the river."

"By his feet I dragged him out," muttered Mahmat under his breath. "Tuan Babalatchi, there will be a recompense!" he exclaimed aloud.

Babalatchi held up the gold bangle before Mahmat's eyes. "What I have told you, Mahmat, is for all ears. What I give you now is for your eyes only. Take."

Mahmat took the bangle eagerly and hid it in the folds of his waist-cloth. "Am I a fool to show this thing in a house with three women in it?" he growled. "But I shall tell them about Dain the trader, and there will be talk enough."

He turned and went away, increasing his pace as soon as he was outside Almayer's compound.

Babalatchi looked after him till he disappeared behind the bushes. "Have I done well, Mem Putih?" he asked, humbly addressing Nina.

"You have," answered Nina. "The ring you may keep yourself."

Babalatchi touched his lips and forehead, and scrambled to his feet. He looked at Nina, as if expecting her to say something more, but Nina turned towards the house and went up the steps, motioning him away with her hand.

Babalatchi picked up his staff and prepared to go. It was very warm, and he did not care for the long pull to the Rajah's house. Yet he must go and tell the Rajah — tell of the event; of the change in his plans; of all his suspicions. He walked to the jetty and began casting off the rattan painter of his canoe.

The broad expanse of the lower reach, with its shimmering surface dotted by the black specks of the fishing canoes, lay before his eyes. The fishermen seemed to be racing. Babalatchi paused in his work, and looked on with sudden interest. The man in the foremost canoe, now within hail of the first houses of Sambir, laid in his paddle and stood up shouting —

"The boats! the boats! The man-of-war's boats are coming! They are here!"

In a moment the settlement was again alive with people rushing to the riverside. The men began to unfasten their boats, the women stood in groups looking towards the bend down the river. Above the trees lining the reach a slight puff of smoke appeared like a black stain on the brilliant blue of the cloudless sky.

Babalatchi stood perplexed, the painter in his hand. He looked down the reach, then up towards Almayer's house, and back again at the river as if undecided what to do. At last he made the canoe fast again hastily, and ran towards the house and up the steps of the verandah.

"Tuan! Tuan!" he called, eagerly. "The boats are coming. The man-of-war's boats. You had better get ready. The officers will come here, I know."

Almayer lifted his head slowly from the table, and looked at him stupidly.

"Mem Putih!" exclaimed Babalatchi to Nina, "look at him. He does not hear. You must take care," he added meaningly.

Nina nodded to him with an uncertain smile, and was going to speak, when a sharp report from the gun mounted in the bow of the steam launch that was just then coming into view arrested the words on her parted lips. The smile died out, and was replaced by the old look of anxious attention. From the hills far away the echo came back like a long-drawn and mournful sigh, as if the land had sent it in answer to the voice of its masters.

Chapter 8

The news as to the identity of the body lying now in Almayer's compound spread rapidly over the settlement. During the forenoon most of the inhabitants remained in the long street discussing the mysterious return and the unexpected death of the man who had become known to them as the trader. His arrival during the north-east monsoon, his long sojourn in their midst, his sudden departure with his brig, and, above all, the mysterious appearance of the body, said to be his, amongst the logs, were subjects to wonder at and to talk over and over again with undiminished interest. Mahmat moved from house to house and from group to group, always ready to repeat his tale: how he saw the body caught by the sarong in a forked log; how Mrs. Almayer coming, one of the first, at his cries, recognised it, even before he had it hauled on shore; how Babalatchi ordered him to bring it out of the water. "By the feet I dragged him in, and there was no head," exclaimed Mahmat, "and how could the white man's wife know who it was? She was a witch, it was well known. And did you see how the white man himself ran away at the sight of the body? Like a deer he ran!" And here Mahmat imitated Almayer's long strides, to the great joy of the beholders. And for all his trouble he had nothing. The ring with the green stone Tuan Babalatchi kept. "Nothing! Nothing!" He spat down at his feet in sign of disgust, and left that group to seek further on a fresh audience.

The news spreading to the furthest parts of the settlement found out Abdulla in the cool recess of his godown, where he sat overlooking his Arab clerks and the men loading and unloading the up-country canoes. Reshid, who was busy on the jetty, was summoned into his uncle's presence and found him, as usual, very calm and even cheerful, but very much surprised. The rumour of the capture or destruction of Dain's brig had reached the Arab's ears three days before from the sea-fishermen and through the dwellers on the lower reaches of the river. It had been passed up-stream from neighbour to neighbour till Bulangi, whose clearing was nearest to the settlement, had brought that news himself to Abdulla whose favour he courted. But rumour also spoke of a fight and of Dain's death on board his own vessel. And now all the settlement talked of Dain's visit to the Rajah and of his death when crossing the river in the dark to see Almayer.

They could not understand this. Reshid thought that it was very strange. He felt uneasy and doubtful. But Abdulla, after the first shock of surprise, with the old age's dislike for solving riddles, showed a becoming resignation. He remarked that the man was dead now at all events, and consequently no more dangerous. Where was the use to wonder at the decrees of Fate, especially if they were propitious to the True

Believers? And with a pious ejaculation to Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate, Abdulla seemed to regard the incident as closed for the present.

Not so Reshid. He lingered by his uncle, pulling thoughtfully his neatly trimmed beard.

"There are many lies," he murmured. "He has been dead once before, and came to life to die again now. The Dutch will be here before many days and clamour for the man. Shall I not believe my eyes sooner than the tongues of women and idle men?"

"They say that the body is being taken to Almayer's compound," said Abdulla. "If you want to go there you must go before the Dutch arrive here. Go late. It should not be said that we have been seen inside that man's enclosure lately."

Reshid assented to the truth of this last remark and left his uncle's side. He leaned against the lintel of the big doorway and looked idly across the courtyard through the open gate on to the main road of the settlement. It lay empty, straight, and yellow under the flood of light. In the hot noontide the smooth trunks of palm trees, the outlines of the houses, and away there at the other end of the road the roof of Almayer's house visible over the bushes on the dark background of forest, seemed to quiver in the heat radiating from the steaming earth. Swarms of yellow butterflies rose, and settled to rise again in short flights before Reshid's half-closed eyes. From under his feet arose the dull hum of insects in the long grass of the courtyard. He looked on sleepily.

From one of the side paths amongst the houses a woman stepped out on the road, a slight girlish figure walking under the shade of a large tray balanced on its head. The consciousness of something moving stirred Reshid's half-sleeping senses into a comparative wakefulness. He recognised Taminah, Bulangi's slave-girl, with her tray of cakes for sale — an apparition of daily recurrence and of no importance whatever. She was going towards Almayer's house. She could be made useful. He roused himself up and ran towards the gate calling out, "Taminah O!" The girl stopped, hesitated, and came back slowly.

Reshid waited, signing to her impatiently to come nearer.

When near Reshid Taminah stood with downcast eyes. Reshid looked at her a while before he asked —

"Are you going to Almayer's house? They say in the settlement that Dain the trader, he that was found drowned this morning, is lying in the white man's campong."

"I have heard this talk," whispered Taminah; "and this morning by the riverside I saw the body. Where it is now I do not know."

"So you have seen it?" asked Reshid, eagerly. "Is it Dain? You have seen him many times. You would know him."

The girl's lips quivered and she remained silent for a while, breathing quickly.

"I have seen him, not a long time ago," she said at last. "The talk is true; he is dead. What do you want from me, Tuan? I must go."

Just then the report of the gun fired on board the steam launch was heard, interrupting Reshid's reply. Leaving the girl he ran to the house, and met in the courtyard Abdulla coming towards the gate.

“The Orang Blanda are come,” said Reshid, “and now we shall have our reward.”

Abdulla shook his head doubtfully. “The white men’s rewards are long in coming,” he said. “White men are quick in anger and slow in gratitude. We shall see.”

He stood at the gate stroking his grey beard and listening to the distant cries of greeting at the other end of the settlement. As Taminah was turning to go he called her back.

“Listen, girl,” he said: “there will be many white men in Almayer’s house. You shall be there selling your cakes to the men of the sea. What you see and what you hear you may tell me. Come here before the sun sets and I will give you a blue handkerchief with red spots. Now go, and forget not to return.”

He gave her a push with the end of his long staff as she was going away and made her stumble.

“This slave is very slow,” he remarked to his nephew, looking after the girl with great disfavour.

Taminah walked on, her tray on the head, her eyes fixed on the ground. From the open doors of the houses were heard, as she passed, friendly calls inviting her within for business purposes, but she never heeded them, neglecting her sales in the preoccupation of intense thinking. Since the very early morning she had heard much, she had also seen much that filled her heart with a joy mingled with great suffering and fear. Before the dawn, before she left Bulangi’s house to paddle up to Sambir she had heard voices outside the house when all in it but herself were asleep. And now, with her knowledge of the words spoken in the darkness, she held in her hand a life and carried in her breast a great sorrow. Yet from her springy step, erect figure, and face veiled over by the everyday look of apathetic indifference, nobody could have guessed of the double load she carried under the visible burden of the tray piled up high with cakes manufactured by the thrifty hands of Bulangi’s wives. In that supple figure straight as an arrow, so graceful and free in its walk, behind those soft eyes that spoke of nothing but of unconscious resignation, there slept all feelings and all passions, all hopes and all fears, the curse of life and the consolation of death. And she knew nothing of it all. She lived like the tall palms amongst whom she was passing now, seeking the light, desiring the sunshine, fearing the storm, unconscious of either. The slave had no hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky, no other water, no other forest, no other world, no other life. She had no wish, no hope, no love, no fear except of a blow, and no vivid feeling but that of occasional hunger, which was seldom, for Bulangi was rich and rice was plentiful in the solitary house in his clearing. The absence of pain and hunger was her happiness, and when she felt unhappy she was simply tired, more than usual, after the day’s labour. Then in the hot nights of the south-west monsoon she slept dreamlessly under the bright stars on the platform built outside the house and over the river. Inside they slept too: Bulangi by the door; his wives further in; the children with their mothers. She could hear their breathing; Bulangi’s sleepy voice; the sharp cry of a child soon hushed with tender words. And she closed her eyes to the murmur of the water below her, to the whisper of the warm wind above, ignorant of the

never-ceasing life of that tropical nature that spoke to her in vain with the thousand faint voices of the near forest, with the breath of tepid wind; in the heavy scents that lingered around her head; in the white wraiths of morning mist that hung over her in the solemn hush of all creation before the dawn.

Such had been her existence before the coming of the brig with the strangers. She remembered well that time; the uproar in the settlement, the never-ending wonder, the days and nights of talk and excitement. She remembered her own timidity with the strange men, till the brig moored to the bank became in a manner part of the settlement, and the fear wore off in the familiarity of constant intercourse. The call on board then became part of her daily round. She walked hesitatingly up the slanting planks of the gangway amidst the encouraging shouts and more or less decent jokes of the men idling over the bulwarks. There she sold her wares to those men that spoke so loud and carried themselves so free. There was a throng, a constant coming and going; calls interchanged, orders given and executed with shouts; the rattle of blocks, the flinging about of coils of rope. She sat out of the way under the shade of the awning, with her tray before her, the veil drawn well over her face, feeling shy amongst so many men. She smiled at all buyers, but spoke to none, letting their jests pass with stolid unconcern. She heard many tales told around her of far-off countries, of strange customs, of events stranger still. Those men were brave; but the most fearless of them spoke of their chief with fear. Often the man they called their master passed before her, walking erect and indifferent, in the pride of youth, in the flash of rich dress, with a tinkle of gold ornaments, while everybody stood aside watching anxiously for a movement of his lips, ready to do his bidding. Then all her life seemed to rush into her eyes, and from under her veil she gazed at him, charmed, yet fearful to attract attention. One day he noticed her and asked, "Who is that girl?" "A slave, Tuan! A girl that sells cakes," a dozen voices replied together. She rose in terror to run on shore, when he called her back; and as she stood trembling with head hung down before him, he spoke kind words, lifting her chin with his hand and looking into her eyes with a smile. "Do not be afraid," he said. He never spoke to her any more. Somebody called out from the river bank; he turned away and forgot her existence. Taminah saw Almayer standing on the shore with Nina on his arm. She heard Nina's voice calling out gaily, and saw Dain's face brighten with joy as he leaped on shore. She hated the sound of that voice ever since.

After that day she left off visiting Almayer's compound, and passed the noon hours under the shade of the brig awning. She watched for his coming with heart beating quicker and quicker, as he approached, into a wild tumult of newly-aroused feelings of joy and hope and fear that died away with Dain's retreating figure, leaving her tired out, as if after a struggle, sitting still for a long time in dreamy languor. Then she paddled home slowly in the afternoon, often letting her canoe float with the lazy stream in the quiet backwater of the river. The paddle hung idle in the water as she sat in the stern, one hand supporting her chin, her eyes wide open, listening intently to the whispering of her heart that seemed to swell at last into a song of extreme

sweetness. Listening to that song she husked the rice at home; it dulled her ears to the shrill bickerings of Bulangi's wives, to the sound of angry reproaches addressed to herself. And when the sun was near its setting she walked to the bathing-place and heard it as she stood on the tender grass of the low bank, her robe at her feet, and looked at the reflection of her figure on the glass-like surface of the creek. Listening to it she walked slowly back, her wet hair hanging over her shoulders; laying down to rest under the bright stars, she closed her eyes to the murmur of the water below, of the warm wind above; to the voice of nature speaking through the faint noises of the great forest, and to the song of her own heart.

She heard, but did not understand, and drank in the dreamy joy of her new existence without troubling about its meaning or its end, till the full consciousness of life came to her through pain and anger. And she suffered horribly the first time she saw Nina's long canoe drift silently past the sleeping house of Bulangi, bearing the two lovers into the white mist of the great river. Her jealousy and rage culminated into a paroxysm of physical pain that left her lying panting on the river bank, in the dumb agony of a wounded animal. But she went on moving patiently in the enchanted circle of slavery, going through her task day after day with all the pathos of the grief she could not express, even to herself, locked within her breast. She shrank from Nina as she would have shrunk from the sharp blade of a knife cutting into her flesh, but she kept on visiting the brig to feed her dumb, ignorant soul on her own despair. She saw Dain many times. He never spoke, he never looked. Could his eyes see only one woman's image? Could his ears hear only one woman's voice? He never noticed her; not once.

And then he went away. She saw him and Nina for the last time on that morning when Babalatchi, while visiting his fish baskets, had his suspicions of the white man's daughter's love affair with Dain confirmed beyond the shadow of doubt. Dain disappeared, and Taminah's heart, where lay useless and barren the seeds of all love and of all hate, the possibilities of all passions and of all sacrifices, forgot its joys and its sufferings when deprived of the help of the senses. Her half-formed, savage mind, the slave of her body — as her body was the slave of another's will — forgot the faint and vague image of the ideal that had found its beginning in the physical promptings of her savage nature. She dropped back into the torpor of her former life and found consolation — even a certain kind of happiness — in the thought that now Nina and Dain were separated, probably for ever. He would forget. This thought soothed the last pangs of dying jealousy that had nothing now to feed upon, and Taminah found peace. It was like the dreary tranquillity of a desert, where there is peace only because there is no life.

And now he had returned. She had recognised his voice calling aloud in the night for Bulangi. She had crept out after her master to listen closer to the intoxicating sound. Dain was there, in a boat, talking to Bulangi. Taminah, listening with arrested breath, heard another voice. The maddening joy, that only a second before she thought herself incapable of containing within her fast-beating heart, died out, and left her shivering in the old anguish of physical pain that she had suffered once before at the sight of Dain

and Nina. Nina spoke now, ordering and entreating in turns, and Bulangi was refusing, expostulating, at last consenting. He went in to take a paddle from the heap lying behind the door. Outside the murmur of two voices went on, and she caught a word here and there. She understood that he was fleeing from white men, that he was seeking a hiding-place, that he was in some danger. But she heard also words which woke the rage of jealousy that had been asleep for so many days in her bosom. Crouching low on the mud in the black darkness amongst the piles, she heard the whisper in the boat that made light of toil, of privation, of danger, of life itself, if in exchange there could be but a short moment of close embrace, a look from the eyes, the feel of light breath, the touch of soft lips. So spoke Dain as he sat in the canoe holding Nina's hands while waiting for Bulangi's return; and Taminah, supporting herself by the slimy pile, felt as if a heavy weight was crushing her down, down into the black oily water at her feet. She wanted to cry out; to rush at them and tear their vague shadows apart; to throw Nina into the smooth water, cling to her close, hold her to the bottom where that man could not find her. She could not cry, she could not move. Then footsteps were heard on the bamboo platform above her head; she saw Bulangi get into his smallest canoe and take the lead, the other boat following, paddled by Dain and Nina. With a slight splash of the paddles dipped stealthily into the water, their indistinct forms passed before her aching eyes and vanished in the darkness of the creek.

She remained there in the cold and wet, powerless to move, breathing painfully under the crushing weight that the mysterious hand of Fate had laid so suddenly upon her slender shoulders, and shivering, she felt within a burning fire, that seemed to feed upon her very life. When the breaking day had spread a pale golden ribbon over the black outline of the forests, she took up her tray and departed towards the settlement, going about her task purely from the force of habit. As she approached Sambir she could see the excitement and she heard with momentary surprise of the finding of Dain's body. It was not true, of course. She knew it well. She regretted that he was not dead. She should have liked Dain to be dead, so as to be parted from that woman — from all women. She felt a strong desire to see Nina, but without any clear object. She hated her, and feared her and she felt an irresistible impulse pushing her towards Almayer's house to see the white woman's face, to look close at those eyes, to hear again that voice, for the sound of which Dain was ready to risk his liberty, his life even. She had seen her many times; she had heard her voice daily for many months past. What was there in her? What was there in that being to make a man speak as Dain had spoken, to make him blind to all other faces, deaf to all other voices?

She left the crowd by the riverside, and wandered aimlessly among the empty houses, resisting the impulse that pushed her towards Almayer's campong to seek there in Nina's eyes the secret of her own misery. The sun mounting higher, shortened the shadows and poured down upon her a flood of light and of stifling heat as she passed on from shadow to light, from light to shadow, amongst the houses, the bushes, the tall trees, in her unconscious flight from the pain in her own heart. In the extremity of her distress she could find no words to pray for relief, she knew of no heaven to send

her prayer to, and she wandered on with tired feet in the dumb surprise and terror at the injustice of the suffering inflicted upon her without cause and without redress.

The short talk with Reshid, the proposal of Abdulla steadied her a little and turned her thoughts into another channel. Dain was in some danger. He was hiding from white men. So much she had overheard last night. They all thought him dead. She knew he was alive, and she knew of his hiding-place. What did the Arabs want to know about the white men? The white men want with Dain? Did they wish to kill him? She could tell them all — no, she would say nothing, and in the night she would go to him and sell him his life for a word, for a smile, for a gesture even, and be his slave in far-off countries, away from Nina. But there were dangers. The one-eyed Babalatchi who knew everything; the white man's wife — she was a witch. Perhaps they would tell. And then there was Nina. She must hurry on and see.

In her impatience she left the path and ran towards Almayer's dwelling through the undergrowth between the palm trees. She came out at the back of the house, where a narrow ditch, full of stagnant water that overflowed from the river, separated Almayer's campong from the rest of the settlement. The thick bushes growing on the bank were hiding from her sight the large courtyard with its cooking shed. Above them rose several thin columns of smoke, and from behind the sound of strange voices informed Taminah that the Men of the Sea belonging to the warship had already landed and were camped between the ditch and the house. To the left one of Almayer's slave-girls came down to the ditch and bent over the shiny water, washing a kettle. To the right the tops of the banana plantation, visible above the bushes, swayed and shook under the touch of invisible hands gathering the fruit. On the calm water several canoes moored to a heavy stake were crowded together, nearly bridging the ditch just at the place where Taminah stood. The voices in the courtyard rose at times into an outburst of calls, replies, and laughter, and then died away into a silence that soon was broken again by a fresh clamour. Now and again the thin blue smoke rushed out thicker and blacker, and drove in odorous masses over the creek, wrapping her for a moment in a suffocating veil; then, as the fresh wood caught well alight, the smoke vanished in the bright sunlight, and only the scent of aromatic wood drifted afar, to leeward of the crackling fires.

Taminah rested her tray on a stump of a tree, and remained standing with her eyes turned towards Almayer's house, whose roof and part of a whitewashed wall were visible over the bushes. The slave-girl finished her work, and after looking for a while curiously at Taminah, pushed her way through the dense thicket back to the courtyard. Round Taminah there was now a complete solitude. She threw herself down on the ground, and hid her face in her hands. Now when so close she had no courage to see Nina. At every burst of louder voices from the courtyard she shivered in the fear of hearing Nina's voice. She came to the resolution of waiting where she was till dark, and then going straight to Dain's hiding-place. From where she was she could watch the movements of white men, of Nina, of all Dain's friends, and of all his enemies. Both

were hateful alike to her, for both would take him away beyond her reach. She hid herself in the long grass to wait anxiously for the sunset that seemed so slow to come.

On the other side of the ditch, behind the bush, by the clear fires, the seamen of the frigate had encamped on the hospitable invitation of Almayer. Almayer, roused out of his apathy by the prayers and importunity of Nina, had managed to get down in time to the jetty so as to receive the officers at their landing. The lieutenant in command accepted his invitation to his house with the remark that in any case their business was with Almayer — and perhaps not very pleasant, he added. Almayer hardly heard him. He shook hands with them absently and led the way towards the house. He was scarcely conscious of the polite words of welcome he greeted the strangers with, and afterwards repeated several times over again in his efforts to appear at ease. The agitation of their host did not escape the officer's eyes, and the chief confided to his subordinate, in a low voice, his doubts as to Almayer's sobriety. The young sub-lieutenant laughed and expressed in a whisper the hope that the white man was not intoxicated enough to neglect the offer of some refreshments. "He does not seem very dangerous," he added, as they followed Almayer up the steps of the verandah.

"No, he seems more of a fool than a knave; I have heard of him," returned the senior.

They sat around the table. Almayer with shaking hands made gin cocktails, offered them all round, and drank himself, with every gulp feeling stronger, steadier, and better able to face all the difficulties of his position. Ignorant of the fate of the brig he did not suspect the real object of the officer's visit. He had a general notion that something must have leaked out about the gunpowder trade, but apprehended nothing beyond some temporary inconveniences. After emptying his glass he began to chat easily, lying back in his chair with one of his legs thrown negligently over the arm. The lieutenant astride on his chair, a glowing cheroot in the corner of his mouth, listened with a sly smile from behind the thick volumes of smoke that escaped from his compressed lips. The young sub-lieutenant, leaning with both elbows on the table, his head between his hands, looked on sleepily in the torpor induced by fatigue and the gin. Almayer talked on —

"It is a great pleasure to see white faces here. I have lived here many years in great solitude. The Malays, you understand, are not company for a white man; moreover they are not friendly; they do not understand our ways. Great rascals they are. I believe I am the only white man on the east coast that is a settled resident. We get visitors from Macassar or Singapore sometimes — traders, agents, or explorers, but they are rare. There was a scientific explorer here a year or more ago. He lived in my house: drank from morning to night. He lived joyously for a few months, and when the liquor he brought with him was gone he returned to Batavia with a report on the mineral wealth of the interior. Ha, ha, ha! Good, is it not?"

He ceased abruptly and looked at his guests with a meaningless stare. While they laughed he was reciting to himself the old story: "Dain dead, all my plans destroyed. This is the end of all hope and of all things." His heart sank within him. He felt a kind of deadly sickness.

“Very good. Capital!” exclaimed both officers. Almayer came out of his despondency with another burst of talk.

“Eh! what about the dinner? You have got a cook with you. That’s all right. There is a cooking shed in the other courtyard. I can give you a goose. Look at my geese — the only geese on the east coast — perhaps on the whole island. Is that your cook? Very good. Here, Ali, show this Chinaman the cooking place and tell Mem Almayer to let him have room there. My wife, gentlemen, does not come out; my daughter may. Meantime have some more drink. It is a hot day.”

The lieutenant took the cigar out of his mouth, looked at the ash critically, shook it off and turned towards Almayer.

“We have a rather unpleasant business with you,” he said.

“I am sorry,” returned Almayer. “It can be nothing very serious, surely.”

“If you think an attempt to blow up forty men at least, not a serious matter you will not find many people of your opinion,” retorted the officer sharply.

“Blow up! What? I know nothing about it,” exclaimed Almayer. “Who did that, or tried to do it?”

“A man with whom you had some dealings,” answered the lieutenant. “He passed here under the name of Dain Maroola. You sold him the gunpowder he had in that brig we captured.”

“How did you hear about the brig?” asked Almayer. “I know nothing about the powder he may have had.”

“An Arab trader of this place has sent the information about your goings on here to Batavia, a couple of months ago,” said the officer. “We were waiting for the brig outside, but he slipped past us at the mouth of the river, and we had to chase the fellow to the southward. When he sighted us he ran inside the reefs and put the brig ashore. The crew escaped in boats before we could take possession. As our boats neared the craft it blew up with a tremendous explosion; one of the boats being too near got swamped. Two men drowned — that is the result of your speculation, Mr. Almayer. Now we want this Dain. We have good grounds to suppose he is hiding in Sambir. Do you know where he is? You had better put yourself right with the authorities as much as possible by being perfectly frank with me. Where is this Dain?”

Almayer got up and walked towards the balustrade of the verandah. He seemed not to be thinking of the officer’s question. He looked at the body laying straight and rigid under its white cover on which the sun, declining amongst the clouds to the westward, threw a pale tinge of red. The lieutenant waited for the answer, taking quick pulls at his half-extinguished cigar. Behind them Ali moved noiselessly laying the table, ranging solemnly the ill-assorted and shabby crockery, the tin spoons, the forks with broken prongs, and the knives with saw-like blades and loose handles. He had almost forgotten how to prepare the table for white men. He felt aggrieved; Mem Nina would not help him. He stepped back to look at his work admiringly, feeling very proud. This must be right; and if the master afterwards is angry and swears, then so much the worse for Mem Nina. Why did she not help? He left the verandah to fetch the dinner.

“Well, Mr. Almayer, will you answer my question as frankly as it is put to you?” asked the lieutenant, after a long silence.

Almayer turned round and looked at his interlocutor steadily. “If you catch this Dain what will you do with him?” he asked.

The officer’s face flushed. “This is not an answer,” he said, annoyed.

“And what will you do with me?” went on Almayer, not heeding the interruption.

“Are you inclined to bargain?” growled the other. “It would be bad policy, I assure you. At present I have no orders about your person, but we expected your assistance in catching this Malay.”

“Ah!” interrupted Almayer, “just so: you can do nothing without me, and I, knowing the man well, am to help you in finding him.”

“This is exactly what we expect,” assented the officer. “You have broken the law, Mr. Almayer, and you ought to make amends.”

“And save myself?”

“Well, in a sense yes. Your head is not in any danger,” said the lieutenant, with a short laugh.

“Very well,” said Almayer, with decision, “I shall deliver the man up to you.”

Both officers rose to their feet quickly, and looked for their side-arms which they had unbuckled. Almayer laughed harshly.

“Steady, gentlemen!” he exclaimed. “In my own time and in my own way. After dinner, gentlemen, you shall have him.”

“This is preposterous,” urged the lieutenant. “Mr. Almayer, this is no joking matter. The man is a criminal. He deserves to hang. While we dine he may escape; the rumour of our arrival — ”

Almayer walked towards the table. “I give you my word of honour, gentlemen, that he shall not escape; I have him safe enough.”

“The arrest should be effected before dark,” remarked the young sub.

“I shall hold you responsible for any failure. We are ready, but can do nothing just now without you,” added the senior, with evident annoyance.

Almayer made a gesture of assent. “On my word of honour,” he repeated vaguely. “And now let us dine,” he added briskly.

Nina came through the doorway and stood for a moment holding the curtain aside for Ali and the old Malay woman bearing the dishes; then she moved towards the three men by the table.

“Allow me,” said Almayer, pompously. “This is my daughter. Nina, these gentlemen, officers of the frigate outside, have done me the honour to accept my hospitality.”

Nina answered the low bows of the two officers by a slow inclination of the head and took her place at the table opposite her father. All sat down. The coxswain of the steam launch came up carrying some bottles of wine.

“You will allow me to have this put upon the table?” said the lieutenant to Almayer.

“What! Wine! You are very kind. Certainly, I have none myself. Times are very hard.”

The last words of his reply were spoken by Almayer in a faltering voice. The thought that Dain was dead recurred to him vividly again, and he felt as if an invisible hand was gripping his throat. He reached for the gin bottle while they were uncorking the wine and swallowed a big gulp. The lieutenant, who was speaking to Nina, gave him a quick glance. The young sub began to recover from the astonishment and confusion caused by Nina's unexpected appearance and great beauty. "She was very beautiful and imposing," he reflected, "but after all a half-caste girl." This thought caused him to pluck up heart and look at Nina sideways. Nina, with composed face, was answering in a low, even voice the elder officer's polite questions as to the country and her mode of life. Almayer pushed his plate away and drank his guest's wine in gloomy silence.

Chapter 9

“Can I believe what you tell me? It is like a tale for men that listen only half awake by the camp fire, and it seems to have run off a woman’s tongue.”

“Who is there here for me to deceive, O Rajah?” answered Babalatchi. “Without you I am nothing. All I have told you I believe to be true. I have been safe for many years in the hollow of your hand. This is no time to harbour suspicions. The danger is very great. We should advise and act at once, before the sun sets.”

“Right. Right,” muttered Lakamba, pensively.

They had been sitting for the last hour together in the audience chamber of the Rajah’s house, for Babalatchi, as soon as he had witnessed the landing of the Dutch officers, had crossed the river to report to his master the events of the morning, and to confer with him upon the line of conduct to pursue in the face of altered circumstances. They were both puzzled and frightened by the unexpected turn the events had taken. The Rajah, sitting crosslegged on his chair, looked fixedly at the floor; Babalatchi was squatting close by in an attitude of deep dejection.

“And where did you say he is hiding now?” asked Lakamba, breaking at last the silence full of gloomy forebodings in which they both had been lost for a long while.

“In Bulangi’s clearing — the furthest one, away from the house. They went there that very night. The white man’s daughter took him there. She told me so herself, speaking to me openly, for she is half white and has no decency. She said she was waiting for him while he was here; then, after a long time, he came out of the darkness and fell at her feet exhausted. He lay like one dead, but she brought him back to life in her arms, and made him breathe again with her own breath. That is what she said, speaking to my face, as I am speaking now to you, Rajah. She is like a white woman and knows no shame.”

He paused, deeply shocked. Lakamba nodded his head. “Well, and then?” he asked.

“They called the old woman,” went on Babalatchi, “and he told them all — about the brig, and how he tried to kill many men. He knew the Orang Blanda were very near, although he had said nothing to us about that; he knew his great danger. He thought he had killed many, but there were only two dead, as I have heard from the men of the sea that came in the warship’s boats.”

“And the other man, he that was found in the river?” interrupted Lakamba.

“That was one of his boatmen. When his canoe was overturned by the logs those two swam together, but the other man must have been hurt. Dain swam, holding him up. He left him in the bushes when he went up to the house. When they all came down his heart had ceased to beat; then the old woman spoke; Dain thought it was good.

He took off his anklet and broke it, twisting it round the man's foot. His ring he put on that slave's hand. He took off his sarong and clothed that thing that wanted no clothes, the two women holding it up meanwhile, their intent being to deceive all eyes and to mislead the minds in the settlement, so that they could swear to the thing that was not, and that there could be no treachery when the white-men came. Then Dain and the white woman departed to call up Bulangi and find a hiding-place. The old woman remained by the body."

"Hai!" exclaimed Lakamba. "She has wisdom."

"Yes, she has a Devil of her own to whisper counsel in her ear," assented Babalatchi. "She dragged the body with great toil to the point where many logs were stranded. All these things were done in the darkness after the storm had passed away. Then she waited. At the first sign of daylight she battered the face of the dead with a heavy stone, and she pushed him amongst the logs. She remained near, watching. At sunrise Mahmat Banjer came and found him. They all believed; I myself was deceived, but not for long. The white man believed, and, grieving, fled to his house. When we were alone I, having doubts, spoke to the woman, and she, fearing my anger and your might, told me all, asking for help in saving Dain."

"He must not fall into the hands of the Orang Blanda," said Lakamba; "but let him die, if the thing can be done quietly."

"It cannot, Tuan! Remember there is that woman who, being half white, is ungovernable, and would raise a great outcry. Also the officers are here. They are angry enough already. Dain must escape; he must go. We must help him now for our own safety."

"Are the officers very angry?" inquired Lakamba, with interest.

"They are. The principal chief used strong words when speaking to me — to me when I salaamed in your name. I do not think," added Babalatchi, after a short pause and looking very worried — "I do not think I saw a white chief so angry before. He said we were careless or even worse. He told me he would speak to the Rajah, and that I was of no account."

"Speak to the Rajah!" repeated Lakamba, thoughtfully. "Listen, Babalatchi: I am sick, and shall withdraw; you cross over and tell the white men."

"Yes," said Babalatchi, "I am going over at once; and as to Dain?"

"You get him away as you can best. This is a great trouble in my heart," sighed Lakamba.

Babalatchi got up, and, going close to his master, spoke earnestly.

"There is one of our praus at the southern mouth of the river. The Dutch warship is to the northward watching the main entrance. I shall send Dain off to-night in a canoe, by the hidden channels, on board the prau. His father is a great prince, and shall hear of our generosity. Let the prau take him to Ampanam. Your glory shall be great, and your reward in powerful friendship. Almayer will no doubt deliver the dead body as Dain's to the officers, and the foolish white men shall say, 'This is very good; let there be peace.' And the trouble shall be removed from your heart, Rajah."

"True! true!" said Lakamba.

“And, this being accomplished by me who am your slave, you shall reward with a generous hand. That I know! The white man is grieving for the lost treasure, in the manner of white men who thirst after dollars. Now, when all other things are in order, we shall perhaps obtain the treasure from the white man. Dain must escape, and Almayer must live.”

“Now go, Babalatchi, go!” said Lakamba, getting off his chair. “I am very sick, and want medicine. Tell the white chief so.”

But Babalatchi was not to be got rid of in this summary manner. He knew that his master, after the manner of the great, liked to shift the burden of toil and danger on to his servants' shoulders, but in the difficult straits in which they were now the Rajah must play his part. He may be very sick for the white men, for all the world if he liked, as long as he would take upon himself the execution of part at least of Babalatchi's carefully thought-of plan. Babalatchi wanted a big canoe manned by twelve men to be sent out after dark towards Bulangi's clearing. Dain may have to be overpowered. A man in love cannot be expected to see clearly the path of safety if it leads him away from the object of his affections, argued Babalatchi, and in that case they would have to use force in order to make him go. Would the Rajah see that trusty men manned the canoe? The thing must be done secretly. Perhaps the Rajah would come himself, so as to bring all the weight of his authority to bear upon Dain if he should prove obstinate and refuse to leave his hiding-place. The Rajah would not commit himself to a definite promise, and anxiously pressed Babalatchi to go, being afraid of the white men paying him an unexpected visit. The aged statesman reluctantly took his leave and went into the courtyard.

Before going down to his boat Babalatchi stopped for a while in the big open space where the thick-leaved trees put black patches of shadow which seemed to float on a flood of smooth, intense light that rolled up to the houses and down to the stockade and over the river, where it broke and sparkled in thousands of glittering wavelets, like a band woven of azure and gold edged with the brilliant green of the forests guarding both banks of the Pantai. In the perfect calm before the coming of the afternoon breeze the irregularly jagged line of tree-tops stood unchanging, as if traced by an unsteady hand on the clear blue of the hot sky. In the space sheltered by the high palisades there lingered the smell of decaying blossoms from the surrounding forest, a taint of drying fish; with now and then a whiff of acrid smoke from the cooking fires when it eddied down from under the leafy boughs and clung lazily about the burnt-up grass.

As Babalatchi looked up at the flagstaff over-topping a group of low trees in the middle of the courtyard, the tricolour flag of the Netherlands stirred slightly for the first time since it had been hoisted that morning on the arrival of the man-of-war boats. With a faint rustle of trees the breeze came down in light puffs, playing capriciously for a time with this emblem of Lakamba's power, that was also the mark of his servitude; then the breeze freshened in a sharp gust of wind, and the flag flew out straight and steady above the trees. A dark shadow ran along the river, rolling over and covering up the sparkle of declining sunlight. A big white cloud sailed slowly across the darkening

sky, and hung to the westward as if waiting for the sun to join it there. Men and things shook off the torpor of the hot afternoon and stirred into life under the first breath of the sea breeze.

Babalatchi hurried down to the water-gate; yet before he passed through it he paused to look round the courtyard, with its light and shade, with its cheery fires, with the groups of Lakamba's soldiers and retainers scattered about. His own house stood amongst the other buildings in that enclosure, and the statesman of Sambir asked himself with a sinking heart when and how would it be given him to return to that house. He had to deal with a man more dangerous than any wild beast of his experience: a proud man, a man wilful after the manner of princes, a man in love. And he was going forth to speak to that man words of cold and worldly wisdom. Could anything be more appalling? What if that man should take umbrage at some fancied slight to his honour or disregard of his affections and suddenly "amok"? The wise adviser would be the first victim, no doubt, and death would be his reward. And underlying the horror of this situation there was the danger of those meddling fools, the white men. A vision of comfortless exile in far-off Madura rose up before Babalatchi. Wouldn't that be worse than death itself? And there was that half-white woman with threatening eyes. How could he tell what an incomprehensible creature of that sort would or would not do? She knew so much that she made the killing of Dain an impossibility. That much was certain. And yet the sharp, rough-edged kriss is a good and discreet friend, thought Babalatchi, as he examined his own lovingly, and put it back in the sheath, with a sigh of regret, before unfastening his canoe. As he cast off the painter, pushed out into the stream, and took up his paddle, he realised vividly how unsatisfactory it was to have women mixed up in state affairs. Young women, of course. For Mrs. Almayer's mature wisdom, and for the easy aptitude in intrigue that comes with years to the feminine mind, he felt the most sincere respect.

He paddled leisurely, letting the canoe drift down as he crossed towards the point. The sun was high yet, and nothing pressed. His work would commence only with the coming of darkness. Avoiding the Lingard jetty, he rounded the point, and paddled up the creek at the back of Almayer's house. There were many canoes lying there, their noses all drawn together, fastened all to the same stake. Babalatchi pushed his little craft in amongst them and stepped on shore. On the other side of the ditch something moved in the grass.

"Who's that hiding?" hailed Babalatchi. "Come out and speak to me."

Nobody answered. Babalatchi crossed over, passing from boat to boat, and poked his staff viciously in the suspicious place. Taminah jumped up with a cry.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, surprised. "I have nearly stepped on your tray. Am I a Dyak that you should hide at my sight?"

"I was weary, and — I slept," whispered Taminah, confusedly.

"You slept! You have not sold anything to-day, and you will be beaten when you return home," said Babalatchi.

Taminah stood before him abashed and silent. Babalatchi looked her over carefully with great satisfaction. Decidedly he would offer fifty dollars more to that thief Bulangi. The girl pleased him.

“Now you go home. It is late,” he said sharply. “Tell Bulangi that I shall be near his house before the night is half over, and that I want him to make all things ready for a long journey. You understand? A long journey to the southward. Tell him that before sunset, and do not forget my words.”

Taminah made a gesture of assent, and watched Babalatchi recross the ditch and disappear through the bushes bordering Almayer’s compound. She moved a little further off the creek and sank in the grass again, lying down on her face, shivering in dry-eyed misery.

Babalatchi walked straight towards the cooking-shed looking for Mrs. Almayer. The courtyard was in a great uproar. A strange Chinaman had possession of the kitchen fire and was noisily demanding another saucepan. He hurled objurgations, in the Canton dialect and bad Malay, against the group of slave-girls standing a little way off, half frightened, half amused, at his violence. From the camping fires round which the seamen of the frigate were sitting came words of encouragement, mingled with laughter and jeering. In the midst of this noise and confusion Babalatchi met Ali, an empty dish in his hand.

“Where are the white men?” asked Babalatchi.

“They are eating in the front verandah,” answered Ali. “Do not stop me, Tuan. I am giving the white men their food and am busy.”

“Where’s Mem Almayer?”

“Inside in the passage. She is listening to the talk.”

Ali grinned and passed on; Babalatchi ascended the plankway to the rear verandah, and beckoning out Mrs. Almayer, engaged her in earnest conversation. Through the long passage, closed at the further end by the red curtain, they could hear from time to time Almayer’s voice mingling in conversation with an abrupt loudness that made Mrs. Almayer look significantly at Babalatchi.

“Listen,” she said. “He has drunk much.”

“He has,” whispered Babalatchi. “He will sleep heavily to-night.”

Mrs. Almayer looked doubtful.

“Sometimes the devil of strong gin makes him keep awake, and he walks up and down the verandah all night, cursing; then we stand afar off,” explained Mrs. Almayer, with the fuller knowledge born of twenty odd years of married life.

“But then he does not hear, nor understand, and his hand, of course, has no strength. We do not want him to hear to-night.”

“No,” assented Mrs. Almayer, energetically, but in a cautiously subdued voice. “If he hears he will kill.”

Babalatchi looked incredulous.

“Hai Tuan, you may believe me. Have I not lived many years with that man? Have I not seen death in that man’s eyes more than once when I was younger and he guessed

at many things. Had he been a man of my own people I would not have seen such a look twice; but he — ”

With a contemptuous gesture she seemed to fling unutterable scorn on Almayer's weak-minded aversion to sudden bloodshed.

“If he has the wish but not the strength, then what do we fear?” asked Babalatchi, after a short silence during which they both listened to Almayer's loud talk till it subsided into the murmur of general conversation. “What do we fear?” repeated Babalatchi again.

“To keep the daughter whom he loves he would strike into your heart and mine without hesitation,” said Mrs. Almayer. “When the girl is gone he will be like the devil unchained. Then you and I had better beware.”

“I am an old man and fear not death,” answered Babalatchi, with a mendacious assumption of indifference. “But what will you do?”

“I am an old woman, and wish to live,” retorted Mrs. Almayer. “She is my daughter also. I shall seek safety at the feet of our Rajah, speaking in the name of the past when we both were young, and he — ”

Babalatchi raised his hand.

“Enough. You shall be protected,” he said soothingly.

Again the sound of Almayer's voice was heard, and again interrupting their talk, they listened to the confused but loud utterance coming in bursts of unequal strength, with unexpected pauses and noisy repetitions that made some words and sentences fall clear and distinct on their ears out of the meaningless jumble of excited shoutings emphasised by the thumping of Almayer's fist upon the table. On the short intervals of silence, the high complaining note of tumblers, standing close together and vibrating to the shock, lingered, growing fainter, till it leapt up again into tumultuous ringing, when a new idea started a new rush of words and brought down the heavy hand again. At last the quarrelsome shouting ceased, and the thin plaint of disturbed glass died away into reluctant quietude.

Babalatchi and Mrs. Almayer had listened curiously, their bodies bent and their ears turned towards the passage. At every louder shout they nodded at each other with a ridiculous affectation of scandalised propriety, and they remained in the same attitude for some time after the noise had ceased.

“This is the devil of gin,” whispered Mrs. Almayer. “Yes; he talks like that sometimes when there is nobody to hear him.”

“What does he say?” inquired Babalatchi, eagerly. “You ought to understand.”

“I have forgotten their talk. A little I understood. He spoke without any respect of the white ruler in Batavia, and of protection, and said he had been wronged; he said that several times. More I did not understand. Listen! Again he speaks!”

“Tse! tse! tse!” clicked Babalatchi, trying to appear shocked, but with a joyous twinkle of his solitary eye. “There will be great trouble between those white men. I will go round now and see. You tell your daughter that there is a sudden and a long

journey before her, with much glory and splendour at the end. And tell her that Dain must go, or he must die, and that he will not go alone."

"No, he will not go alone," slowly repeated Mrs. Almayer, with a thoughtful air, as she crept into the passage after seeing Babalatchi disappear round the corner of the house.

The statesman of Sambir, under the impulse of vivid curiosity, made his way quickly to the front of the house, but once there he moved slowly and cautiously as he crept step by step up the stairs of the verandah. On the highest step he sat down quietly, his feet on the steps below, ready for flight should his presence prove unwelcome. He felt pretty safe so. The table stood nearly endways to him, and he saw Almayer's back; at Nina he looked full face, and had a side view of both officers; but of the four persons sitting at the table only Nina and the younger officer noticed his noiseless arrival. The momentary dropping of Nina's eyelids acknowledged Babalatchi's presence; she then spoke at once to the young sub, who turned towards her with attentive alacrity, but her gaze was fastened steadily on her father's face while Almayer was speaking uproariously.

". . . disloyalty and unscrupulousness! What have you ever done to make me loyal? You have no grip on this country. I had to take care of myself, and when I asked for protection I was met with threats and contempt, and had Arab slander thrown in my face. I! a white man!"

"Don't be violent, Almayer," remonstrated the lieutenant; "I have heard all this already."

"Then why do you talk to me about scruples? I wanted money, and I gave powder in exchange. How could I know that some of your wretched men were going to be blown up? Scruples! Pah!"

He groped unsteadily amongst the bottles, trying one after another, grumbling to himself the while.

"No more wine," he muttered discontentedly.

"You have had enough, Almayer," said the lieutenant, as he lighted a cigar. "Is it not time to deliver to us your prisoner? I take it you have that Dain Maroola stowed away safely somewhere. Still we had better get that business over, and then we shall have more drink. Come! don't look at me like this."

Almayer was staring with stony eyes, his trembling fingers fumbling about his throat.

"Gold," he said with difficulty. "Hem! A hand on the windpipe, you know. Sure you will excuse. I wanted to say — a little gold for a little powder. What's that?"

"I know, I know," said the lieutenant soothingly.

"No! You don't know. Not one of you knows!" shouted Almayer. "The government is a fool, I tell you. Heaps of gold. I am the man that knows; I and another one. But he won't speak. He is —"

He checked himself with a feeble smile, and, making an unsuccessful attempt to pat the officer on the shoulder, knocked over a couple of empty bottles.

“Personally you are a fine fellow,” he said very distinctly, in a patronising manner. His head nodded drowsily as he sat muttering to himself.

The two officers looked at each other helplessly.

“This won’t do,” said the lieutenant, addressing his junior. “Have the men mustered in the compound here. I must get some sense out of him. Hi! Almayer! Wake up, man. Redeem your word. You gave your word. You gave your word of honour, you know.”

Almayer shook off the officer’s hand with impatience, but his ill-humour vanished at once, and he looked up, putting his forefinger to the side of his nose.

“You are very young; there is time for all things,” he said, with an air of great sagacity.

The lieutenant turned towards Nina, who, leaning back in her chair, watched her father steadily.

“Really I am very much distressed by all this for your sake,” he exclaimed. “I do not know;” he went on, speaking with some embarrassment, “whether I have any right to ask you anything, unless, perhaps, to withdraw from this painful scene, but I feel that I must — for your father’s good — suggest that you should — I mean if you have any influence over him you ought to exert it now to make him keep the promise he gave me before he — before he got into this state.”

He observed with discouragement that she seemed not to take any notice of what he said sitting still with half-closed eyes.

“I trust — ” he began again.

“What is the promise you speak of?” abruptly asked Nina, leaving her seat and moving towards her father.

“Nothing that is not just and proper. He promised to deliver to us a man who in time of profound peace took the lives of innocent men to escape the punishment he deserved for breaking the law. He planned his mischief on a large scale. It is not his fault if it failed, partially. Of course you have heard of Dain Maroola. Your father secured him, I understand. We know he escaped up this river. Perhaps you — ”

“And he killed white men!” interrupted Nina.

“I regret to say they were white. Yes, two white men lost their lives through that scoundrel’s freak.”

“Two only!” exclaimed Nina.

The officer looked at her in amazement.

“Why! why! You — ” he stammered, confused.

“There might have been more,” interrupted Nina. “And when you get this — this scoundrel will you go?”

The lieutenant, still speechless, bowed his assent.

“Then I would get him for you if I had to seek him in a burning fire,” she burst out with intense energy. “I hate the sight of your white faces. I hate the sound of your gentle voices. That is the way you speak to women, dropping sweet words before any pretty face. I have heard your voices before. I hoped to live here without seeing any

other white face but this," she added in a gentler tone, touching lightly her father's cheek.

Almayer ceased his mumbling and opened his eyes. He caught hold of his daughter's hand and pressed it to his face, while Nina with the other hand smoothed his rumpled grey hair, looking defiantly over her father's head at the officer, who had now regained his composure and returned her look with a cool, steady stare. Below, in front of the verandah, they could hear the tramp of seamen mustering there according to orders. The sub-lieutenant came up the steps, while Babalatchi stood up uneasily and, with finger on lip, tried to catch Nina's eye.

"You are a good girl," whispered Almayer, absently, dropping his daughter's hand.

"Father! father!" she cried, bending over him with passionate entreaty. "See those two men looking at us. Send them away. I cannot bear it any more. Send them away. Do what they want and let them go."

She caught sight of Babalatchi and ceased speaking suddenly, but her foot tapped the floor with rapid beats in a paroxysm of nervous restlessness. The two officers stood close together looking on curiously.

"What has happened? What is the matter?" whispered the younger man.

"Don't know," answered the other, under his breath. "One is furious, and the other is drunk. Not so drunk, either. Queer, this. Look!"

Almayer had risen, holding on to his daughter's arm. He hesitated a moment, then he let go his hold and lurched half-way across the verandah. There he pulled himself together, and stood very straight, breathing hard and glaring round angrily.

"Are the men ready?" asked the lieutenant.

"All ready, sir."

"Now, Mr. Almayer, lead the way," said the lieutenant

Almayer rested his eyes on him as if he saw him for the first time.

"Two men," he said thickly. The effort of speaking seemed to interfere with his equilibrium. He took a quick step to save himself from a fall, and remained swaying backwards and forwards. "Two men," he began again, speaking with difficulty. "Two white men — men in uniform — honourable men. I want to say — men of honour. Are you?"

"Come! None of that," said the officer impatiently. "Let us have that friend of yours."

"What do you think I am?" asked Almayer, fiercely.

"You are drunk, but not so drunk as not to know what you are doing. Enough of this tomfoolery," said the officer sternly, "or I will have you put under arrest in your own house."

"Arrest!" laughed Almayer, discordantly. "Ha! ha! ha! Arrest! Why, I have been trying to get out of this infernal place for twenty years, and I can't. You hear, man! I can't, and never shall! Never!"

He ended his words with a sob, and walked unsteadily down the stairs. When in the courtyard the lieutenant approached him, and took him by the arm. The sub-lieutenant and Babalatchi followed close.

“That’s better, Almayer,” said the officer encouragingly. “Where are you going to? There are only planks there. Here,” he went on, shaking him slightly, “do we want the boats?”

“No,” answered Almayer, viciously. “You want a grave.”

“What? Wild again! Try to talk sense.”

“Grave!” roared Almayer, struggling to get himself free. “A hole in the ground. Don’t you understand? You must be drunk. Let me go! Let go, I tell you!”

He tore away from the officer’s grasp, and reeled towards the planks where the body lay under its white cover; then he turned round quickly, and faced the semicircle of interested faces. The sun was sinking rapidly, throwing long shadows of house and trees over the courtyard, but the light lingered yet on the river, where the logs went drifting past in midstream, looking very distinct and black in the pale red glow. The trunks of the trees in the forest on the east bank were lost in gloom while their highest branches swayed gently in the departing sunlight. The air felt heavy and cold in the breeze, expiring in slight puffs that came over the water.

Almayer shivered as he made an effort to speak, and again with an uncertain gesture he seemed to free his throat from the grip of an invisible hand. His bloodshot eyes wandered aimlessly from face to face.

“There!” he said at last. “Are you all there? He is a dangerous man.”

He dragged at the cover with hasty violence, and the body rolled stiffly off the planks and fell at his feet in rigid helplessness.

“Cold, perfectly cold,” said Almayer, looking round with a mirthless smile. “Sorry can do no better. And you can’t hang him, either. As you observe, gentlemen,” he added gravely, “there is no head, and hardly any neck.”

The last ray of light was snatched away from the tree-tops, the river grew suddenly dark, and in the great stillness the murmur of the flowing water seemed to fill the vast expanse of grey shadow that descended upon the land.

“This is Dain,” went on Almayer to the silent group that surrounded him. “And I have kept my word. First one hope, then another, and this is my last. Nothing is left now. You think there is one dead man here? Mistake, I ‘sure you. I am much more dead. Why don’t you hang me?” he suggested suddenly, in a friendly tone, addressing the lieutenant. “I assure, assure you it would be a mat — matter of form altog — altogether.”

These last words he muttered to himself, and walked zigzagging towards his house. “Get out!” he thundered at Ali, who was approaching timidly with offers of assistance. From afar, scared groups of men and women watched his devious progress. He dragged himself up the stairs by the banister, and managed to reach a chair into which he fell heavily. He sat for awhile panting with exertion and anger, and looking round vaguely for Nina; then making a threatening gesture towards the compound, where he had heard Babalatchi’s voice, he overturned the table with his foot in a great crash of smashed crockery. He muttered yet menacingly to himself, then his head fell on his breast, his eyes closed, and with a deep sigh he fell asleep.

That night — for the first time in its history — the peaceful and flourishing settlement of Sambir saw the lights shining about “Almayer’s Folly.” These were the lanterns of the boats hung up by the seamen under the verandah where the two officers were holding a court of inquiry into the truth of the story related to them by Babalatchi. Babalatchi had regained all his importance. He was eloquent and persuasive, calling Heaven and Earth to witness the truth of his statements. There were also other witnesses. Mahmat Banjer and a good many others underwent a close examination that dragged its weary length far into the evening. A messenger was sent for Abdulla, who excused himself from coming on the score of his venerable age, but sent Reshid. Mahmat had to produce the bangle, and saw with rage and mortification the lieutenant put it in his pocket, as one of the proofs of Dain’s death, to be sent in with the official report of the mission. Babalatchi’s ring was also impounded for the same purpose, but the experienced statesman was resigned to that loss from the very beginning. He did not mind as long as he was sure, that the white men believed. He put that question to himself earnestly as he left, one of the last, when the proceedings came to a close. He was not certain. Still, if they believed only for a night, he would put Dain beyond their reach and feel safe himself. He walked away fast, looking from time to time over his shoulder in the fear of being followed, but he saw and heard nothing.

“Ten o’clock,” said the lieutenant, looking at his watch and yawning. “I shall hear some of the captain’s complimentary remarks when we get back. Miserable business, this.”

“Do you think all this is true?” asked the younger man.

“True! It is just possible. But if it isn’t true what can we do? If we had a dozen boats we could patrol the creeks; and that wouldn’t be much good. That drunken madman was right; we haven’t enough hold on this coast. They do what they like. Are our hammocks slung?”

“Yes, I told the coxswain. Strange couple over there,” said the sub, with a wave of his hand towards Almayer’s house.

“Hem! Queer, certainly. What have you been telling her? I was attending to the father most of the time.”

“I assure you I have been perfectly civil,” protested the other warmly.

“All right. Don’t get excited. She objects to civility, then, from what I understand. I thought you might have been tender. You know we are on service.”

“Well, of course. Never forget that. Coldly civil. That’s all.”

They both laughed a little, and not feeling sleepy began to pace the verandah side by side. The moon rose stealthily above the trees, and suddenly changed the river into a stream of scintillating silver. The forest came out of the black void and stood sombre and pensive over the sparkling water. The breeze died away into a breathless calm.

Seamanlike, the two officers tramped measuredly up and down without exchanging a word. The loose planks rattled rhythmically under their steps with obstrusive dry sound in the perfect silence of the night. As they were wheeling round again the younger man stood attentive.

“Did you hear that?” he asked.

“No!” said the other. “Hear what?”

“I thought I heard a cry. Ever so faint. Seemed a woman’s voice. In that other house. Ah! Again! Hear it?”

“No,” said the lieutenant, after listening awhile. “You young fellows always hear women’s voices. If you are going to dream you had better get into your hammock. Good-night.”

The moon mounted higher, and the warm shadows grew smaller and crept away as if hiding before the cold and cruel light.

Chapter 10

“It has set at last,” said Nina to her mother pointing towards the hills behind which the sun had sunk. “Listen, mother, I am going now to Bulangi’s creek, and if I should never return — ”

She interrupted herself, and something like doubt dimmed for a moment the fire of suppressed exaltation that had glowed in her eyes and had illuminated the serene impassiveness of her features with a ray of eager life during all that long day of excitement — the day of joy and anxiety, of hope and terror, of vague grief and indistinct delight. While the sun shone with that dazzling light in which her love was born and grew till it possessed her whole being, she was kept firm in her unwavering resolve by the mysterious whisperings of desire which filled her heart with impatient longing for the darkness that would mean the end of danger and strife, the beginning of happiness, the fulfilling of love, the completeness of life. It had set at last! The short tropical twilight went out before she could draw the long breath of relief; and now the sudden darkness seemed to be full of menacing voices calling upon her to rush headlong into the unknown; to be true to her own impulses, to give herself up to the passion she had evoked and shared. He was waiting! In the solitude of the secluded clearing, in the vast silence of the forest he was waiting alone, a fugitive in fear of his life. Indifferent to his danger he was waiting for her. It was for her only that he had come; and now as the time approached when he should have his reward, she asked herself with dismay what meant that chilling doubt of her own will and of her own desire? With an effort she shook off the fear of the passing weakness. He should have his reward. Her woman’s love and her woman’s honour overcame the faltering distrust of that unknown future waiting for her in the darkness of the river.

“No, you will not return,” muttered Mrs. Almayer, prophetically.

“Without you he will not go, and if he remains here — ” She waved her hand towards the lights of “Almayer’s Folly,” and the unfinished sentence died out in a threatening murmur.

The two women had met behind the house, and now were walking slowly together towards the creek where all the canoes were moored. Arrived at the fringe of bushes they stopped by a common impulse, and Mrs. Almayer, laying her hand on her daughter’s arm, tried in vain to look close into the girl’s averted face. When she attempted to speak her first words were lost in a stifled sob that sounded strangely coming from that woman who, of all human passions, seemed to know only those of anger and hate.

“You are going away to be a great Raneé,” she said at last, in a voice that was steady enough now, “and if you be wise you shall have much power that will endure

many days, and even last into your old age. What have I been? A slave all my life, and I have cooked rice for a man who had no courage and no wisdom. Hai! I! even I, was given in gift by a chief and a warrior to a man that was neither. Hai! Hai!"

She wailed to herself softly, lamenting the lost possibilities of murder and mischief that could have fallen to her lot had she been mated with a congenial spirit. Nina bent down over Mrs. Almayer's slight form and scanned attentively, under the stars that had rushed out on the black sky and now hung breathless over that strange parting, her mother's shrivelled features, and looked close into the sunken eyes that could see into her own dark future by the light of a long and a painful experience. Again she felt herself fascinated, as of old, by her mother's exalted mood and by the oracular certainty of expression which, together with her fits of violence, had contributed not a little to the reputation for witchcraft she enjoyed in the settlement.

* * * * *

"I was a slave, and you shall be a queen," went on Mrs. Almayer, looking straight before her; "but remember men's strength and their weakness. Tremble before his anger, so that he may see your fear in the light of day; but in your heart you may laugh, for after sunset he is your slave."

"A slave! He! The master of life! You do not know him, mother."

Mrs. Almayer condescended to laugh contemptuously.

"You speak like a fool of a white woman," she exclaimed. "What do you know of men's anger and of men's love? Have you watched the sleep of men weary of dealing death? Have you felt about you the strong arm that could drive a kriss deep into a beating heart? Yah! you are a white woman, and ought to pray to a woman-god!"

"Why do you say this? I have listened to your words so long that I have forgotten my old life. If I was white would I stand here, ready to go? Mother, I shall return to the house and look once more at my father's face."

"No!" said Mrs. Almayer, violently. "No, he sleeps now the sleep of gin; and if you went back he might awake and see you. No, he shall never see you. When the terrible old man took you away from me when you were little, you remember — "

"It was such a long time ago," murmured Nina.

"I remember," went on Mrs. Almayer, fiercely. "I wanted to look at your face again. He said no! I heard you cry and jumped into the river. You were his daughter then; you are my daughter now. Never shall you go back to that house; you shall never cross this courtyard again. No! no!"

Her voice rose almost to a shout. On the other side of the creek there was a rustle in the long grass. The two women heard it, and listened for a while in startled silence. "I shall go," said Nina, in a cautious but intense whisper. "What is your hate or your revenge to me?"

She moved towards the house, Mrs. Almayer clinging to her and trying to pull her back.

"Stop, you shall not go!" she gasped.

Nina pushed away her mother impatiently and gathered up her skirts for a quick run, but Mrs. Almayer ran forward and turned round, facing her daughter with outstretched arms.

“If you move another step,” she exclaimed, breathing quickly, “I shall cry out. Do you see those lights in the big house? There sit two white men, angry because they cannot have the blood of the man you love. And in those dark houses,” she continued, more calmly as she pointed towards the settlement, “my voice could wake up men that would lead the Orang Blanda soldiers to him who is waiting — for you.”

She could not see her daughter’s face, but the white figure before her stood silent and irresolute in the darkness. Mrs. Almayer pursued her advantage.

“Give up your old life! Forget!” she said in entreating tones. “Forget that you ever looked at a white face; forget their words; forget their thoughts. They speak lies. And they think lies because they despise us that are better than they are, but not so strong. Forget their friendship and their contempt; forget their many gods. Girl, why do you want to remember the past when there is a warrior and a chief ready to give many lives — his own life — for one of your smiles?”

While she spoke she pushed gently her daughter towards the canoes, hiding her own fear, anxiety, and doubt under the flood of passionate words that left Nina no time to think and no opportunity to protest, even if she had wished it. But she did not wish it now. At the bottom of that passing desire to look again at her father’s face there was no strong affection. She felt no scruples and no remorse at leaving suddenly that man whose sentiment towards herself she could not understand, she could not even see. There was only an instinctive clinging to old life, to old habits, to old faces; that fear of finality which lurks in every human breast and prevents so many heroisms and so many crimes. For years she had stood between her mother and her father, the one so strong in her weakness, the other so weak where he could have been strong. Between those two beings so dissimilar, so antagonistic, she stood with mute heart wondering and angry at the fact of her own existence. It seemed so unreasonable, so humiliating to be flung there in that settlement and to see the days rush by into the past, without a hope, a desire, or an aim that would justify the life she had to endure in ever-growing weariness. She had little belief and no sympathy for her father’s dreams; but the savage ravings of her mother chanced to strike a responsive chord, deep down somewhere in her despairing heart; and she dreamed dreams of her own with the persistent absorption of a captive thinking of liberty within the walls of his prison cell. With the coming of Dain she found the road to freedom by obeying the voice of the new-born impulses, and with surprised joy she thought she could read in his eyes the answer to all the questionings of her heart. She understood now the reason and the aim of life; and in the triumphant unveiling of that mystery she threw away disdainfully her past with its sad thoughts, its bitter feelings, and its faint affections, now withered and dead in contact with her fierce passion.

Mrs. Almayer unmoored Nina’s own canoe and, straightening herself painfully, stood, painter in hand, looking at her daughter.

“Quick,” she said; “get away before the moon rises, while the river is dark. I am afraid of Abdulla’s slaves. The wretches prowl in the night often, and might see and follow you. There are two paddles in the canoe.”

Nina approached her mother and hesitatingly touched lightly with her lips the wrinkled forehead. Mrs. Almayer snorted contemptuously in protest against that tenderness which she, nevertheless, feared could be contagious.

“Shall I ever see you again, mother?” murmured Nina.

“No,” said Mrs. Almayer, after a short silence. “Why should you return here where it is my fate to die? You will live far away in splendour and might. When I hear of white men driven from the islands, then I shall know that you are alive, and that you remember my words.”

“I shall always remember,” returned Nina, earnestly; “but where is my power, and what can I do?”

“Do not let him look too long in your eyes, nor lay his head on your knees without reminding him that men should fight before they rest. And if he lingers, give him his kriss yourself and bid him go, as the wife of a mighty prince should do when the enemies are near. Let him slay the white men that come to us to trade, with prayers on their lips and loaded guns in their hands. Ah!” — she ended with a sigh — “they are on every sea, and on every shore; and they are very many!”

She swung the bow of the canoe towards the river, but did not let go the gunwale, keeping her hand on it in irresolute thoughtfulness.

Nina put the point of the paddle against the bank, ready to shove off into the stream.

“What is it, mother?” she asked, in a low voice. “Do you hear anything?”

“No,” said Mrs. Almayer, absently. “Listen, Nina,” she continued, abruptly, after a slight pause, “in after years there will be other women — ”

A stifled cry in the boat interrupted her, and the paddle rattled in the canoe as it slipped from Nina’s hands, which she put out in a protesting gesture. Mrs. Almayer fell on her knees on the bank and leaned over the gunwale so as to bring her own face close to her daughter’s.

“There will be other women,” she repeated firmly; “I tell you that, because you are half white, and may forget that he is a great chief, and that such things must be. Hide your anger, and do not let him see on your face the pain that will eat your heart. Meet him with joy in your eyes and wisdom on your lips, for to you he will turn in sadness or in doubt. As long as he looks upon many women your power will last, but should there be one, one only with whom he seems to forget you, then — ”

“I could not live,” exclaimed Nina, covering her face with both her hands. “Do not speak so, mother; it could not be.”

“Then,” went on Mrs. Almayer, steadily, “to that woman, Nina, show no mercy.”

She moved the canoe down towards the stream by the gunwale, and gripped it with both her hands, the bow pointing into the river.

“Are you crying?” she asked sternly of her daughter, who sat still with covered face. “Arise, and take your paddle, for he has waited long enough. And remember, Nina, no mercy; and if you must strike, strike with a steady hand.”

She put out all her strength, and swinging her body over the water, shot the light craft far into the stream. When she recovered herself from the effort she tried vainly to catch a glimpse of the canoe that seemed to have dissolved suddenly into the white mist trailing over the heated waters of the Pantai. After listening for a while intently on her knees, Mrs. Almayer rose with a deep sigh, while two tears wandered slowly down her withered cheeks. She wiped them off quickly with a wisp of her grey hair as if ashamed of herself, but could not stifle another loud sigh, for her heart was heavy and she suffered much, being unused to tender emotions. This time she fancied she had heard a faint noise, like the echo of her own sigh, and she stopped, straining her ears to catch the slightest sound, and peering apprehensively towards the bushes near her.

“Who is there?” she asked, in an unsteady voice, while her imagination peopled the solitude of the riverside with ghost-like forms. “Who is there?” she repeated faintly.

There was no answer: only the voice of the river murmuring in sad monotone behind the white veil seemed to swell louder for a moment, to die away again in a soft whisper of eddies washing against the bank.

Mrs. Almayer shook her head as if in answer to her own thoughts, and walked quickly away from the bushes, looking to the right and left watchfully. She went straight towards the cooking-shed, observing that the embers of the fire there glowed more brightly than usual, as if somebody had been adding fresh fuel to the fires during the evening. As she approached, Babalatchi, who had been squatting in the warm glow, rose and met her in the shadow outside.

“Is she gone?” asked the anxious statesman, hastily.

“Yes,” answered Mrs. Almayer. “What are the white men doing? When did you leave them?”

“They are sleeping now, I think. May they never wake!” exclaimed Babalatchi, fervently. “Oh! but they are devils, and made much talk and trouble over that carcass. The chief threatened me twice with his hand, and said he would have me tied up to a tree. Tie me up to a tree! Me!” he repeated, striking his breast violently.

Mrs. Almayer laughed tauntingly.

“And you salaamed and asked for mercy. Men with arms by their side acted otherwise when I was young.”

“And where are they, the men of your youth? You mad woman!” retorted Babalatchi, angrily. “Killed by the Dutch. Aha! But I shall live to deceive them. A man knows when to fight and when to tell peaceful lies. You would know that if you were not a woman.”

But Mrs. Almayer did not seem to hear him. With bent body and outstretched arm she appeared to be listening to some noise behind the shed.

"There are strange sounds," she whispered, with evident alarm. "I have heard in the air the sounds of grief, as of a sigh and weeping. That was by the riverside. And now again I heard — "

"Where?" asked Babalatchi, in an altered voice. "What did you hear?"

"Close here. It was like a breath long drawn. I wish I had burnt the paper over the body before it was buried."

"Yes," assented Babalatchi. "But the white men had him thrown into a hole at once. You know he found his death on the river," he added cheerfully, "and his ghost may hail the canoes, but would leave the land alone."

Mrs. Almayer, who had been craning her neck to look round the corner of the shed, drew back her head.

"There is nobody there," she said, reassured. "Is it not time for the Rajah war-canoe to go to the clearing?"

"I have been waiting for it here, for I myself must go," explained Babalatchi. "I think I will go over and see what makes them late. When will you come? The Rajah gives you refuge."

"I shall paddle over before the break of day. I cannot leave my dollars behind," muttered Mrs. Almayer.

They separated. Babalatchi crossed the courtyard towards the creek to get his canoe, and Mrs. Almayer walked slowly to the house, ascended the plankway, and passing through the back verandah entered the passage leading to the front of the house; but before going in she turned in the doorway and looked back at the empty and silent courtyard, now lit up by the rays of the rising moon. No sooner she had disappeared, however, than a vague shape flitted out from amongst the stalks of the banana plantation, darted over the moonlit space, and fell in the darkness at the foot of the verandah. It might have been the shadow of a driving cloud, so noiseless and rapid was its passage, but for the trail of disturbed grass, whose feathery heads trembled and swayed for a long time in the moonlight before they rested motionless and gleaming, like a design of silver sprays embroidered on a sombre background.

Mrs. Almayer lighted the cocoanut lamp, and lifting cautiously the red curtain, gazed upon her husband, shading the light with her hand.

Almayer, huddled up in the chair, one of his arms hanging down, the other thrown across the lower part of his face as if to ward off an invisible enemy, his legs stretched straight out, slept heavily, unconscious of the unfriendly eyes that looked upon him in disparaging criticism. At his feet lay the overturned table, amongst a wreck of crockery and broken bottles. The appearance as of traces left by a desperate struggle was accentuated by the chairs, which seemed to have been scattered violently all over the place, and now lay about the verandah with a lamentable aspect of inebriety in their helpless attitudes. Only Nina's big rocking-chair, standing black and motionless on its high runners, towered above the chaos of demoralised furniture, unflinchingly dignified and patient, waiting for its burden.

With a last scornful look towards the sleeper, Mrs. Almayer passed behind the curtain into her own room. A couple of bats, encouraged by the darkness and the peaceful state of affairs, resumed their silent and oblique gambols above Almayer's head, and for a long time the profound quiet of the house was unbroken, save for the deep breathing of the sleeping man and the faint tinkle of silver in the hands of the woman preparing for flight. In the increasing light of the moon that had risen now above the night mist, the objects on the verandah came out strongly outlined in black splashes of shadow with all the uncompromising ugliness of their disorder, and a caricature of the sleeping Almayer appeared on the dirty whitewash of the wall behind him in a grotesquely exaggerated detail of attitude and feature enlarged to a heroic size. The discontented bats departed in quest of darker places, and a lizard came out in short, nervous rushes, and, pleased with the white table-cloth, stopped on it in breathless immobility that would have suggested sudden death had it not been for the melodious call he exchanged with a less adventurous friend hiding amongst the lumber in the courtyard. Then the boards in the passage creaked, the lizard vanished, and Almayer stirred uneasily with a sigh: slowly, out of the senseless annihilation of drunken sleep, he was returning, through the land of dreams, to waking consciousness. Almayer's head rolled from shoulder to shoulder in the oppression of his dream; the heavens had descended upon him like a heavy mantle, and trailed in starred folds far under him. Stars above, stars all round him; and from the stars under his feet rose a whisper full of entreaties and tears, and sorrowful faces flitted amongst the clusters of light filling the infinite space below. How escape from the importunity of lamentable cries and from the look of staring, sad eyes in the faces which pressed round him till he gasped for breath under the crushing weight of worlds that hung over his aching shoulders? Get away! But how? If he attempted to move he would step off into nothing, and perish in the crashing fall of that universe of which he was the only support. And what were the voices saying? Urging him to move! Why? Move to destruction! Not likely! The absurdity of the thing filled him with indignation. He got a firmer foothold and stiffened his muscles in heroic resolve to carry his burden to all eternity. And ages passed in the superhuman labour, amidst the rush of circling worlds; in the plaintive murmur of sorrowful voices urging him to desist before it was too late — till the mysterious power that had laid upon him the giant task seemed at last to seek his destruction. With terror he felt an irresistible hand shaking him by the shoulder, while the chorus of voices swelled louder into an agonised prayer to go, go before it is too late. He felt himself slipping, losing his balance, as something dragged at his legs, and he fell. With a faint cry he glided out of the anguish of perishing creation into an imperfect waking that seemed to be still under the spell of his dream.

"What? What?" he murmured sleepily, without moving or opening his eyes. His head still felt heavy, and he had not the courage to raise his eyelids. In his ears there still lingered the sound of entreating whisper. — "Am I awake? — Why do I hear the voices?" he argued to himself, hazily. — "I cannot get rid of the horrible nightmare yet.

— I have been very drunk. — What is that shaking me? I am dreaming yet — I must open my eyes and be done with it. I am only half awake, it is evident.”

He made an effort to shake off his stupor and saw a face close to his, glaring at him with staring eyeballs. He closed his eyes again in amazed horror and sat up straight in the chair, trembling in every limb. What was this apparition? — His own fancy, no doubt. — His nerves had been much tried the day before — and then the drink! He would not see it again if he had the courage to look. — He would look directly. — Get a little steadier first. — So. — Now.

He looked. The figure of a woman standing in the steely light, her hands stretched forth in a suppliant gesture, confronted him from the far-off end of the verandah; and in the space between him and the obstinate phantom floated the murmur of words that fell on his ears in a jumble of torturing sentences, the meaning of which escaped the utmost efforts of his brain. Who spoke the Malay words? Who ran away? Why too late — and too late for what? What meant those words of hate and love mixed so strangely together, the ever-recurring names falling on his ears again and again — Nina, Dain; Dain, Nina? Dain was dead, and Nina was sleeping, unaware of the terrible experience through which he was now passing. Was he going to be tormented for ever, sleeping or waking, and have no peace either night or day? What was the meaning of this?

He shouted the last words aloud. The shadowy woman seemed to shrink and recede a little from him towards the doorway, and there was a shriek. Exasperated by the incomprehensible nature of his torment, Almayer made a rush upon the apparition, which eluded his grasp, and he brought up heavily against the wall. Quick as lightning he turned round and pursued fiercely the mysterious figure fleeing from him with piercing shrieks that were like fuel to the flames of his anger. Over the furniture, round the overturned table, and now he had it cornered behind Nina's chair. To the left, to the right they dodged, the chair rocking madly between them, she sending out shriek after shriek at every feint, and he growling meaningless curses through his hard set teeth. “Oh! the fiendish noise that split his head and seemed to choke his breath. — It would kill him. — It must be stopped!” An insane desire to crush that yelling thing induced him to cast himself recklessly over the chair with a desperate grab, and they came down together in a cloud of dust amongst the splintered wood. The last shriek died out under him in a faint gurgle, and he had secured the relief of absolute silence.

He looked at the woman's face under him. A real woman! He knew her. By all that is wonderful! Taminah! He jumped up ashamed of his fury and stood perplexed, wiping his forehead. The girl struggled to a kneeling posture and embraced his legs in a frenzied prayer for mercy.

“Don't be afraid,” he said, raising her. “I shall not hurt you. Why do you come to my house in the night? And if you had to come, why not go behind the curtain where the women sleep?”

“The place behind the curtain is empty,” gasped Taminah, catching her breath between the words. “There are no women in your house any more, Tuan. I saw the old Mem go away before I tried to wake you. I did not want your women, I wanted you.”

“Old Mem!” repeated Almayer. “Do you mean my wife?”

She nodded her head.

“But of my daughter you are not afraid?” said Almayer.

“Have you not heard me?” she exclaimed. “Have I not spoken for a long time when you lay there with eyes half open? She is gone too.”

“I was asleep. Can you not tell when a man is sleeping and when awake?”

“Sometimes,” answered Taminah in a low voice; “sometimes the spirit lingers close to a sleeping body and may hear. I spoke a long time before I touched you, and I spoke softly for fear it would depart at a sudden noise and leave you sleeping for ever. I took you by the shoulder only when you began to mutter words I could not understand. Have you not heard, then, and do you know nothing?”

“Nothing of what you said. What is it? Tell again if you want me to know.”

He took her by the shoulder and led her unresisting to the front of the verandah into a stronger light. She wrung her hands with such an appearance of grief that he began to be alarmed.

“Speak,” he said. “You made noise enough to wake even dead men. And yet nobody living came,” he added to himself in an uneasy whisper. “Are you mute? Speak!” he repeated.

In a rush of words which broke out after a short struggle from her trembling lips she told him the tale of Nina’s love and her own jealousy. Several times he looked angrily into her face and told her to be silent; but he could not stop the sounds that seemed to him to run out in a hot stream, swirl about his feet, and rise in scalding waves about him, higher, higher, drowning his heart, touching his lips with a feel of molten lead, blotting out his sight in scorching vapour, closing over his head, merciless and deadly. When she spoke of the deception as to Dain’s death of which he had been the victim only that day, he glanced again at her with terrible eyes, and made her falter for a second, but he turned away directly, and his face suddenly lost all expression in a stony stare far away over the river. Ah! the river! His old friend and his old enemy, speaking always with the same voice as he runs from year to year bringing fortune or disappointment happiness or pain, upon the same varying but unchanged surface of glancing currents and swirling eddies. For many years he had listened to the passionless and soothing murmur that sometimes was the song of hope, at times the song of triumph, of encouragement; more often the whisper of consolation that spoke of better days to come. For so many years! So many years! And now to the accompaniment of that murmur he listened to the slow and painful beating of his heart. He listened attentively, wondering at the regularity of its beats. He began to count mechanically. One, two. Why count? At the next beat it must stop. No heart could suffer so and beat so steadily for long. Those regular strokes as of a muffled hammer that rang in his ears must stop soon. Still beating unceasing and cruel. No man can bear this; and is this the last, or will the next one be the last? — How much longer? O God! how much longer? His hand weighed heavier unconsciously on the girl’s shoulder, and she spoke the last words of her story crouching at his feet with tears of

pain and shame and anger. Was her revenge to fail her? This white man was like a senseless stone. Too late! Too late!

“And you saw her go?” Almayer’s voice sounded harshly above her head.

“Did I not tell you?” she sobbed, trying to wriggle gently out from under his grip. “Did I not tell you that I saw the witchwoman push the canoe? I lay hidden in the grass and heard all the words. She that we used to call the white Mem wanted to return to look at your face, but the witchwoman forbade her, and — ”

She sank lower yet on her elbow, turning half round under the downward push of the heavy hand, her face lifted up to him with spiteful eyes.

“And she obeyed,” she shouted out in a half-laugh, half-cry of pain. “Let me go, Tuan. Why are you angry with me? Hasten, or you shall be too late to show your anger to the deceitful woman.”

Almayer dragged her up to her feet and looked close into her face while she struggled, turning her head away from his wild stare.

“Who sent you here to torment me?” he asked, violently. “I do not believe you. You lie.”

He straightened his arm suddenly and flung her across the verandah towards the doorway, where she lay immobile and silent, as if she had left her life in his grasp, a dark heap, without a sound or a stir.

“Oh! Nina!” whispered Almayer, in a voice in which reproach and love spoke together in pained tenderness. “Oh! Nina! I do not believe.”

A light draught from the river ran over the courtyard in a wave of bowing grass and, entering the verandah, touched Almayer’s forehead with its cool breath, in a caress of infinite pity. The curtain in the women’s doorway blew out and instantly collapsed with startling helplessness. He stared at the fluttering stuff.

“Nina!” cried Almayer. “Where are you, Nina?”

The wind passed out of the empty house in a tremulous sigh, and all was still.

Almayer hid his face in his hands as if to shut out a loathsome sight. When, hearing a slight rustle, he uncovered his eyes, the dark heap by the door was gone.

Chapter 11

In the middle of a shadowless square of moonlight, shining on a smooth and level expanse of young rice-shoots, a little shelter-hut perched on high posts, the pile of brushwood near by and the glowing embers of a fire with a man stretched before it, seemed very small and as if lost in the pale green iridescence reflected from the ground. On three sides of the clearing, appearing very far away in the deceptive light, the big trees of the forest, lashed together with manifold bonds by a mass of tangled creepers, looked down at the growing young life at their feet with the sombre resignation of giants that had lost faith in their strength. And in the midst of them the merciless creepers clung to the big trunks in cable-like coils, leaped from tree to tree, hung in thorny festoons from the lower boughs, and, sending slender tendrils on high to seek out the smallest branches, carried death to their victims in an exulting riot of silent destruction.

On the fourth side, following the curve of the bank of that branch of the Pantai that formed the only access to the clearing, ran a black line of young trees, bushes, and thick second growth, unbroken save for a small gap chopped out in one place. At that gap began the narrow footpath leading from the water's edge to the grass-built shelter used by the night watchers when the ripening crop had to be protected from the wild pigs. The pathway ended at the foot of the piles on which the hut was built, in a circular space covered with ashes and bits of burnt wood. In the middle of that space, by the dim fire, lay Dain.

He turned over on his side with an impatient sigh, and, pillowing his head on his bent arm, lay quietly with his face to the dying fire. The glowing embers shone redly in a small circle, throwing a gleam into his wide-open eyes, and at every deep breath the fine white ash of bygone fires rose in a light cloud before his parted lips, and danced away from the warm glow into the moonbeams pouring down upon Bulangi's clearing. His body was weary with the exertion of the past few days, his mind more weary still with the strain of solitary waiting for his fate. Never before had he felt so helpless. He had heard the report of the gun fired on board the launch, and he knew that his life was in untrustworthy hands, and that his enemies were very near. During the slow hours of the afternoon he roamed about on the edge of the forest, or, hiding in the bushes, watched the creek with unquiet eyes for some sign of danger. He feared not death, yet he desired ardently to live, for life to him was Nina. She had promised to come, to follow him, to share his danger and his splendour. But with her by his side he cared not for danger, and without her there could be no splendour and no joy in existence.

Crouching in his shady hiding-place, he closed his eyes, trying to evoke the gracious and charming image of the white figure that for him was the beginning and the end of life. With eyes shut tight, his teeth hard set, he tried in a great effort of passionate will to keep his hold on that vision of supreme delight. In vain! His heart grew heavy as the figure of Nina faded away to be replaced by another vision this time — a vision of armed men, of angry faces, of glittering arms — and he seemed to hear the hum of excited and triumphant voices as they discovered him in his hiding-place. Startled by the vividness of his fancy, he would open his eyes, and, leaping out into the sunlight, resume his aimless wanderings around the clearing. As he skirted in his weary march the edge of the forest he glanced now and then into its dark shade, so enticing in its deceptive appearance of coolness, so repellent with its unrelieved gloom, where lay, entombed and rotting, countless generations of trees, and where their successors stood as if mourning, in dark green foliage, immense and helpless, awaiting their turn. Only the parasites seemed to live there in a sinuous rush upwards into the air and sunshine, feeding on the dead and the dying alike, and crowning their victims with pink and blue flowers that gleamed amongst the boughs, incongruous and cruel, like a strident and mocking note in the solemn harmony of the doomed trees.

A man could hide there, thought Dain, as he approached a place where the creepers had been torn and hacked into an archway that might have been the beginning of a path. As he bent down to look through he heard angry grunting, and a sounder of wild pig crashed away in the undergrowth. An acrid smell of damp earth and of decaying leaves took him by the throat, and he drew back with a scared face, as if he had been touched by the breath of Death itself. The very air seemed dead in there — heavy and stagnating, poisoned with the corruption of countless ages. He went on, staggering on his way, urged by the nervous restlessness that made him feel tired yet caused him to loathe the very idea of immobility and repose. Was he a wild man to hide in the woods and perhaps be killed there — in the darkness — where there was no room to breathe? He would wait for his enemies in the sunlight, where he could see the sky and feel the breeze. He knew how a Malay chief should die. The sombre and desperate fury, that peculiar inheritance of his race, took possession of him, and he glared savagely across the clearing towards the gap in the bushes by the riverside. They would come from there. In imagination he saw them now. He saw the bearded faces and the white jackets of the officers, the light on the levelled barrels of the rifles. What is the bravery of the greatest warrior before the firearms in the hand of a slave? He would walk toward them with a smiling face, with his hands held out in a sign of submission till he was very near them. He would speak friendly words — come nearer yet — yet nearer — so near that they could touch him with their hands and stretch them out to make him a captive. That would be the time: with a shout and a leap he would be in the midst of them, kriss in hand, killing, killing, killing, and would die with the shouts of his enemies in his ears, their warm blood spurting before his eyes.

Carried away by his excitement, he snatched the kriss hidden in his sarong, and, drawing a long breath, rushed forward, struck at the empty air, and fell on his face.

He lay as if stunned in the sudden reaction from his exaltation, thinking that, even if he died thus gloriously, it would have to be before he saw Nina. Better so. If he saw her again he felt that death would be too terrible. With horror he, the descendant of Rajahs and of conquerors, had to face the doubt of his own bravery. His desire of life tormented him in a paroxysm of agonising remorse. He had not the courage to stir a limb. He had lost faith in himself, and there was nothing else in him of what makes a man. The suffering remained, for it is ordered that it should abide in the human body even to the last breath, and fear remained. Dimly he could look into the depths of his passionate love, see its strength and its weakness, and felt afraid.

The sun went down slowly. The shadow of the western forest marched over the clearing, covered the man's scorched shoulders with its cool mantle, and went on hurriedly to mingle with the shadows of other forests on the eastern side. The sun lingered for a while amongst the light tracery of the higher branches, as if in friendly reluctance to abandon the body stretched in the green paddy-field. Then Dain, revived by the cool of the evening breeze, sat up and stared round him. As he did so the sun dipped sharply, as if ashamed of being detected in a sympathising attitude, and the clearing, which during the day was all light, became suddenly all darkness, where the fire gleamed like an eye. Dain walked slowly towards the creek, and, divesting himself of his torn sarong, his only garment, entered the water cautiously. He had had nothing to eat that day, and had not dared show himself in daylight by the water-side to drink. Now, as he swam silently, he swallowed a few mouthfuls of water that lapped about his lips. This did him good, and he walked with greater confidence in himself and others as he returned towards the fire. Had he been betrayed by Lakamba all would have been over by this. He made up a big blaze, and while it lasted dried himself, and then lay down by the embers. He could not sleep, but he felt a great numbness in all his limbs. His restlessness was gone, and he was content to lay still, measuring the time by watching the stars that rose in endless succession above the forests, while the slight puffs of wind under the cloudless sky seemed to fan their twinkle into a greater brightness. Dreamily he assured himself over and over again that she would come, till the certitude crept into his heart and filled him with a great peace. Yes, when the next day broke, they would be together on the great blue sea that was like life — away from the forests that were like death. He murmured the name of Nina into the silent space with a tender smile: this seemed to break the spell of stillness, and far away by the creek a frog croaked loudly as if in answer. A chorus of loud roars and plaintive calls rose from the mud along the line of bushes. He laughed heartily; doubtless it was their love-song. He felt affectionate towards the frogs and listened, pleased with the noisy life near him.

When the moon peeped above the trees he felt the old impatience and the old restlessness steal over him. Why was she so late? True, it was a long way to come with a single paddle. With what skill and what endurance could those small hands manage a heavy paddle! It was very wonderful — such small hands, such soft little palms that knew how to touch his cheek with a feel lighter than the fanning of a butterfly's wing. Wonderful! He lost himself lovingly in the contemplation of this tremendous mystery,

and when he looked at the moon again it had risen a hand's breadth above the trees. Would she come? He forced himself to lay still, overcoming the impulse to rise and rush round the clearing again. He turned this way and that; at last, quivering with the effort, he lay on his back, and saw her face among the stars looking down on him.

The croaking of frogs suddenly ceased. With the watchfulness of a hunted man Dain sat up, listening anxiously, and heard several splashes in the water as the frogs took rapid headers into the creek. He knew that they had been alarmed by something, and stood up suspicious and attentive. A slight grating noise, then the dry sound as of two pieces of wood struck against each other. Somebody was about to land! He took up an armful of brushwood, and, without taking his eyes from the path, held it over the embers of his fire. He waited, undecided, and saw something gleam amongst the bushes; then a white figure came out of the shadows and seemed to float towards him in the pale light. His heart gave a great leap and stood still, then went on shaking his frame in furious beats. He dropped the brushwood upon the glowing coals, and had an impression of shouting her name — of rushing to meet her; yet he emitted no sound, he stirred not an inch, but he stood silent and motionless like chiselled bronze under the moonlight that streamed over his naked shoulders. As he stood still, fighting with his breath, as if bereft of his senses by the intensity of his delight, she walked up to him with quick, resolute steps, and, with the appearance of one about to leap from a dangerous height, threw both her arms round his neck with a sudden gesture. A small blue gleam crept amongst the dry branches, and the crackling of reviving fire was the only sound as they faced each other in the speechless emotion of that meeting; then the dry fuel caught at once, and a bright hot flame shot upwards in a blaze as high as their heads, and in its light they saw each other's eyes.

Neither of them spoke. He was regaining his senses in a slight tremor that ran upwards along his rigid body and hung about his trembling lips. She drew back her head and fastened her eyes on his in one of those long looks that are a woman's most terrible weapon; a look that is more stirring than the closest touch, and more dangerous than the thrust of a dagger, because it also whips the soul out of the body, but leaves the body alive and helpless, to be swayed here and there by the capricious tempests of passion and desire; a look that enwraps the whole body, and that penetrates into the innermost recesses of the being, bringing terrible defeat in the delirious uplifting of accomplished conquest. It has the same meaning for the man of the forests and the sea as for the man threading the paths of the more dangerous wilderness of houses and streets. Men that had felt in their breasts the awful exultation such a look awakens become mere things of to-day — which is paradise; forget yesterday — which was suffering; care not for to-morrow — which may be perdition. They wish to live under that look for ever. It is the look of woman's surrender.

He understood, and, as if suddenly released from his invisible bonds, fell at her feet with a shout of joy, and, embracing her knees, hid his head in the folds of her dress, murmuring disjointed words of gratitude and love. Never before had he felt so proud as now, when at the feet of that woman that half belonged to his enemies. Her fingers

played with his hair in an absent-minded caress as she stood absorbed in thought. The thing was done. Her mother was right. The man was her slave. As she glanced down at his kneeling form she felt a great pitying tenderness for that man she was used to call — even in her thoughts — the master of life. She lifted her eyes and looked sadly at the southern heavens under which lay the path of their lives — her own, and that man's at her feet. Did he not say himself is that she was the light of his life? She would be his light and his wisdom; she would be his greatness and his strength; yet hidden from the eyes of all men she would be, above all, his only and lasting weakness. A very woman! In the sublime vanity of her kind she was thinking already of moulding a god from the clay at her feet. A god for others to worship. She was content to see him as he was now, and to feel him quiver at the slightest touch of her light fingers. And while her eyes looked sadly at the southern stars a faint smile seemed to be playing about her firm lips. Who can tell in the fitful light of a camp fire? It might have been a smile of triumph, or of conscious power, or of tender pity, or, perhaps, of love.

She spoke softly to him, and he rose to his feet, putting his arm round her in quiet consciousness of his ownership; she laid her head on his shoulder with a sense of defiance to all the world in the encircling protection of that arm. He was hers with all his qualities and all his faults. His strength and his courage, his recklessness and his daring, his simple wisdom and his savage cunning — all were hers. As they passed together out of the red light of the fire into the silver shower of rays that fell upon the clearing he bent his head over her face, and she saw in his eyes the dreamy intoxication of boundless felicity from the close touch of her slight figure clasped to his side. With a rhythmical swing of their bodies they walked through the light towards the outlying shadows of the forests that seemed to guard their happiness in solemn immobility. Their forms melted in the play of light and shadow at the foot of the big trees, but the murmur of tender words lingered over the empty clearing, grew faint, and died out. A sigh as of immense sorrow passed over the land in the last effort of the dying breeze, and in the deep silence which succeeded, the earth and the heavens were suddenly hushed up in the mournful contemplation of human love and human blindness.

They walked slowly back to the fire. He made for her a seat out of the dry branches, and, throwing himself down at her feet, lay his head in her lap and gave himself up to the dreamy delight of the passing hour. Their voices rose and fell, tender or animated as they spoke of their love and of their future. She, with a few skilful words spoken from time to time, guided his thoughts, and he let his happiness flow in a stream of talk passionate and tender, grave or menacing, according to the mood which she evoked. He spoke to her of his own island, where the gloomy forests and the muddy rivers were unknown. He spoke of its terraced fields, of the murmuring clear rills of sparkling water that flowed down the sides of great mountains, bringing life to the land and joy to its tillers. And he spoke also of the mountain peak that rising lonely above the belt of trees knew the secrets of the passing clouds, and was the dwelling-place of the mysterious spirit of his race, of the guardian genius of his house. He spoke of vast horizons swept by fierce winds that whistled high above the summits of burning mountains. He spoke

of his forefathers that conquered ages ago the island of which he was to be the future ruler. And then as, in her interest, she brought her face nearer to his, he, touching lightly the thick tresses of her long hair, felt a sudden impulse to speak to her of the sea he loved so well; and he told her of its never-ceasing voice, to which he had listened as a child, wondering at its hidden meaning that no living man has penetrated yet; of its enchanting glitter; of its senseless and capricious fury; how its surface was for ever changing, and yet always enticing, while its depths were for ever the same, cold and cruel, and full of the wisdom of destroyed life. He told her how it held men slaves of its charm for a lifetime, and then, regardless of their devotion, swallowed them up, angry at their fear of its mystery, which it would never disclose, not even to those that loved it most. While he talked, Nina's head had been gradually sinking lower, and her face almost touched his now. Her hair was over his eyes, her breath was on his forehead, her arms were about his body. No two beings could be closer to each other, yet she guessed rather than understood the meaning of his last words that came out after a slight hesitation in a faint murmur, dying out imperceptibly into a profound and significant silence: "The sea, O Nina, is like a woman's heart."

She closed his lips with a sudden kiss, and answered in a steady voice —

"But to the men that have no fear, O master of my life, the sea is ever true."

Over their heads a film of dark, thread-like clouds, looking like immense cobwebs drifting under the stars, darkened the sky with the presage of the coming thunderstorm. From the invisible hills the first distant rumble of thunder came in a prolonged roll which, after tossing about from hill to hill, lost itself in the forests of the Pantai. Dain and Nina stood up, and the former looked at the sky uneasily.

"It is time for Babalatchi to be here," he said. "The night is more than half gone. Our road is long, and a bullet travels quicker than the best canoe."

"He will be here before the moon is hidden behind the clouds," said Nina. "I heard a splash in the water," she added. "Did you hear it too?"

"Alligator," answered Dain shortly, with a careless glance towards the creek. "The darker the night," he continued, "the shorter will be our road, for then we could keep in the current of the main stream, but if it is light — even no more than now — we must follow the small channels of sleeping water, with nothing to help our paddles."

"Dain," interposed Nina, earnestly, "it was no alligator. I heard the bushes rustling near the landing-place."

"Yes," said Dain, after listening awhile. "It cannot be Babalatchi, who would come in a big war canoe, and openly. Those that are coming, whoever they are, do not wish to make much noise. But you have heard, and now I can see," he went on quickly. "It is but one man. Stand behind me, Nina. If he is a friend he is welcome; if he is an enemy you shall see him die."

He laid his hand on his kriss, and awaited the approach of his unexpected visitor. The fire was burning very low, and small clouds — precursors of the storm — crossed the face of the moon in rapid succession, and their flying shadows darkened the clearing. He could not make out who the man might be, but he felt uneasy at the steady advance

of the tall figure walking on the path with a heavy tread, and hailed it with a command to stop. The man stopped at some little distance, and Dain expected him to speak, but all he could hear was his deep breathing. Through a break in the flying clouds a sudden and fleeting brightness descended upon the clearing. Before the darkness closed in again, Dain saw a hand holding some glittering object extended towards him, heard Nina's cry of "Father!" and in an instant the girl was between him and Almayer's revolver. Nina's loud cry woke up the echoes of the sleeping woods, and the three stood still as if waiting for the return of silence before they would give expression to their various feelings. At the appearance of Nina, Almayer's arm fell by his side, and he made a step forward. Dain pushed the girl gently aside.

"Am I a wild beast that you should try to kill me suddenly and in the dark, Tuan Almayer?" said Dain, breaking the strained silence. "Throw some brushwood on the fire," he went on, speaking to Nina, "while I watch my white friend, lest harm should come to you or to me, O delight of my heart!"

Almayer ground his teeth and raised his arm again. With a quick bound Dain was at his side: there was a short scuffle, during which one chamber of the revolver went off harmlessly, then the weapon, wrenched out of Almayer's hand, whirled through the air and fell in the bushes. The two men stood close together, breathing hard. The replenished fire threw out an unsteady circle of light and shone on the terrified face of Nina, who looked at them with outstretched hands.

"Dain!" she cried out warningly, "Dain!"

He waved his hand towards her in a reassuring gesture, and, turning to Almayer, said with great courtesy —

"Now we may talk, Tuan. It is easy to send out death, but can your wisdom recall the life? She might have been harmed," he continued, indicating Nina. "Your hand shook much; for myself I was not afraid."

"Nina!" exclaimed Almayer, "come to me at once. What is this sudden madness? What bewitched you? Come to your father, and together we shall try to forget this horrible nightmare!"

He opened his arms with the certitude of clasping her to his breast in another second. She did not move. As it dawned upon him that she did not mean to obey he felt a deadly cold creep into his heart, and, pressing the palms of his hands to his temples, he looked down on the ground in mute despair. Dain took Nina by the arm and led her towards her father.

"Speak to him in the language of his people," he said. "He is grieving — as who would not grieve at losing thee, my pearl! Speak to him the last words he shall hear spoken by that voice, which must be very sweet to him, but is all my life to me."

He released her, and, stepping back a few paces out of the circle of light, stood in the darkness looking at them with calm interest. The reflection of a distant flash of lightning lit up the clouds over their heads, and was followed after a short interval by the faint rumble of thunder, which mingled with Almayer's voice as he began to speak.

“Do you know what you are doing? Do you know what is waiting for you if you follow that man? Have you no pity for yourself? Do you know that you shall be at first his plaything and then a scorned slave, a drudge, and a servant of some new fancy of that man?”

She raised her hand to stop him, and turning her head slightly, asked —

“You hear this Dain! Is it true?”

“By all the gods!” came the impassioned answer from the darkness — ”by heaven and earth, by my head and thine I swear: this is a white man’s lie. I have delivered my soul into your hands for ever; I breathe with your breath, I see with your eyes, I think with your mind, and I take you into my heart for ever.”

“You thief!” shouted the exasperated Almayer.

A deep silence succeeded this outburst, then the voice of Dain was heard again.

“Nay, Tuan,” he said in a gentle tone, “that is not true also. The girl came of her own will. I have done no more but to show her my love like a man; she heard the cry of my heart, and she came, and the dowry I have given to the woman you call your wife.”

Almayer groaned in his extremity of rage and shame. Nina laid her hand lightly on his shoulder, and the contact, light as the touch of a falling leaf, seemed to calm him. He spoke quickly, and in English this time.

“Tell me,” he said — ”tell me, what have they done to you, your mother and that man? What made you give yourself up to that savage? For he is a savage. Between him and you there is a barrier that nothing can remove. I can see in your eyes the look of those who commit suicide when they are mad. You are mad. Don’t smile. It breaks my heart. If I were to see you drowning before my eyes, and I without the power to help you, I could not suffer a greater torment. Have you forgotten the teaching of so many years?”

“No,” she interrupted, “I remember it well. I remember how it ended also. Scorn for scorn, contempt for contempt, hate for hate. I am not of your race. Between your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove. You ask why I want to go, and I ask you why I should stay.”

He staggered as if struck in the face, but with a quick, unhesitating grasp she caught him by the arm and steadied him.

“Why you should stay!” he repeated slowly, in a dazed manner, and stopped short, astounded at the completeness of his misfortune.

“You told me yesterday,” she went on again, “that I could not understand or see your love for me: it is so. How can I? No two human beings understand each other. They can understand but their own voices. You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions — the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self; then this man came, and all was still; there was only the murmur of his love. You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife?”

“Nina!” cried Almayer, “take your eyes off my face.”

She looked down directly, but continued speaking only a little above a whisper.

"In time," she went on, "both our voices, that man's and mine, spoke together in a sweetness that was intelligible to our ears only. You were speaking of gold then, but our ears were filled with the song of our love, and we did not hear you. Then I found that we could see through each other's eyes: that he saw things that nobody but myself and he could see. We entered a land where no one could follow us, and least of all you. Then I began to live."

She paused. Almayer sighed deeply. With her eyes still fixed on the ground she began speaking again.

"And I mean to live. I mean to follow him. I have been rejected with scorn by the white people, and now I am a Malay! He took me in his arms, he laid his life at my feet. He is brave; he will be powerful, and I hold his bravery and his strength in my hand, and I shall make him great. His name shall be remembered long after both our bodies are laid in the dust. I love you no less than I did before, but I shall never leave him, for without him I cannot live."

"If he understood what you have said," answered Almayer, scornfully, "he must be highly flattered. You want him as a tool for some incomprehensible ambition of yours. Enough, Nina. If you do not go down at once to the creek, where Ali is waiting with my canoe, I shall tell him to return to the settlement and bring the Dutch officers here. You cannot escape from this clearing, for I have cast adrift your canoe. If the Dutch catch this hero of yours they will hang him as sure as I stand here. Now go."

He made a step towards his daughter and laid hold of her by the shoulder, his other hand pointing down the path to the landing-place.

"Beware!" exclaimed Dain; "this woman belongs to me!"

Nina wrenched herself free and looked straight at Almayer's angry face.

"No, I will not go," she said with desperate energy. "If he dies I shall die too!"

"You die!" said Almayer, contemptuously. "Oh, no! You shall live a life of lies and deception till some other vagabond comes along to sing; how did you say that? The song of love to you! Make up your mind quickly."

He waited for a while, and then added meaningly —

"Shall I call out to Ali?"

"Call out," she answered in Malay, "you that cannot be true to your own countrymen. Only a few days ago you were selling the powder for their destruction; now you want to give up to them the man that yesterday you called your friend. Oh, Dain," she said, turning towards the motionless but attentive figure in the darkness, "instead of bringing you life I bring you death, for he will betray unless I leave you for ever!"

Dain came into the circle of light, and, throwing his arm around Nina's neck, whispered in her ear — "I can kill him where he stands, before a sound can pass his lips. For you it is to say yes or no. Babalatchi cannot be far now."

He straightened himself up, taking his arm off her shoulder, and confronted Almayer, who looked at them both with an expression of concentrated fury.

"No!" she cried, clinging to Dain in wild alarm. "No! Kill me! Then perhaps he will let you go. You do not know the mind of a white man. He would rather see me dead than standing where I am. Forgive me, your slave, but you must not." She fell at his feet sobbing violently and repeating, "Kill me! Kill me!"

"I want you alive," said Almayer, speaking also in Malay, with sombre calmness. "You go, or he hangs. Will you obey?"

Dain shook Nina off, and, making a sudden lunge, struck Almayer full in the chest with the handle of his kriss, keeping the point towards himself.

"Hai, look! It was easy for me to turn the point the other way," he said in his even voice. "Go, Tuan Putih," he added with dignity. "I give you your life, my life, and her life. I am the slave of this woman's desire, and she wills it so."

There was not a glimmer of light in the sky now, and the tops of the trees were as invisible as their trunks, being lost in the mass of clouds that hung low over the woods, the clearing, and the river.

Every outline had disappeared in the intense blackness that seemed to have destroyed everything but space. Only the fire glimmered like a star forgotten in this annihilation of all visible things, and nothing was heard after Dain ceased speaking but the sobs of Nina, whom he held in his arms, kneeling beside the fire. Almayer stood looking down at them in gloomy thoughtfulness. As he was opening his lips to speak they were startled by a cry of warning by the riverside, followed by the splash of many paddles and the sound of voices.

"Babalatchi!" shouted Dain, lifting up Nina as he got upon his feet quickly.

"Ada! Ada!" came the answer from the panting statesman who ran up the path and stood amongst them. "Run to my canoe," he said to Dain excitedly, without taking any notice of Almayer. "Run! we must go. That woman has told them all!"

"What woman?" asked Dain, looking at Nina. Just then there was only one woman in the whole world for him.

"The she-dog with white teeth; the seven times accursed slave of Bulangi. She yelled at Abdulla's gate till she woke up all Sambir. Now the white officers are coming, guided by her and Reshid. If you want to live, do not look at me, but go!"

"How do you know this?" asked Almayer.

"Oh, Tuan! what matters how I know! I have only one eye, but I saw lights in Abdulla's house and in his campong as we were paddling past. I have ears, and while we lay under the bank I have heard the messengers sent out to the white men's house."

"Will you depart without that woman who is my daughter?" said Almayer, addressing Dain, while Babalatchi stamped with impatience, muttering, "Run! Run at once!"

"No," answered Dain, steadily, "I will not go; to no man will I abandon this woman."

"Then kill me and escape yourself," sobbed out Nina.

He clasped her close, looking at her tenderly, and whispered, "We will never part, O Nina!"

"I shall not stay here any longer," broke in Babalatchi, angrily. "This is great foolishness. No woman is worth a man's life. I am an old man, and I know."

He picked up his staff, and, turning to go, looked at Dain as if offering him his last chance of escape. But Dain's face was hidden amongst Nina's black tresses, and he did not see this last appealing glance.

Babalatchi vanished in the darkness. Shortly after his disappearance they heard the war canoe leave the landing-place in the swish of the numerous paddles dipped in the water together. Almost at the same time Ali came up from the riverside, two paddles on his shoulder.

"Our canoe is hidden up the creek, Tuan Almayer," he said, "in the dense bush where the forest comes down to the water. I took it there because I heard from Babalatchi's paddlers that the white men are coming here."

"Wait for me there," said Almayer, "but keep the canoe hidden."

He remained silent, listening to Ali's footsteps, then turned to Nina.

"Nina," he said sadly, "will you have no pity for me?"

There was no answer. She did not even turn her head, which was pressed close to Dain's breast.

He made a movement as if to leave them and stopped. By the dim glow of the burning-out fire he saw their two motionless figures. The woman's back turned to him with the long black hair streaming down over the white dress, and Dain's calm face looking at him above her head.

"I cannot," he muttered to himself. After a long pause he spoke again a little lower, but in an unsteady voice, "It would be too great a disgrace. I am a white man." He broke down completely there, and went on tearfully, "I am a white man, and of good family. Very good family," he repeated, weeping bitterly. "It would be a disgrace . . . all over the islands, . . . the only white man on the east coast. No, it cannot be . . . white men finding my daughter with this Malay. My daughter!" he cried aloud, with a ring of despair in his voice.

He recovered his composure after a while and said distinctly —

"I will never forgive you, Nina — never! If you were to come back to me now, the memory of this night would poison all my life. I shall try to forget. I have no daughter. There used to be a half-caste woman in my house, but she is going even now. You, Dain, or whatever your name may be, I shall take you and that woman to the island at the mouth of the river myself. Come with me."

He led the way, following the bank as far as the forest. Ali answered to his call, and, pushing their way through the dense bush, they stepped into the canoe hidden under the overhanging branches. Dain laid Nina in the bottom, and sat holding her head on his knees. Almayer and Ali each took up a paddle. As they were going to push out Ali hissed warningly. All listened.

In the great stillness before the bursting out of the thunderstorm they could hear the sound of oars working regularly in their row-locks. The sound approached steadily, and Dain, looking through the branches, could see the faint shape of a big white boat. A woman's voice said in a cautious tone —

"There is the place where you may land white men; a little higher — there!"

The boat was passing them so close in the narrow creek that the blades of the long oars nearly touched the canoe.

“Way enough! Stand by to jump on shore! He is alone and unarmed,” was the quiet order in a man’s voice, and in Dutch.

Somebody else whispered: “I think I can see a glimmer of a fire through the bush.” And then the boat floated past them, disappearing instantly in the darkness.

“Now,” whispered Ali, eagerly, “let us push out and paddle away.”

The little canoe swung into the stream, and as it sprung forward in response to the vigorous dig of the paddles they could hear an angry shout.

“He is not by the fire. Spread out, men, and search for him!”

Blue lights blazed out in different parts of the clearing, and the shrill voice of a woman cried in accents of rage and pain —

“Too late! O senseless white men! He has escaped!”

Chapter 12

“That is the place,” said Dain, indicating with the blade of his paddle a small islet about a mile ahead of the canoe — ”that is the place where Babalatchi promised that a boat from the prau would come for me when the sun is overhead. We will wait for that boat there.”

Almayer, who was steering, nodded without speaking, and by a slight sweep of his paddle laid the head of the canoe in the required direction.

They were just leaving the southern outlet of the Pantai, which lay behind them in a straight and long vista of water shining between two walls of thick verdure that ran downwards and towards each other, till at last they joined and sank together in the far-away distance. The sun, rising above the calm waters of the Straits, marked its own path by a streak of light that glided upon the sea and darted up the wide reach of the river, a hurried messenger of light and life to the gloomy forests of the coast; and in this radiance of the sun’s pathway floated the black canoe heading for the islet which lay bathed in sunshine, the yellow sands of its encircling beach shining like an inlaid golden disc on the polished steel of the unwrinkled sea. To the north and south of it rose other islets, joyous in their brilliant colouring of green and yellow, and on the main coast the sombre line of mangrove bushes ended to the southward in the reddish cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah, advancing into the sea, steep and shadowless under the clear, light of the early morning.

The bottom of the canoe grated upon the sand as the little craft ran upon the beach. Ali leaped on shore and held on while Dain stepped out carrying Nina in his arms, exhausted by the events and the long travelling during the night. Almayer was the last to leave the boat, and together with Ali ran it higher up on the beach. Then Ali, tired out by the long paddling, laid down in the shade of the canoe, and incontinently fell asleep. Almayer sat sideways on the gunwale, and with his arms crossed on his breast, looked to the southward upon the sea.

After carefully laying Nina down in the shade of the bushes growing in the middle of the islet, Dain threw himself beside her and watched in silent concern the tears that ran down from under her closed eyelids, and lost themselves in that fine sand upon which they both were lying face to face. These tears and this sorrow were for him a profound and disquieting mystery. Now, when the danger was past, why should she grieve? He doubted her love no more than he would have doubted the fact of his own existence, but as he lay looking ardently in her face, watching her tears, her parted lips, her very breath, he was uneasily conscious of something in her he could not understand. Doubtless she had the wisdom of perfect beings. He sighed. He felt something invisible

that stood between them, something that would let him approach her so far, but no farther. No desire, no longing, no effort of will or length of life could destroy this vague feeling of their difference. With awe but also with great pride he concluded that it was her own incomparable perfection. She was his, and yet she was like a woman from another world. His! His! He exulted in the glorious thought; nevertheless her tears pained him.

With a wisp of her own hair which he took in his hand with timid reverence he tried in an access of clumsy tenderness to dry the tears that trembled on her eyelashes. He had his reward in a fleeting smile that brightened her face for the short fraction of a second, but soon the tears fell faster than ever, and he could bear it no more. He rose and walked towards Almayer, who still sat absorbed in his contemplation of the sea. It was a very, very long time since he had seen the sea — that sea that leads everywhere, brings everything, and takes away so much. He had almost forgotten why he was there, and dreamily he could see all his past life on the smooth and boundless surface that glittered before his eyes.

Dain's hand laid on Almayer's shoulder recalled him with a start from some country very far away indeed. He turned round, but his eyes seemed to look rather at the place where Dain stood than at the man himself. Dain felt uneasy under the unconscious gaze.

“What?” said Almayer.

“She is crying,” murmured Dain, softly.

“She is crying! Why?” asked Almayer, indifferently.

“I came to ask you. My Ranee smiles when looking at the man she loves. It is the white woman that is crying now. You would know.”

Almayer shrugged his shoulders and turned away again towards the sea.

“Go, Tuan Putih,” urged Dain. “Go to her; her tears are more terrible to me than the anger of gods.”

“Are they? You will see them more than once. She told me she could not live without you,” answered Almayer, speaking without the faintest spark of expression in his face, “so it behoves you to go to her quick, for fear you may find her dead.”

He burst into a loud and unpleasant laugh which made Dain stare at him with some apprehension, but got off the gunwale of the boat and moved slowly towards Nina, glancing up at the sun as he walked.

“And you go when the sun is overhead?” he said.

“Yes, Tuan. Then we go,” answered Dain.

“I have not long to wait,” muttered Almayer. “It is most important for me to see you go. Both of you. Most important,” he repeated, stopping short and looking at Dain fixedly.

He went on again towards Nina, and Dain remained behind. Almayer approached his daughter and stood for a time looking down on her. She did not open her eyes, but hearing footsteps near her, murmured in a low sob, “Dain.”

Almayer hesitated for a minute and then sank on the sand by her side. She, not hearing a responsive word, not feeling a touch, opened her eyes — saw her father, and sat up suddenly with a movement of terror.

“Oh, father!” she murmured faintly, and in that word there was expressed regret and fear and dawning hope.

“I shall never forgive you, Nina,” said Almayer, in a dispassionate voice. “You have torn my heart from me while I dreamt of your happiness. You have deceived me. Your eyes that for me were like truth itself lied to me in every glance — for how long? You know that best. When you were caressing my cheek you were counting the minutes to the sunset that was the signal for your meeting with that man — there!”

He ceased, and they both sat silent side by side, not looking at each other, but gazing at the vast expanse of the sea. Almayer’s words had dried Nina’s tears, and her look grew hard as she stared before her into the limitless sheet of blue that shone limpid, unwavering, and steady like heaven itself. He looked at it also, but his features had lost all expression, and life in his eyes seemed to have gone out. The face was a blank, without a sign of emotion, feeling, reason, or even knowledge of itself. All passion, regret, grief, hope, or anger — all were gone, erased by the hand of fate, as if after this last stroke everything was over and there was no need for any record.

Those few who saw Almayer during the short period of his remaining days were always impressed by the sight of that face that seemed to know nothing of what went on within: like the blank wall of a prison enclosing sin, regrets, and pain, and wasted life, in the cold indifference of mortar and stones.

“What is there to forgive?” asked Nina, not addressing Almayer directly, but more as if arguing with herself. “Can I not live my own life as you have lived yours? The path you would have wished me to follow has been closed to me by no fault of mine.”

“You never told me,” muttered Almayer.

“You never asked me,” she answered, “and I thought you were like the others and did not care. I bore the memory of my humiliation alone, and why should I tell you that it came to me because I am your daughter? I knew you could not avenge me.”

“And yet I was thinking of that only,” interrupted Almayer, “and I wanted to give you years of happiness for the short day of your suffering. I only knew of one way.”

“Ah! but it was not my way!” she replied. “Could you give me happiness without life? Life!” she repeated with sudden energy that sent the word ringing over the sea. “Life that means power and love,” she added in a low voice.

“That!” said Almayer, pointing his finger at Dain standing close by and looking at them in curious wonder.

“Yes, that!” she replied, looking her father full in the face and noticing for the first time with a slight gasp of fear the unnatural rigidity of his features.

“I would have rather strangled you with my own hands,” said Almayer, in an expressionless voice which was such a contrast to the desperate bitterness of his feelings that it surprised even himself. He asked himself who spoke, and, after looking slowly round as if expecting to see somebody, turned again his eyes towards the sea.

“You say that because you do not understand the meaning of my words,” she said sadly. “Between you and my mother there never was any love. When I returned to Sambir I found the place which I thought would be a peaceful refuge for my heart, filled with weariness and hatred — and mutual contempt. I have listened to your voice and to her voice. Then I saw that you could not understand me; for was I not part of that woman? Of her who was the regret and shame of your life? I had to choose — I hesitated. Why were you so blind? Did you not see me struggling before your eyes? But, when he came, all doubt disappeared, and I saw only the light of the blue and cloudless heaven — ”

“I will tell you the rest,” interrupted Almayer: “when that man came I also saw the blue and the sunshine of the sky. A thunderbolt has fallen from that sky, and suddenly all is still and dark around me for ever. I will never forgive you, Nina; and to-morrow I shall forget you! I shall never forgive you,” he repeated with mechanical obstinacy while she sat, her head bowed down as if afraid to look at her father.

To him it seemed of the utmost importance that he should assure her of his intention of never forgiving. He was convinced that his faith in her had been the foundation of his hopes, the motive of his courage, of his determination to live and struggle, and to be victorious for her sake. And now his faith was gone, destroyed by her own hands; destroyed cruelly, treacherously, in the dark; in the very moment of success. In the utter wreck of his affections and of all his feelings, in the chaotic disorder of his thoughts, above the confused sensation of physical pain that wrapped him up in a sting as of a whiplash curling round him from his shoulders down to his feet, only one idea remained clear and definite — not to forgive her; only one vivid desire — to forget her. And this must be made clear to her — and to himself — by frequent repetition. That was his idea of his duty to himself — to his race — to his respectable connections; to the whole universe unsettled and shaken by this frightful catastrophe of his life. He saw it clearly and believed he was a strong man. He had always prided himself upon his unflinching firmness. And yet he was afraid. She had been all in all to him. What if he should let the memory of his love for her weaken the sense of his dignity? She was a remarkable woman; he could see that; all the latent greatness of his nature — in which he honestly believed — had been transfused into that slight, girlish figure. Great things could be done! What if he should suddenly take her to his heart, forget his shame, and pain, and anger, and — follow her! What if he changed his heart if not his skin and made her life easier between the two loves that would guard her from any mischance! His heart yearned for her. What if he should say that his love for her was greater than . . .

“I will never forgive you, Nina!” he shouted, leaping up madly in the sudden fear of his dream.

This was the last time in his life that he was heard to raise his voice. Henceforth he spoke always in a monotonous whisper like an instrument of which all the strings but one are broken in a last ringing clamour under a heavy blow.

She rose to her feet and looked at him. The very violence of his cry soothed her in an intuitive conviction of his love, and she hugged to her breast the lamentable remnants

of that affection with the unscrupulous greediness of women who cling desperately to the very scraps and rags of love, any kind of love, as a thing that of right belongs to them and is the very breath of their life. She put both her hands on Almayer's shoulders, and looking at him half tenderly, half playfully, she said —

“You speak so because you love me.”

Almayer shook his head.

“Yes, you do,” she insisted softly; then after a short pause she added, “and you will never forget me.”

Almayer shivered slightly. She could not have said a more cruel thing.

“Here is the boat coming now,” said Dain, his arm outstretched towards a black speck on the water between the coast and the islet.

They all looked at it and remained standing in silence till the little canoe came gently on the beach and a man landed and walked towards them. He stopped some distance off and hesitated.

“What news?” asked Dain.

“We have had orders secretly and in the night to take off from this islet a man and a woman. I see the woman. Which of you is the man?”

“Come, delight of my eyes,” said Dain to Nina. “Now we go, and your voice shall be for my ears only. You have spoken your last words to the Tuan Putih, your father. Come.”

She hesitated for a while, looking at Almayer, who kept his eyes steadily on the sea, then she touched his forehead in a lingering kiss, and a tear — one of her tears — fell on his cheek and ran down his immovable face.

“Goodbye,” she whispered, and remained irresolute till he pushed her suddenly into Dain's arms.

“If you have any pity for me,” murmured Almayer, as if repeating some sentence learned by heart, “take that woman away.”

He stood very straight, his shoulders thrown back, his head held high, and looked at them as they went down the beach to the canoe, walking enlaced in each other's arms. He looked at the line of their footsteps marked in the sand. He followed their figures moving in the crude blaze of the vertical sun, in that light violent and vibrating, like a triumphal flourish of brazen trumpets. He looked at the man's brown shoulders, at the red sarong round his waist; at the tall, slender, dazzling white figure he supported. He looked at the white dress, at the falling masses of the long black hair. He looked at them embarking, and at the canoe growing smaller in the distance, with rage, despair, and regret in his heart, and on his face a peace as that of a carved image of oblivion. Inwardly he felt himself torn to pieces, but Ali — who now aroused — stood close to his master, saw on his features the blank expression of those who live in that hopeless calm which sightless eyes only can give.

The canoe disappeared, and Almayer stood motionless with his eyes fixed on its wake. Ali from under the shade of his hand examined the coast curiously. As the sun

declined, the sea-breeze sprang up from the northward and shivered with its breath the glassy surface of the water.

“Dapat!” exclaimed Ali, joyously. “Got him, master! Got prau! Not there! Look more Tanah Mirrah side. Aha! That way! Master, see? Now plain. See?”

Almayer followed Ali’s forefinger with his eyes for a long time in vain. At last he sighted a triangular patch of yellow light on the red background of the cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah. It was the sail of the prau that had caught the sunlight and stood out, distinct with its gay tint, on the dark red of the cape. The yellow triangle crept slowly from cliff to cliff, till it cleared the last point of land and shone brilliantly for a fleeting minute on the blue of the open sea. Then the prau bore up to the southward: the light went out of the sail, and all at once the vessel itself disappeared, vanishing in the shadow of the steep headland that looked on, patient and lonely, watching over the empty sea.

Almayer never moved. Round the little islet the air was full of the talk of the rippling water. The crested wavelets ran up the beach audaciously, joyously, with the lightness of young life, and died quickly, unresistingly, and graciously, in the wide curves of transparent foam on the yellow sand. Above, the white clouds sailed rapidly southwards as if intent upon overtaking something. Ali seemed anxious.

“Master,” he said timidly, “time to get house now. Long way off to pull. All ready, sir.”

“Wait,” whispered Almayer.

Now she was gone his business was to forget, and he had a strange notion that it should be done systematically and in order. To Ali’s great dismay he fell on his hands and knees, and, creeping along the sand, erased carefully with his hand all traces of Nina’s footsteps. He piled up small heaps of sand, leaving behind him a line of miniature graves right down to the water. After burying the last slight imprint of Nina’s slipper he stood up, and, turning his face towards the headland where he had last seen the prau, he made an effort to shout out loud again his firm resolve to never forgive. Ali watching him uneasily saw only his lips move, but heard no sound. He brought his foot down with a stamp. He was a firm man — firm as a rock. Let her go. He never had a daughter. He would forget. He was forgetting already.

Ali approached him again, insisting on immediate departure, and this time he consented, and they went together towards their canoe, Almayer leading. For all his firmness he looked very dejected and feeble as he dragged his feet slowly through the sand on the beach; and by his side — invisible to Ali — stalked that particular fiend whose mission it is to jog the memories of men, lest they should forget the meaning of life. He whispered into Almayer’s ear a childish prattle of many years ago. Almayer, his head bent on one side, seemed to listen to his invisible companion, but his face was like the face of a man that has died struck from behind — a face from which all feelings and all expression are suddenly wiped off by the hand of unexpected death.

* * * * *

They slept on the river that night, mooring their canoe under the bushes and lying down in the bottom side by side, in the absolute exhaustion that kills hunger, thirst,

all feeling and all thought in the overpowering desire for that deep sleep which is like the temporary annihilation of the tired body. Next day they started again and fought doggedly with the current all the morning, till about midday they reached the settlement and made fast their little craft to the jetty of Lingard and Co. Almayer walked straight to the house, and Ali followed, paddles on shoulder, thinking that he would like to eat something. As they crossed the front courtyard they noticed the abandoned look of the place. Ali looked in at the different servants' houses: all were empty. In the back courtyard there was the same absence of sound and life. In the cooking-shed the fire was out and the black embers were cold. A tall, lean man came stealthily out of the banana plantation, and went away rapidly across the open space looking at them with big, frightened eyes over his shoulder. Some vagabond without a master; there were many such in the settlement, and they looked upon Almayer as their patron. They prowled about his premises and picked their living there, sure that nothing worse could befall them than a shower of curses when they got in the way of the white man, whom they trusted and liked, and called a fool amongst themselves. In the house, which Almayer entered through the back verandah, the only living thing that met his eyes was his small monkey which, hungry and unnoticed for the last two days, began to cry and complain in monkey language as soon as it caught sight of the familiar face. Almayer soothed it with a few words and ordered Ali to bring in some bananas, then while Ali was gone to get them he stood in the doorway of the front verandah looking at the chaos of overturned furniture. Finally he picked up the table and sat on it while the monkey let itself down from the roof-stick by its chain and perched on his shoulder. When the bananas came they had their breakfast together; both hungry, both eating greedily and showering the skins round them recklessly, in the trusting silence of perfect friendship. Ali went away, grumbling, to cook some rice himself, for all the women about the house had disappeared; he did not know where. Almayer did not seem to care, and, after he finished eating, he sat on the table swinging his legs and staring at the river as if lost in thought.

After some time he got up and went to the door of a room on the right of the verandah. That was the office. The office of Lingard and Co. He very seldom went in there. There was no business now, and he did not want an office. The door was locked, and he stood biting his lower lip, trying to think of the place where the key could be. Suddenly he remembered: in the women's room hung upon a nail. He went over to the doorway where the red curtain hung down in motionless folds, and hesitated for a moment before pushing it aside with his shoulder as if breaking down some solid obstacle. A great square of sunshine entering through the window lay on the floor. On the left he saw Mrs. Almayer's big wooden chest, the lid thrown back, empty; near it the brass nails of Nina's European trunk shone in the large initials N. A. on the cover. A few of Nina's dresses hung on wooden pegs, stiffened in a look of offended dignity at their abandonment. He remembered making the pegs himself and noticed that they were very good pegs. Where was the key? He looked round and saw it near the door where he stood. It was red with rust. He felt very much annoyed at that, and directly

afterwards wondered at his own feeling. What did it matter? There soon would be no key — no door — nothing! He paused, key in hand, and asked himself whether he knew well what he was about. He went out again on the verandah and stood by the table thinking. The monkey jumped down, and, snatching a banana skin, absorbed itself in picking it to shreds industriously.

“Forget!” muttered Almayer, and that word started before him a sequence of events, a detailed programme of things to do. He knew perfectly well what was to be done now. First this, then that, and then forgetfulness would come easy. Very easy. He had a fixed idea that if he should not forget before he died he would have to remember to all eternity. Certain things had to be taken out of his life, stamped out of sight, destroyed, forgotten. For a long time he stood in deep thought, lost in the alarming possibilities of unconquerable memory, with the fear of death and eternity before him. “Eternity!” he said aloud, and the sound of that word recalled him out of his reverie. The monkey started, dropped the skin, and grinned up at him amicably.

He went towards the office door and with some difficulty managed to open it. He entered in a cloud of dust that rose under his feet.

Books open with torn pages bestrewed the floor; other books lay about grimy and black, looking as if they had never been opened. Account books. In those books he had intended to keep day by day a record of his rising fortunes. Long time ago. A very long time. For many years there has been no record to keep on the blue and red ruled pages! In the middle of the room the big office desk, with one of its legs broken, careened over like the hull of a stranded ship; most of the drawers had fallen out, disclosing heaps of paper yellow with age and dirt. The revolving office chair stood in its place, but he found the pivot set fast when he tried to turn it. No matter. He desisted, and his eyes wandered slowly from object to object. All those things had cost a lot of money at the time. The desk, the paper, the torn books, and the broken shelves, all under a thick coat of dust. The very dust and bones of a dead and gone business. He looked at all these things, all that was left after so many years of work, of strife, of weariness, of discouragement, conquered so many times. And all for what? He stood thinking mournfully of his past life till he heard distinctly the clear voice of a child speaking amongst all this wreck, ruin, and waste. He started with a great fear in his heart, and feverishly began to rake in the papers scattered on the floor, broke the chair into bits, splintered the drawers by banging them against the desk, and made a big heap of all that rubbish in one corner of the room.

He came out quickly, slammed the door after him, turned the key, and, taking it out, ran to the front rail of the verandah, and, with a great swing of his arm, sent the key whizzing into the river. This done he went back slowly to the table, called the monkey down, unhooked its chain, and induced it to remain quiet in the breast of his jacket. Then he sat again on the table and looked fixedly at the door of the room he had just left. He listened also intently. He heard a dry sound of rustling; sharp cracks as of dry wood snapping; a whirr like of a bird’s wings when it rises suddenly, and

then he saw a thin stream of smoke come through the keyhole. The monkey struggled under his coat. Ali appeared with his eyes starting out of his head.

“Master! House burn!” he shouted.

Almayer stood up holding by the table. He could hear the yells of alarm and surprise in the settlement. Ali wrung his hands, lamenting aloud.

“Stop this noise, fool!” said Almayer, quietly. “Pick up my hammock and blankets and take them to the other house. Quick, now!”

The smoke burst through the crevices of the door, and Ali, with the hammock in his arms, cleared in one bound the steps of the verandah.

“It has caught well,” muttered Almayer to himself. “Be quiet, Jack,” he added, as the monkey made a frantic effort to escape from its confinement.

The door split from top to bottom, and a rush of flame and smoke drove Almayer away from the table to the front rail of the verandah. He held on there till a great roar overhead assured him that the roof was ablaze. Then he ran down the steps of the verandah, coughing, half choked with the smoke that pursued him in bluish wreaths curling about his head.

On the other side of the ditch, separating Almayer’s courtyard from the settlement, a crowd of the inhabitants of Sambir looked at the burning house of the white man. In the calm air the flames rushed up on high, coloured pale brick-red, with violet gleams in the strong sunshine. The thin column of smoke ascended straight and unwavering till it lost itself in the clear blue of the sky, and, in the great empty space between the two houses the interested spectators could see the tall figure of the Tuan Putih, with bowed head and dragging feet, walking slowly away from the fire towards the shelter of “Almayer’s Folly.”

In that manner did Almayer move into his new house. He took possession of the new ruin, and in the undying folly of his heart set himself to wait in anxiety and pain for that forgetfulness which was so slow to come. He had done all he could. Every vestige of Nina’s existence had been destroyed; and now with every sunrise he asked himself whether the longed-for oblivion would come before sunset, whether it would come before he died? He wanted to live only long enough to be able to forget, and the tenacity of his memory filled him with dread and horror of death; for should it come before he could accomplish the purpose of his life he would have to remember for ever! He also longed for loneliness. He wanted to be alone. But he was not. In the dim light of the rooms with their closed shutters, in the bright sunshine of the verandah, wherever he went, whichever way he turned, he saw the small figure of a little maiden with pretty olive face, with long black hair, her little pink robe slipping off her shoulders, her big eyes looking up at him in the tender trustfulness of a petted child. Ali did not see anything, but he also was aware of the presence of a child in the house. In his long talks by the evening fires of the settlement he used to tell his intimate friends of Almayer’s strange doings. His master had turned sorcerer in his old age. Ali said that often when Tuan Putih had retired for the night he could hear him talking to something in his room. Ali thought that it was a spirit in the shape of

a child. He knew his master spoke to a child from certain expressions and words his master used. His master spoke in Malay a little, but mostly in English, which he, Ali, could understand. Master spoke to the child at times tenderly, then he would weep over it, laugh at it, scold it, beg of it to go away; curse it. It was a bad and stubborn spirit. Ali thought his master had imprudently called it up, and now could not get rid of it. His master was very brave; he was not afraid to curse this spirit in the very Presence; and once he fought with it. Ali had heard a great noise as of running about inside the room and groans. His master groaned. Spirits do not groan. His master was brave, but foolish. You cannot hurt a spirit. Ali expected to find his master dead next morning, but he came out very early, looking much older than the day before, and had no food all day.

So far Ali to the settlement. To Captain Ford he was much more communicative, for the good reason that Captain Ford had the purse and gave orders. On each of Ford's monthly visits to Sambir Ali had to go on board with a report about the inhabitant of "Almayer's Folly." On his first visit to Sambir, after Nina's departure, Ford had taken charge of Almayer's affairs. They were not cumbersome. The shed for the storage of goods was empty, the boats had disappeared, appropriated — generally in night-time — by various citizens of Sambir in need of means of transport. During a great flood the jetty of Lingard and Co. left the bank and floated down the river, probably in search of more cheerful surroundings; even the flock of geese — "the only geese on the east coast" — departed somewhere, preferring the unknown dangers of the bush to the desolation of their old home. As time went on the grass grew over the black patch of ground where the old house used to stand, and nothing remained to mark the place of the dwelling that had sheltered Almayer's young hopes, his foolish dream of splendid future, his awakening, and his despair.

Ford did not often visit Almayer, for visiting Almayer was not a pleasant task. At first he used to respond listlessly to the old seaman's boisterous inquiries about his health; he even made efforts to talk, asking for news in a voice that made it perfectly clear that no news from this world had any interest for him. Then gradually he became more silent — not sulkily — but as if he was forgetting how to speak. He used also to hide in the darkest rooms of the house, where Ford had to seek him out guided by the patter of the monkey galloping before him. The monkey was always there to receive and introduce Ford. The little animal seemed to have taken complete charge of its master, and whenever it wished for his presence on the verandah it would tug perseveringly at his jacket, till Almayer obediently came out into the sunshine, which he seemed to dislike so much.

One morning Ford found him sitting on the floor of the verandah, his back against the wall, his legs stretched stiffly out, his arms hanging by his side. His expressionless face, his eyes open wide with immobile pupils, and the rigidity of his pose, made him look like an immense man-doll broken and flung there out of the way. As Ford came up the steps he turned his head slowly.

"Ford," he murmured from the floor, "I cannot forget."

“Can’t you?” said Ford, innocently, with an attempt at joviality: “I wish I was like you. I am losing my memory — age, I suppose; only the other day my mate — ”

He stopped, for Almayer had got up, stumbled, and steadied himself on his friend’s arm.

“Hallo! You are better to-day. Soon be all right,” said Ford, cheerfully, but feeling rather scared.

Almayer let go his arm and stood very straight with his head up and shoulders thrown back, looking stonily at the multitude of suns shining in ripples of the river. His jacket and his loose trousers flapped in the breeze on his thin limbs.

“Let her go!” he whispered in a grating voice. “Let her go. To-morrow I shall forget. I am a firm man, . . . firm as a . . . rock, . . . firm . . .”

Ford looked at his face — and fled. The skipper was a tolerably firm man himself — as those who had sailed with him could testify — but Almayer’s firmness was altogether too much for his fortitude.

Next time the steamer called in Sambir Ali came on board early with a grievance. He complained to Ford that Jim-Eng the Chinaman had invaded Almayer’s house, and actually had lived there for the last month.

“And they both smoke,” added Ali.

“Phew! Opium, you mean?”

Ali nodded, and Ford remained thoughtful; then he muttered to himself, “Poor devil! The sooner the better now.” In the afternoon he walked up to the house.

“What are you doing here?” he asked of Jim-Eng, whom he found strolling about on the verandah.

Jim-Eng explained in bad Malay, and speaking in that monotonous, uninterested voice of an opium smoker pretty far gone, that his house was old, the roof leaked, and the floor was rotten. So, being an old friend for many, many years, he took his money, his opium, and two pipes, and came to live in this big house.

“There is plenty of room. He smokes, and I live here. He will not smoke long,” he concluded.

“Where is he now?” asked Ford.

“Inside. He sleeps,” answered Jim-Eng, wearily. Ford glanced in through the doorway. In the dim light of the room he could see Almayer lying on his back on the floor, his head on a wooden pillow, the long white beard scattered over his breast, the yellow skin of the face, the half-closed eyelids showing the whites of the eye only. . . .

He shuddered and turned away. As he was leaving he noticed a long strip of faded red silk, with some Chinese letters on it, which Jim-Eng had just fastened to one of the pillars.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“That,” said Jim-Eng, in his colourless voice, “that is the name of the house. All the same like my house. Very good name.”

Ford looked at him for awhile and went away. He did not know what the crazy-looking maze of the Chinese inscription on the red silk meant. Had he asked Jim-Eng,

that patient Chinaman would have informed him with proper pride that its meaning was: "House of heavenly delight."

In the evening of the same day Babalatchi called on Captain Ford. The captain's cabin opened on deck, and Babalatchi sat astride on the high step, while Ford smoked his pipe on the settee inside. The steamer was leaving next morning, and the old statesman came as usual for a last chat.

"We had news from Bali last moon," remarked Babalatchi. "A grandson is born to the old Rajah, and there is great rejoicing."

Ford sat up interested.

"Yes," went on Babalatchi, in answer to Ford's look. "I told him. That was before he began to smoke."

"Well, and what?" asked Ford.

"I escaped with my life," said Babalatchi, with perfect gravity, "because the white man is very weak and fell as he rushed upon me." Then, after a pause, he added, "She is mad with joy."

"Mrs. Almayer, you mean?"

"Yes, she lives in our Rajah's house. She will not die soon. Such women live a long time," said Babalatchi, with a slight tinge of regret in his voice. "She has dollars, and she has buried them, but we know where. We had much trouble with those people. We had to pay a fine and listen to threats from the white men, and now we have to be careful." He sighed and remained silent for a long while. Then with energy:

"There will be fighting. There is a breath of war on the islands. Shall I live long enough to see? . . . Ah, Tuan!" he went on, more quietly, "the old times were best. Even I have sailed with Lanun men, and boarded in the night silent ships with white sails. That was before an English Rajah ruled in Kuching. Then we fought amongst ourselves and were happy. Now when we fight with you we can only die!"

He rose to go. "Tuan," he said, "you remember the girl that man Bulangi had? Her that caused all the trouble?"

"Yes," said Ford. "What of her?"

"She grew thin and could not work. Then Bulangi, who is a thief and a pig-eater, gave her to me for fifty dollars. I sent her amongst my women to grow fat. I wanted to hear the sound of her laughter, but she must have been bewitched, and . . . she died two days ago. Nay, Tuan. Why do you speak bad words? I am old — that is true — but why should I not like the sight of a young face and the sound of a young voice in my house?" He paused, and then added with a little mournful laugh, "I am like a white man talking too much of what is not men's talk when they speak to one another."

And he went off looking very sad.

* * * * *

The crowd massed in a semicircle before the steps of "Almayer's Folly," swayed silently backwards and forwards, and opened out before the group of white-robed and turbaned men advancing through the grass towards the house. Abdulla walked first, supported by Reshid and followed by all the Arabs in Sambir. As they entered the lane

made by the respectful throng there was a subdued murmur of voices, where the word "Mati" was the only one distinctly audible. Abdulla stopped and looked round slowly.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"May you live!" answered the crowd in one shout, and then there succeeded a breathless silence.

Abdulla made a few paces forward and found himself for the last time face to face with his old enemy. Whatever he might have been once he was not dangerous now, lying stiff and lifeless in the tender light of the early day. The only white man on the east coast was dead, and his soul, delivered from the trammels of his earthly folly, stood now in the presence of Infinite Wisdom. On the upturned face there was that serene look which follows the sudden relief from anguish and pain, and it testified silently before the cloudless heaven that the man lying there under the gaze of indifferent eyes had been permitted to forget before he died.

Abdulla looked down sadly at this Infidel he had fought so long and had bested so many times. Such was the reward of the Faithful! Yet in the Arab's old heart there was a feeling of regret for that thing gone out of his life. He was leaving fast behind him friendships, and enmities, successes, and disappointments — all that makes up a life; and before him was only the end. Prayer would fill up the remainder of the days allotted to the True Believer! He took in his hand the beads that hung at his waist.

"I found him here, like this, in the morning," said Ali, in a low and awed voice.

Abdulla glanced coldly once more at the serene face.

"Let us go," he said, addressing Reshid.

And as they passed through the crowd that fell back before them, the beads in Abdulla's hand clicked, while in a solemn whisper he breathed out piously the name of Allah! The Merciful! The Compassionate!

An Outcast of the Islands

This is Conrad's second novel, published in 1896, and inspired by his experiences as a mate of the steamer the Vigar.

The first edition

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The 1951 film adaptation

Author's Note

“An Outcast of the Islands” is my second novel in the absolute sense of the word; second in conception, second in execution, second as it were in its essence. There was no hesitation, half-formed plan, vague idea, or the vaguest reverie of anything else between it and “Almayer’s Folly.” The only doubt I suffered from, after the publication of “Almayer’s Folly,” was whether I should write another line for print. Those days, now grown so dim, had their poignant moments. Neither in my mind nor in my heart had I then given up the sea. In truth I was clinging to it desperately, all the more desperately because, against my will, I could not help feeling that there was something changed in my relation to it. “Almayer’s Folly,” had been finished and done with. The mood itself was gone. But it had left the memory of an experience that, both in thought and emotion was unconnected with the sea, and I suppose that part of my moral being which is rooted in consistency was badly shaken. I was a victim of contrary stresses which produced a state of immobility. I gave myself up to indolence. Since it was impossible for me to face both ways I had elected to face nothing. The discovery of new values in life is a very chaotic experience; there is a tremendous amount of jostling and confusion and a momentary feeling of darkness. I let my spirit float supine over that chaos.

A phrase of Edward Garnett’s is, as a matter of fact, responsible for this book. The first of the friends I made for myself by my pen it was but natural that he should be the recipient, at that time, of my confidences. One evening when we had dined together and he had listened to the account of my perplexities (I fear he must have been growing a little tired of them) he pointed out that there was no need to determine my future absolutely. Then he added: “You have the style, you have the temperament; why not write another?” I believe that as far as one man may wish to influence another man’s life Edward Garnett had a great desire that I should go on writing. At that time, and I may say, ever afterwards, he was always very patient and gentle with me. What strikes me most however in the phrase quoted above which was offered to me in a tone of detachment is not its gentleness but its effective wisdom. Had he said, “Why not go on writing,” it is very probable he would have scared me away from pen and ink for ever; but there was nothing either to frighten one or arouse one’s antagonism in the mere suggestion to “write another.” And thus a dead point in the revolution of my affairs was insidiously got over. The word “another” did it. At about eleven o’clock of a nice London night, Edward and I walked along interminable streets talking of many things, and I remember that on getting home I sat down and wrote about half a page of “An Outcast of the Islands” before I slept. This was committing myself definitely, I

won't say to another life, but to another book. There is apparently something in my character which will not allow me to abandon for good any piece of work I have begun. I have laid aside many beginnings. I have laid them aside with sorrow, with disgust, with rage, with melancholy and even with self-contempt; but even at the worst I had an uneasy consciousness that I would have to go back to them.

"An Outcast of the Islands" belongs to those novels of mine that were never laid aside; and though it brought me the qualification of "exotic writer" I don't think the charge was at all justified.

For the life of me I don't see that there is the slightest exotic spirit in the conception or style of that novel. It is certainly the most tropical of my eastern tales. The mere scenery got a great hold on me as I went on, perhaps because (I may just as well confess that) the story itself was never very near my heart.

It engaged my imagination much more than my affection. As to my feeling for Willems it was but the regard one cannot help having for one's own creation. Obviously I could not be indifferent to a man on whose head I had brought so much evil simply by imagining him such as he appears in the novel — and that, too, on a very slight foundation.

The man who suggested Willems to me was not particularly interesting in himself. My interest was aroused by his dependent position, his strange, dubious status of a mistrusted, disliked, worn-out European living on the reluctant toleration of that Settlement hidden in the heart of the forest-land, up that sombre stream which our ship was the only white men's ship to visit. With his hollow, clean-shaved cheeks, a heavy grey moustache and eyes without any expression whatever, clad always in a spotless sleeping suit much be-frogged in front, which left his lean neck wholly uncovered, and with his bare feet in a pair of straw slippers, he wandered silently amongst the houses in daylight, almost as dumb as an animal and apparently much more homeless. I don't know what he did with himself at night. He must have had a place, a hut, a palm-leaf shed, some sort of hovel where he kept his razor and his change of sleeping suits. An air of futile mystery hung over him, something not exactly dark but obviously ugly. The only definite statement I could extract from anybody was that it was he who had "brought the Arabs into the river." That must have happened many years before. But how did he bring them into the river? He could hardly have done it in his arms like a lot of kittens. I knew that Almayer founded the chronology of all his misfortunes on the date of that fateful advent; and yet the very first time we dined with Almayer there was Willems sitting at table with us in the manner of the skeleton at the feast, obviously shunned by everybody, never addressed by any one, and for all recognition of his existence getting now and then from Almayer a venomous glance which I observed with great surprise. In the course of the whole evening he ventured one single remark which I didn't catch because his articulation was imperfect, as of a man who had forgotten how to speak. I was the only person who seemed aware of the sound. Willems subsided. Presently he retired, pointedly unnoticed — into the forest maybe? Its immensity was there, within three hundred yards of the verandah, ready to

swallow up anything. Almayer conversing with my captain did not stop talking while he glared angrily at the retreating back. Didn't that fellow bring the Arabs into the river! Nevertheless Willems turned up next morning on Almayer's verandah. From the bridge of the steamer I could see plainly these two, breakfasting together, tete a tete and, I suppose, in dead silence, one with his air of being no longer interested in this world and the other raising his eyes now and then with intense dislike.

It was clear that in those days Willems lived on Almayer's charity. Yet on returning two months later to Sambir I heard that he had gone on an expedition up the river in charge of a steam-launch belonging to the Arabs, to make some discovery or other. On account of the strange reluctance that everyone manifested to talk about Willems it was impossible for me to get at the rights of that transaction. Moreover, I was a newcomer, the youngest of the company, and, I suspect, not judged quite fit as yet for a full confidence. I was not much concerned about that exclusion. The faint suggestion of plots and mysteries pertaining to all matters touching Almayer's affairs amused me vastly. Almayer was obviously very much affected. I believe he missed Willems immensely. He wore an air of sinister preoccupation and talked confidentially with my captain. I could catch only snatches of mumbled sentences. Then one morning as I came along the deck to take my place at the breakfast table Almayer checked himself in his low-toned discourse. My captain's face was perfectly impenetrable. There was a moment of profound silence and then as if unable to contain himself Almayer burst out in a loud vicious tone:

"One thing's certain; if he finds anything worth having up there they will poison him like a dog."

Disconnected though it was, that phrase, as food for thought, was distinctly worth hearing. We left the river three days afterwards and I never returned to Sambir; but whatever happened to the protagonist of my Willems nobody can deny that I have recorded for him a less squalid fate.

J. C. 1919.

Part 1

Chapter 1

When he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect. It was going to be a short episode — a sentence in brackets, so to speak — in the flowing tale of his life: a thing of no moment, to be done unwillingly, yet neatly, and to be quickly forgotten. He imagined that he could go on afterwards looking at the sunshine, enjoying the shade, breathing in the perfume of flowers in the small garden before his house. He fancied that nothing would be changed, that he would be able as heretofore to tyrannize good-humouredly over his half-caste wife, to notice with tender contempt his pale yellow child, to patronize loftily his dark-skinned brother-in-law, who loved pink neckties and wore patent-leather boots on his little feet, and was so humble before the white husband of the lucky sister. Those were the delights of his life, and he was unable to conceive that the moral significance of any act of his could interfere with the very nature of things, could dim the light of the sun, could destroy the perfume of the flowers, the submission of his wife, the smile of his child, the awe-struck respect of Leonard da Souza and of all the Da Souza family. That family's admiration was the great luxury of his life. It rounded and completed his existence in a perpetual assurance of unquestionable superiority. He loved to breathe the coarse incense they offered before the shrine of the successful white man; the man that had done them the honour to marry their daughter, sister, cousin; the rising man sure to climb very high; the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. They were a numerous and an unclean crowd, living in ruined bamboo houses, surrounded by neglected compounds, on the outskirts of Macassar. He kept them at arm's length and even further off, perhaps, having no illusions as to their worth. They were a half-caste, lazy lot, and he saw them as they were — ragged, lean, unwashed, undersized men of various ages, shuffling about aimlessly in slippers; motionless old women who looked like monstrous bags of pink calico stuffed with shapeless lumps of fat, and deposited askew upon decaying rattan chairs in shady corners of dusty verandahs; young women, slim and yellow, big-eyed, long-haired, moving languidly amongst the dirt and rubbish of their dwellings as if every step they took was going to be their very last. He heard their shrill quarrellings, the squalling of their children, the grunting of their pigs; he smelt the odours of the heaps of garbage in their courtyards: and he was greatly disgusted. But he fed and clothed that shabby multitude; those degenerate descendants of Portuguese conquerors; he was their providence; he kept them singing his praises in the midst of their laziness, of their dirt, of their immense and hopeless

squalor: and he was greatly delighted. They wanted much, but he could give them all they wanted without ruining himself. In exchange he had their silent fear, their loquacious love, their noisy veneration. It is a fine thing to be a providence, and to be told so on every day of one's life. It gives one a feeling of enormously remote superiority, and Willems revelled in it. He did not analyze the state of his mind, but probably his greatest delight lay in the unexpressed but intimate conviction that, should he close his hand, all those admiring human beings would starve. His munificence had demoralized them. An easy task. Since he descended amongst them and married Joanna they had lost the little aptitude and strength for work they might have had to put forth under the stress of extreme necessity. They lived now by the grace of his will. This was power. Willems loved it. In another, and perhaps a lower plane, his days did not want for their less complex but more obvious pleasures. He liked the simple games of skill — billiards; also games not so simple, and calling for quite another kind of skill — poker. He had been the aptest pupil of a steady-eyed, sententious American, who had drifted mysteriously into Macassar from the wastes of the Pacific, and, after knocking about for a time in the eddies of town life, had drifted out enigmatically into the sunny solitudes of the Indian Ocean. The memory of the Californian stranger was perpetuated in the game of poker — which became popular in the capital of Celebes from that time — and in a powerful cocktail, the recipe for which is transmitted — in the Kwang-tung dialect — from head boy to head boy of the Chinese servants in the Sunda Hotel even to this day. Willems was a connoisseur in the drink and an adept at the game. Of those accomplishments he was moderately proud. Of the confidence reposed in him by Hudig — the master — he was boastfully and obtrusively proud. This arose from his great benevolence, and from an exalted sense of his duty to himself and the world at large. He experienced that irresistible impulse to impart information which is inseparable from gross ignorance. There is always some one thing which the ignorant man knows, and that thing is the only thing worth knowing; it fills the ignorant man's universe. Willems knew all about himself. On the day when, with many misgivings, he ran away from a Dutch East-Indiaman in Samarang roads, he had commenced that study of himself, of his own ways, of his own abilities, of those fate-compelling qualities of his which led him toward that lucrative position which he now filled. Being of a modest and diffident nature, his successes amazed, almost frightened him, and ended — as he got over the succeeding shocks of surprise — by making him ferociously conceited. He believed in his genius and in his knowledge of the world. Others should know of it also; for their own good and for his greater glory. All those friendly men who slapped him on the back and greeted him noisily should have the benefit of his example. For that he must talk. He talked to them conscientiously. In the afternoon he expounded his theory of success over the little tables, dipping now and then his moustache in the crushed ice of the cocktails; in the evening he would often hold forth, cue in hand, to a young listener across the billiard table. The billiard balls stood still as if listening also, under the vivid brilliance of the shaded oil lamps hung low over the cloth; while away in the shadows of the big room the Chinaman marker would lean wearily against the

wall, the blank mask of his face looking pale under the mahogany marking-board; his eyelids dropped in the drowsy fatigue of late hours and in the buzzing monotony of the unintelligible stream of words poured out by the white man. In a sudden pause of the talk the game would recommence with a sharp click and go on for a time in the flowing soft whirr and the subdued thuds as the balls rolled zig-zagging towards the inevitably successful cannon. Through the big windows and the open doors the salt dampness of the sea, the vague smell of mould and flowers from the garden of the hotel drifted in and mingled with the odour of lamp oil, growing heavier as the night advanced. The players' heads dived into the light as they bent down for the stroke, springing back again smartly into the greenish gloom of broad lamp-shades; the clock ticked methodically; the unmoved Chinaman continuously repeated the score in a lifeless voice, like a big talking doll — and Willems would win the game. With a remark that it was getting late, and that he was a married man, he would say a patronizing good-night and step out into the long, empty street. At that hour its white dust was like a dazzling streak of moonlight where the eye sought repose in the dimmer gleam of rare oil lamps. Willems walked homewards, following the line of walls overtopped by the luxuriant vegetation of the front gardens. The houses right and left were hidden behind the black masses of flowering shrubs. Willems had the street to himself. He would walk in the middle, his shadow gliding obsequiously before him. He looked down on it complacently. The shadow of a successful man! He would be slightly dizzy with the cocktails and with the intoxication of his own glory. As he often told people, he came east fourteen years ago — a cabin boy. A small boy. His shadow must have been very small at that time; he thought with a smile that he was not aware then he had anything — even a shadow — which he dared call his own. And now he was looking at the shadow of the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. going home. How glorious! How good was life for those that were on the winning side! He had won the game of life; also the game of billiards. He walked faster, jingling his winnings, and thinking of the white stone days that had marked the path of his existence. He thought of the trip to Lombok for ponies — that first important transaction confided to him by Hudig; then he reviewed the more important affairs: the quiet deal in opium; the illegal traffic in gunpowder; the great affair of smuggled firearms, the difficult business of the Rajah of Goak. He carried that last through by sheer pluck; he had bearded the savage old ruler in his council room; he had bribed him with a gilt glass coach, which, rumour said, was used as a hen-coop now; he had over-persuaded him; he had bested him in every way. That was the way to get on. He disapproved of the elementary dishonesty that dips the hand in the cash-box, but one could evade the laws and push the principles of trade to their furthest consequences. Some call that cheating. Those are the fools, the weak, the contemptible. The wise, the strong, the respected, have no scruples. Where there are scruples there can be no power. On that text he preached often to the young men. It was his doctrine, and he, himself, was a shining example of its truth.

Night after night he went home thus, after a day of toil and pleasure, drunk with the sound of his own voice celebrating his own prosperity. On his thirtieth birthday

he went home thus. He had spent in good company a nice, noisy evening, and, as he walked along the empty street, the feeling of his own greatness grew upon him, lifted him above the white dust of the road, and filled him with exultation and regrets. He had not done himself justice over there in the hotel, he had not talked enough about himself, he had not impressed his hearers enough. Never mind. Some other time. Now he would go home and make his wife get up and listen to him. Why should she not get up? — and mix a cocktail for him — and listen patiently. Just so. She shall. If he wanted he could make all the Da Souza family get up. He had only to say a word and they would all come and sit silently in their night vestments on the hard, cold ground of his compound and listen, as long as he wished to go on explaining to them from the top of the stairs, how great and good he was. They would. However, his wife would do — for to-night.

His wife! He winced inwardly. A dismal woman with startled eyes and dolorously drooping mouth, that would listen to him in pained wonder and mute stillness. She was used to those night-discourses now. She had rebelled once — at the beginning. Only once. Now, while he sprawled in the long chair and drank and talked, she would stand at the further end of the table, her hands resting on the edge, her frightened eyes watching his lips, without a sound, without a stir, hardly breathing, till he dismissed her with a contemptuous: “Go to bed, dummy.” She would draw a long breath then and trail out of the room, relieved but unmoved. Nothing could startle her, make her scold or make her cry. She did not complain, she did not rebel. That first difference of theirs was decisive. Too decisive, thought Willems, discontentedly. It had frightened the soul out of her body apparently. A dismal woman! A damn’d business altogether! What the devil did he want to go and saddle himself. . . . Ah! Well! he wanted a home, and the match seemed to please Hudig, and Hudig gave him the bungalow, that flower-bowered house to which he was wending his way in the cool moonlight. And he had the worship of the Da Souza tribe. A man of his stamp could carry off anything, do anything, aspire to anything. In another five years those white people who attended the Sunday card-parties of the Governor would accept him — half-caste wife and all! Hooray! He saw his shadow dart forward and wave a hat, as big as a rum barrel, at the end of an arm several yards long. . . . Who shouted hooray? . . . He smiled shamefacedly to himself, and, pushing his hands deep into his pockets, walked faster with a suddenly grave face. Behind him — to the left — a cigar end glowed in the gateway of Mr. Vinck’s front yard. Leaning against one of the brick pillars, Mr. Vinck, the cashier of Hudig & Co., smoked the last cheroot of the evening. Amongst the shadows of the trimmed bushes Mrs. Vinck crunched slowly, with measured steps, the gravel of the circular path before the house.

“There’s Willems going home on foot — and drunk I fancy,” said Mr. Vinck over his shoulder. “I saw him jump and wave his hat.”

The crunching of the gravel stopped.

“Horrid man,” said Mrs. Vinck, calmly. “I have heard he beats his wife.”

“Oh no, my dear, no,” muttered absently Mr. Vinck, with a vague gesture. The aspect of Willems as a wife-beater presented to him no interest. How women do mis-judge! If Willems wanted to torture his wife he would have recourse to less primitive methods. Mr. Vinck knew Willems well, and believed him to be very able, very smart — objectionably so. As he took the last quick draws at the stump of his cheroot, Mr. Vinck reflected that the confidence accorded by Hudig to Willems was open, under the circumstances, to loyal criticism from Hudig’s cashier.

“He is becoming dangerous; he knows too much. He will have to be got rid of,” said Mr. Vinck aloud. But Mrs. Vinck had gone in already, and after shaking his head he threw away his cheroot and followed her slowly.

Willems walked on homeward weaving the splendid web of his future. The road to greatness lay plainly before his eyes, straight and shining, without any obstacle that he could see. He had stepped off the path of honesty, as he understood it, but he would soon regain it, never to leave it any more! It was a very small matter. He would soon put it right again. Meantime his duty was not to be found out, and he trusted in his skill, in his luck, in his well-established reputation that would disarm suspicion if anybody dared to suspect. But nobody would dare! True, he was conscious of a slight deterioration. He had appropriated temporarily some of Hudig’s money. A deplorable necessity. But he judged himself with the indulgence that should be extended to the weaknesses of genius. He would make reparation and all would be as before; nobody would be the loser for it, and he would go on unchecked toward the brilliant goal of his ambition.

Hudig’s partner!

Before going up the steps of his house he stood for awhile, his feet well apart, chin in hand, contemplating mentally Hudig’s future partner. A glorious occupation. He saw him quite safe; solid as the hills; deep — deep as an abyss; discreet as the grave.

Chapter 2

The sea, perhaps because of its saltiness, roughens the outside but keeps sweet the kernel of its servants' soul. The old sea; the sea of many years ago, whose servants were devoted slaves and went from youth to age or to a sudden grave without needing to open the book of life, because they could look at eternity reflected on the element that gave the life and dealt the death. Like a beautiful and unscrupulous woman, the sea of the past was glorious in its smiles, irresistible in its anger, capricious, enticing, illogical, irresponsible; a thing to love, a thing to fear. It cast a spell, it gave joy, it lulled gently into boundless faith; then with quick and causeless anger it killed. But its cruelty was redeemed by the charm of its inscrutable mystery, by the immensity of its promise, by the supreme witchery of its possible favour. Strong men with childlike hearts were faithful to it, were content to live by its grace — to die by its will. That was the sea before the time when the French mind set the Egyptian muscle in motion and produced a dismal but profitable ditch. Then a great pall of smoke sent out by countless steam-boats was spread over the restless mirror of the Infinite. The hand of the engineer tore down the veil of the terrible beauty in order that greedy and faithless landlubbers might pocket dividends. The mystery was destroyed. Like all mysteries, it lived only in the hearts of its worshippers. The hearts changed; the men changed. The once loving and devoted servants went out armed with fire and iron, and conquering the fear of their own hearts became a calculating crowd of cold and exacting masters. The sea of the past was an incomparably beautiful mistress, with inscrutable face, with cruel and promising eyes. The sea of to-day is a used-up drudge, wrinkled and defaced by the churned-up wakes of brutal propellers, robbed of the enslaving charm of its vastness, stripped of its beauty, of its mystery and of its promise.

Tom Lingard was a master, a lover, a servant of the sea. The sea took him young, fashioned him body and soul; gave him his fierce aspect, his loud voice, his fearless eyes, his stupidly guileless heart. Generously it gave him his absurd faith in himself, his universal love of creation, his wide indulgence, his contemptuous severity, his straightforward simplicity of motive and honesty of aim. Having made him what he was, womanlike, the sea served him humbly and let him bask unharmed in the sunshine of its terribly uncertain favour. Tom Lingard grew rich on the sea and by the sea. He loved it with the ardent affection of a lover, he made light of it with the assurance of perfect mastery, he feared it with the wise fear of a brave man, and he took liberties with it as a spoiled child might do with a paternal and good-natured ogre. He was grateful to it, with the gratitude of an honest heart. His greatest pride lay in his profound conviction of its faithfulness — in the deep sense of his unerring knowledge of its treachery.

The little brig Flash was the instrument of Lingard's fortune. They came north together — both young — out of an Australian port, and after a very few years there was not a white man in the islands, from Palembang to Ternate, from Ombawa to Palawan, that did not know Captain Tom and his lucky craft. He was liked for his reckless generosity, for his unswerving honesty, and at first was a little feared on account of his violent temper. Very soon, however, they found him out, and the word went round that Captain Tom's fury was less dangerous than many a man's smile. He prospered greatly. After his first — and successful — fight with the sea robbers, when he rescued, as rumour had it, the yacht of some big wig from home, somewhere down Carimata way, his great popularity began. As years went on it grew apace. Always visiting out-of-the-way places of that part of the world, always in search of new markets for his cargoes — not so much for profit as for the pleasure of finding them — he soon became known to the Malays, and by his successful recklessness in several encounters with pirates, established the terror of his name. Those white men with whom he had business, and who naturally were on the look-out for his weaknesses, could easily see that it was enough to give him his Malay title to flatter him greatly. So when there was anything to be gained by it, and sometimes out of pure and unprofitable good nature, they would drop the ceremonious "Captain Lingard" and address him half seriously as Rajah Laut — the King of the Sea.

He carried the name bravely on his broad shoulders. He had carried it many years already when the boy Willems ran barefooted on the deck of the ship Kosmopoliet IV. in Samarang roads, looking with innocent eyes on the strange shore and objurgating his immediate surroundings with blasphemous lips, while his childish brain worked upon the heroic idea of running away. From the poop of the Flash Lingard saw in the early morning the Dutch ship get lumberingly under weigh, bound for the eastern ports. Very late in the evening of the same day he stood on the quay of the landing canal, ready to go on board of his brig. The night was starry and clear; the little custom-house building was shut up, and as the gharry that brought him down disappeared up the long avenue of dusty trees leading to the town, Lingard thought himself alone on the quay. He roused up his sleeping boat-crew and stood waiting for them to get ready, when he felt a tug at his coat and a thin voice said, very distinctly —

"English captain."

Lingard turned round quickly, and what seemed to be a very lean boy jumped back with commendable activity.

"Who are you? Where do you spring from?" asked Lingard, in startled surprise.

From a safe distance the boy pointed toward a cargo lighter moored to the quay.

"Been hiding there, have you?" said Lingard. "Well, what do you want? Speak out, confound you. You did not come here to scare me to death, for fun, did you?"

The boy tried to explain in imperfect English, but very soon Lingard interrupted him.

"I see," he exclaimed, "you ran away from the big ship that sailed this morning. Well, why don't you go to your countrymen here?"

“Ship gone only a little way — to Sourabaya. Make me go back to the ship,” explained the boy.

“Best thing for you,” affirmed Lingard with conviction.

“No,” retorted the boy; “me want stop here; not want go home. Get money here; home no good.”

“This beats all my going a-fishing,” commented the astonished Lingard. “It’s money you want? Well! well! And you were not afraid to run away, you bag of bones, you!”

The boy intimated that he was frightened of nothing but of being sent back to the ship. Lingard looked at him in meditative silence.

“Come closer,” he said at last. He took the boy by the chin, and turning up his face gave him a searching look. “How old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

“There’s not much of you for seventeen. Are you hungry?”

“A little.”

“Will you come with me, in that brig there?”

The boy moved without a word towards the boat and scrambled into the bows.

“Knows his place,” muttered Lingard to himself as he stepped heavily into the stern sheets and took up the yoke lines. “Give way there.”

The Malay boat crew lay back together, and the gig sprang away from the quay heading towards the brig’s riding light.

Such was the beginning of Willems’ career.

Lingard learned in half an hour all that there was of Willems’ commonplace story. Father outdoor clerk of some ship-broker in Rotterdam; mother dead. The boy quick in learning, but idle in school. The straitened circumstances in the house filled with small brothers and sisters, sufficiently clothed and fed but otherwise running wild, while the disconsolate widower tramped about all day in a shabby overcoat and imperfect boots on the muddy quays, and in the evening piloted wearily the half-intoxicated foreign skippers amongst the places of cheap delights, returning home late, sick with too much smoking and drinking — for company’s sake — with these men, who expected such attentions in the way of business. Then the offer of the good-natured captain of Kosmopoliet IV., who was pleased to do something for the patient and obliging fellow; young Willems’ great joy, his still greater disappointment with the sea that looked so charming from afar, but proved so hard and exacting on closer acquaintance — and then this running away by a sudden impulse. The boy was hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea. He had an instinctive contempt for the honest simplicity of that work which led to nothing he cared for. Lingard soon found this out. He offered to send him home in an English ship, but the boy begged hard to be permitted to remain. He wrote a beautiful hand, became soon perfect in English, was quick at figures; and Lingard made him useful in that way. As he grew older his trading instincts developed themselves astonishingly, and Lingard left him often to trade in one island or another while he, himself, made an intermediate trip to some out-of-the-way place. On Willems expressing a wish to that effect, Lingard let him enter Hudig’s service. He felt a little

sore at that abandonment because he had attached himself, in a way, to his protege. Still he was proud of him, and spoke up for him loyally. At first it was, "Smart boy that — never make a seaman though." Then when Willems was helping in the trading he referred to him as "that clever young fellow." Later when Willems became the confidential agent of Hudig, employed in many a delicate affair, the simple-hearted old seaman would point an admiring finger at his back and whisper to whoever stood near at the moment, "Long-headed chap that; deuced long-headed chap. Look at him. Confidential man of old Hudig. I picked him up in a ditch, you may say, like a starved cat. Skin and bone. 'Pon my word I did. And now he knows more than I do about island trading. Fact. I am not joking. More than I do," he would repeat, seriously, with innocent pride in his honest eyes.

From the safe elevation of his commercial successes Willems patronized Lingard. He had a liking for his benefactor, not unmixed with some disdain for the crude directness of the old fellow's methods of conduct. There were, however, certain sides of Lingard's character for which Willems felt a qualified respect. The talkative seaman knew how to be silent on certain matters that to Willems were very interesting. Besides, Lingard was rich, and that in itself was enough to compel Willems' unwilling admiration. In his confidential chats with Hudig, Willems generally alluded to the benevolent Englishman as the "lucky old fool" in a very distinct tone of vexation; Hudig would grunt an unqualified assent, and then the two would look at each other in a sudden immobility of pupils fixed by a stare of unexpressed thought.

"You can't find out where he gets all that india-rubber, hey Willems?" Hudig would ask at last, turning away and bending over the papers on his desk.

"No, Mr. Hudig. Not yet. But I am trying," was Willems' invariable reply, delivered with a ring of regretful deprecation.

"Try! Always try! You may try! You think yourself clever perhaps," rumbled on Hudig, without looking up. "I have been trading with him twenty — thirty years now. The old fox. And I have tried. Bah!"

He stretched out a short, podgy leg and contemplated the bare instep and the grass slipper hanging by the toes. "You can't make him drunk?" he would add, after a pause of stertorous breathing.

"No, Mr. Hudig, I can't really," protested Willems, earnestly.

"Well, don't try. I know him. Don't try," advised the master, and, bending again over his desk, his staring bloodshot eyes close to the paper, he would go on tracing laboriously with his thick fingers the slim unsteady letters of his correspondence, while Willems waited respectfully for his further good pleasure before asking, with great deference —

"Any orders, Mr. Hudig?"

"Hm! yes. Go to Bun-Hin yourself and see the dollars of that payment counted and packed, and have them put on board the mail-boat for Ternate. She's due here this afternoon."

"Yes, Mr. Hudig."

“And, look here. If the boat is late, leave the case in Bun-Hin’s godown till to-morrow. Seal it up. Eight seals as usual. Don’t take it away till the boat is here.”

“No, Mr. Hudig.”

“And don’t forget about these opium cases. It’s for to-night. Use my own boatmen. Transship them from the Caroline to the Arab barque,” went on the master in his hoarse undertone. “And don’t you come to me with another story of a case dropped overboard like last time,” he added, with sudden ferocity, looking up at his confidential clerk.

“No, Mr. Hudig. I will take care.”

“That’s all. Tell that pig as you go out that if he doesn’t make the punkah go a little better I will break every bone in his body,” finished up Hudig, wiping his purple face with a red silk handkerchief nearly as big as a counterpane.

Noiselessly Willems went out, shutting carefully behind him the little green door through which he passed to the warehouse. Hudig, pen in hand, listened to him bullying the punkah boy with profane violence, born of unbounded zeal for the master’s comfort, before he returned to his writing amid the rustling of papers fluttering in the wind sent down by the punkah that waved in wide sweeps above his head.

Willems would nod familiarly to Mr. Vinck, who had his desk close to the little door of the private office, and march down the warehouse with an important air. Mr. Vinck — extreme dislike lurking in every wrinkle of his gentlemanly countenance — would follow with his eyes the white figure flitting in the gloom amongst the piles of bales and cases till it passed out through the big archway into the glare of the street.

Chapter 3

The opportunity and the temptation were too much for Willems, and under the pressure of sudden necessity he abused that trust which was his pride, the perpetual sign of his cleverness and a load too heavy for him to carry. A run of bad luck at cards, the failure of a small speculation undertaken on his own account, an unexpected demand for money from one or another member of the Da Souza family — and almost before he was well aware of it he was off the path of his peculiar honesty. It was such a faint and ill-defined track that it took him some time to find out how far he had strayed amongst the brambles of the dangerous wilderness he had been skirting for so many years, without any other guide than his own convenience and that doctrine of success which he had found for himself in the book of life — in those interesting chapters that the Devil has been permitted to write in it, to test the sharpness of men's eyesight and the steadfastness of their hearts. For one short, dark and solitary moment he was dismayed, but he had that courage that will not scale heights, yet will wade bravely through the mud — if there be no other road. He applied himself to the task of restitution, and devoted himself to the duty of not being found out. On his thirtieth birthday he had almost accomplished the task — and the duty had been faithfully and cleverly performed. He saw himself safe. Again he could look hopefully towards the goal of his legitimate ambition. Nobody would dare to suspect him, and in a few days there would be nothing to suspect. He was elated. He did not know that his prosperity had touched then its high-water mark, and that the tide was already on the turn.

Two days afterwards he knew. Mr. Vinck, hearing the rattle of the door-handle, jumped up from his desk — where he had been tremulously listening to the loud voices in the private office — and buried his face in the big safe with nervous haste. For the last time Willems passed through the little green door leading to Hudig's sanctum, which, during the past half-hour, might have been taken — from the fiendish noise within — for the cavern of some wild beast. Willems' troubled eyes took in the quick impression of men and things as he came out from the place of his humiliation. He saw the scared expression of the punkah boy; the Chinamen tellers sitting on their heels with unmovable faces turned up blankly towards him while their arrested hands hovered over the little piles of bright guilders ranged on the floor; Mr. Vinck's shoulder-blades with the fleshy rims of two red ears above. He saw the long avenue of gin cases stretching from where he stood to the arched doorway beyond which he would be able to breathe perhaps. A thin rope's end lay across his path and he saw it distinctly, yet stumbled heavily over it as if it had been a bar of iron. Then he found himself in the

street at last, but could not find air enough to fill his lungs. He walked towards his home, gasping.

As the sound of Hudig's insults that lingered in his ears grew fainter by the lapse of time, the feeling of shame was replaced slowly by a passion of anger against himself and still more against the stupid concourse of circumstances that had driven him into his idiotic indiscretion. Idiotic indiscretion; that is how he defined his guilt to himself. Could there be anything worse from the point of view of his undeniable cleverness? What a fatal aberration of an acute mind! He did not recognize himself there. He must have been mad. That's it. A sudden gust of madness. And now the work of long years was destroyed utterly. What would become of him?

Before he could answer that question he found himself in the garden before his house, Hudig's wedding gift. He looked at it with a vague surprise to find it there. His past was so utterly gone from him that the dwelling which belonged to it appeared to him incongruous standing there intact, neat, and cheerful in the sunshine of the hot afternoon. The house was a pretty little structure all doors and windows, surrounded on all sides by the deep verandah supported on slender columns clothed in the green foliage of creepers, which also fringed the overhanging eaves of the high-pitched roof. Slowly, Willems mounted the dozen steps that led to the verandah. He paused at every step. He must tell his wife. He felt frightened at the prospect, and his alarm dismayed him. Frightened to face her! Nothing could give him a better measure of the greatness of the change around him, and in him. Another man — and another life with the faith in himself gone. He could not be worth much if he was afraid to face that woman.

He dared not enter the house through the open door of the dining-room, but stood irresolute by the little work-table where trailed a white piece of calico, with a needle stuck in it, as if the work had been left hurriedly. The pink-crested cockatoo started, on his appearance, into clumsy activity and began to climb laboriously up and down his perch, calling "Joanna" with indistinct loudness and a persistent screech that prolonged the last syllable of the name as if in a peal of insane laughter. The screen in the doorway moved gently once or twice in the breeze, and each time Willems started slightly, expecting his wife, but he never lifted his eyes, although straining his ears for the sound of her footsteps. Gradually he lost himself in his thoughts, in the endless speculation as to the manner in which she would receive his news — and his orders. In this preoccupation he almost forgot the fear of her presence. No doubt she will cry, she will lament, she will be helpless and frightened and passive as ever. And he would have to drag that limp weight on and on through the darkness of a spoiled life. Horrible! Of course he could not abandon her and the child to certain misery or possible starvation. The wife and the child of Willems. Willems the successful, the smart; Willems the conf Pah! And what was Willems now? Willems the . . . He strangled the half-born thought, and cleared his throat to stifle a groan. Ah! Won't they talk to-night in the billiard-room — his world, where he had been first — all those men to whom he had been so superciliously condescending. Won't they talk with surprise, and affected regret, and grave faces, and wise nods. Some of them owed him money, but he never

pressed anybody. Not he. Willems, the prince of good fellows, they called him. And now they will rejoice, no doubt, at his downfall. A crowd of imbeciles. In his abasement he was yet aware of his superiority over those fellows, who were merely honest or simply not found out yet. A crowd of imbeciles! He shook his fist at the evoked image of his friends, and the startled parrot fluttered its wings and shrieked in desperate fright.

In a short glance upwards Willems saw his wife come round the corner of the house. He lowered his eyelids quickly, and waited silently till she came near and stood on the other side of the little table. He would not look at her face, but he could see the red dressing-gown he knew so well. She trailed through life in that red dressing-gown, with its row of dirty blue bows down the front, stained, and hooked on awry; a torn flounce at the bottom following her like a snake as she moved languidly about, with her hair negligently caught up, and a tangled wisp straggling untidily down her back. His gaze travelled upwards from bow to bow, noticing those that hung only by a thread, but it did not go beyond her chin. He looked at her lean throat, at the obtrusive collarbone visible in the disarray of the upper part of her attire. He saw the thin arm and the bony hand clasping the child she carried, and he felt an immense distaste for those encumbrances of his life. He waited for her to say something, but as he felt her eyes rest on him in unbroken silence he sighed and began to speak.

It was a hard task. He spoke slowly, lingering amongst the memories of this early life in his reluctance to confess that this was the end of it and the beginning of a less splendid existence. In his conviction of having made her happiness in the full satisfaction of all material wants he never doubted for a moment that she was ready to keep him company on no matter how hard and stony a road. He was not elated by this certitude. He had married her to please Hudig, and the greatness of his sacrifice ought to have made her happy without any further exertion on his part. She had years of glory as Willems' wife, and years of comfort, of loyal care, and of such tenderness as she deserved. He had guarded her carefully from any bodily hurt; and of any other suffering he had no conception. The assertion of his superiority was only another benefit conferred on her. All this was a matter of course, but he told her all this so as to bring vividly before her the greatness of her loss. She was so dull of understanding that she would not grasp it else. And now it was at an end. They would have to go. Leave this house, leave this island, go far away where he was unknown. To the English Strait-Settlements perhaps. He would find an opening there for his abilities — and juster men to deal with than old Hudig. He laughed bitterly.

“You have the money I left at home this morning, Joanna?” he asked. “We will want it all now.”

As he spoke those words he thought he was a fine fellow. Nothing new that. Still, he surpassed there his own expectations. Hang it all, there are sacred things in life, after all. The marriage tie was one of them, and he was not the man to break it. The solidity of his principles caused him great satisfaction, but he did not care to look at his wife, for all that. He waited for her to speak. Then he would have to console her; tell her not to be a crying fool; to get ready to go. Go where? How? When? He shook

his head. They must leave at once; that was the principal thing. He felt a sudden need to hurry up his departure.

“Well, Joanna,” he said, a little impatiently — “don’t stand there in a trance. Do you hear? We must. . . .”

He looked up at his wife, and whatever he was going to add remained unspoken. She was staring at him with her big, slanting eyes, that seemed to him twice their natural size. The child, its dirty little face pressed to its mother’s shoulder, was sleeping peacefully. The deep silence of the house was not broken, but rather accentuated, by the low mutter of the cockatoo, now very still on its perch. As Willems was looking at Joanna her upper lip was drawn up on one side, giving to her melancholy face a vicious expression altogether new to his experience. He stepped back in his surprise.

“Oh! You great man!” she said distinctly, but in a voice that was hardly above a whisper.

Those words, and still more her tone, stunned him as if somebody had fired a gun close to his ear. He stared back at her stupidly.

“Oh! you great man!” she repeated slowly, glancing right and left as if meditating a sudden escape. “And you think that I am going to starve with you. You are nobody now. You think my mamma and Leonard would let me go away? And with you! With you,” she repeated scornfully, raising her voice, which woke up the child and caused it to whimper feebly.

“Joanna!” exclaimed Willems.

“Do not speak to me. I have heard what I have waited for all these years. You are less than dirt, you that have wiped your feet on me. I have waited for this. I am not afraid now. I do not want you; do not come near me. Ah-h!” she screamed shrilly, as he held out his hand in an entreating gesture — “Ah! Keep off me! Keep off me! Keep off!”

She backed away, looking at him with eyes both angry and frightened. Willems stared motionless, in dumb amazement at the mystery of anger and revolt in the head of his wife. Why? What had he ever done to her? This was the day of injustice indeed. First Hudig — and now his wife. He felt a terror at this hate that had lived stealthily so near him for years. He tried to speak, but she shrieked again, and it was like a needle through his heart. Again he raised his hand.

“Help!” called Mrs. Willems, in a piercing voice. “Help!”

“Be quiet! You fool!” shouted Willems, trying to drown the noise of his wife and child in his own angry accents and rattling violently the little zinc table in his exasperation.

From under the house, where there were bathrooms and a tool closet, appeared Leonard, a rusty iron bar in his hand. He called threateningly from the bottom of the stairs.

“Do not hurt her, Mr. Willems. You are a savage. Not at all like we, whites.”

“You too!” said the bewildered Willems. “I haven’t touched her. Is this a madhouse?” He moved towards the stairs, and Leonard dropped the bar with a clang and made for the gate of the compound. Willems turned back to his wife.

“So you expected this,” he said. “It is a conspiracy. Who’s that sobbing and groaning in the room? Some more of your precious family. Hey?”

She was more calm now, and putting hastily the crying child in the big chair walked towards him with sudden fearlessness.

“My mother,” she said, “my mother who came to defend me from you — man from nowhere; a vagabond!”

“You did not call me a vagabond when you hung round my neck — before we were married,” said Willems, contemptuously.

“You took good care that I should not hang round your neck after we were,” she answered, clenching her hands, and putting her face close to his. “You boasted while I suffered and said nothing. What has become of your greatness; of our greatness — you were always speaking about? Now I am going to live on the charity of your master. Yes. That is true. He sent Leonard to tell me so. And you will go and boast somewhere else, and starve. So! Ah! I can breathe now! This house is mine.”

“Enough!” said Willems, slowly, with an arresting gesture.

She leaped back, the fright again in her eyes, snatched up the child, pressed it to her breast, and, falling into a chair, drummed insanely with her heels on the resounding floor of the verandah.

“I shall go,” said Willems, steadily. “I thank you. For the first time in your life you make me happy. You were a stone round my neck; you understand. I did not mean to tell you that as long as you lived, but you made me — now. Before I pass this gate you shall be gone from my mind. You made it very easy. I thank you.”

He turned and went down the steps without giving her a glance, while she sat upright and quiet, with wide-open eyes, the child crying querulously in her arms. At the gate he came suddenly upon Leonard, who had been dodging about there and failed to get out of the way in time.

“Do not be brutal, Mr. Willems,” said Leonard, hurriedly. “It is unbecoming between white men with all those natives looking on.” Leonard’s legs trembled very much, and his voice wavered between high and low tones without any attempt at control on his part. “Restrain your improper violence,” he went on mumbling rapidly. “I am a respectable man of very good family, while you . . . it is regrettable . . . they all say so . . .”

“What?” thundered Willems. He felt a sudden impulse of mad anger, and before he knew what had happened he was looking at Leonard da Souza rolling in the dust at his feet. He stepped over his prostrate brother-in-law and tore blindly down the street, everybody making way for the frantic white man.

When he came to himself he was beyond the outskirts of the town, stumbling on the hard and cracked earth of reaped rice fields. How did he get there? It was dark. He must get back. As he walked towards the town slowly, his mind reviewed the events of the day and he felt a sense of bitter loneliness. His wife had turned him out of his own house. He had assaulted brutally his brother-in-law, a member of the Da Souza family — of that band of his worshippers. He did. Well, no! It was some other man. Another

man was coming back. A man without a past, without a future, yet full of pain and shame and anger. He stopped and looked round. A dog or two glided across the empty street and rushed past him with a frightened snarl. He was now in the midst of the Malay quarter whose bamboo houses, hidden in the verdure of their little gardens, were dark and silent. Men, women and children slept in there. Human beings. Would he ever sleep, and where? He felt as if he was the outcast of all mankind, and as he looked hopelessly round, before resuming his weary march, it seemed to him that the world was bigger, the night more vast and more black; but he went on doggedly with his head down as if pushing his way through some thick brambles. Then suddenly he felt planks under his feet and, looking up, saw the red light at the end of the jetty. He walked quite to the end and stood leaning against the post, under the lamp, looking at the roadstead where two vessels at anchor swayed their slender rigging amongst the stars. The end of the jetty; and here in one step more the end of life; the end of everything. Better so. What else could he do? Nothing ever comes back. He saw it clearly. The respect and admiration of them all, the old habits and old affections finished abruptly in the clear perception of the cause of his disgrace. He saw all this; and for a time he came out of himself, out of his selfishness — out of the constant preoccupation of his interests and his desires — out of the temple of self and the concentration of personal thought.

His thoughts now wandered home. Standing in the tepid stillness of a starry tropical night he felt the breath of the bitter east wind, he saw the high and narrow fronts of tall houses under the gloom of a clouded sky; and on muddy quays he saw the shabby, high-shouldered figure — the patient, faded face of the weary man earning bread for the children that waited for him in a dingy home. It was miserable, miserable. But it would never come back. What was there in common between those things and Willems the clever, Willems the successful. He had cut himself adrift from that home many years ago. Better for him then. Better for them now. All this was gone, never to come back again; and suddenly he shivered, seeing himself alone in the presence of unknown and terrible dangers.

For the first time in his life he felt afraid of the future, because he had lost his faith, the faith in his own success. And he had destroyed it foolishly with his own hands!

Chapter 4

His meditation which resembled slow drifting into suicide was interrupted by Lingard, who, with a loud "I've got you at last!" dropped his hand heavily on Willems' shoulder. This time it was the old seaman himself going out of his way to pick up the uninteresting waif — all that there was left of that sudden and sordid shipwreck. To Willems, the rough, friendly voice was a quick and fleeting relief followed by a sharper pang of anger and unavailing regret. That voice carried him back to the beginning of his promising career, the end of which was very visible now from the jetty where they both stood. He shook himself free from the friendly grasp, saying with ready bitterness

"It's all your fault. Give me a push now, do, and send me over. I have been standing here waiting for help. You are the man — of all men. You helped at the beginning; you ought to have a hand in the end."

"I have better use for you than to throw you to the fishes," said Lingard, seriously, taking Willems by the arm and forcing him gently to walk up the jetty. "I have been buzzing over this town like a bluebottle fly, looking for you high and low. I have heard a lot. I will tell you what, Willems; you are no saint, that's a fact. And you have not been over-wise either. I am not throwing stones," he added, hastily, as Willems made an effort to get away, "but I am not going to mince matters. Never could! You keep quiet while I talk. Can't you?"

With a gesture of resignation and a half-stifled groan Willems submitted to the stronger will, and the two men paced slowly up and down the resounding planks, while Lingard disclosed to Willems the exact manner of his undoing. After the first shock Willems lost the faculty of surprise in the over-powering feeling of indignation. So it was Vinck and Leonard who had served him so. They had watched him, tracked his misdeeds, reported them to Hudig. They had bribed obscure Chinamen, wormed out confidences from tipsy skippers, got at various boatmen, and had pieced out in that way the story of his irregularities. The blackness of this dark intrigue filled him with horror. He could understand Vinck. There was no love lost between them. But Leonard! Leonard!

"Why, Captain Lingard," he burst out, "the fellow licked my boots."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Lingard, testily, "we know that, and you did your best to cram your boot down his throat. No man likes that, my boy."

"I was always giving money to all that hungry lot," went on Willems, passionately. "Always my hand in my pocket. They never had to ask twice."

“Just so. Your generosity frightened them. They asked themselves where all that came from, and concluded that it was safer to throw you overboard. After all, Hudig is a much greater man than you, my friend, and they have a claim on him also.”

“What do you mean, Captain Lingard?”

“What do I mean?” repeated Lingard, slowly. “Why, you are not going to make me believe you did not know your wife was Hudig’s daughter. Come now!”

Willems stopped suddenly and swayed about.

“Ah! I understand,” he gasped. “I never heard . . . Lately I thought there was . . . But no, I never guessed.”

“Oh, you simpleton!” said Lingard, pityingly. “Pon my word,” he muttered to himself, “I don’t believe the fellow knew. Well! well! Steady now. Pull yourself together. What’s wrong there. She is a good wife to you.”

“Excellent wife,” said Willems, in a dreary voice, looking far over the black and scintillating water.

“Very well then,” went on Lingard, with increasing friendliness. “Nothing wrong there. But did you really think that Hudig was marrying you off and giving you a house and I don’t know what, out of love for you?”

“I had served him well,” answered Willems. “How well, you know yourself — through thick and thin. No matter what work and what risk, I was always there; always ready.”

How well he saw the greatness of his work and the immensity of that injustice which was his reward. She was that man’s daughter!

In the light of this disclosure the facts of the last five years of his life stood clearly revealed in their full meaning. He had spoken first to Joanna at the gate of their dwelling as he went to his work in the brilliant flush of the early morning, when women and flowers are charming even to the dullest eyes. A most respectable family — two women and a young man — were his next-door neighbours. Nobody ever came to their little house but the priest, a native from the Spanish islands, now and then. The young man Leonard he had met in town, and was flattered by the little fellow’s immense respect for the great Willems. He let him bring chairs, call the waiters, chalk his cues when playing billiards, express his admiration in choice words. He even condescended to listen patiently to Leonard’s allusions to “our beloved father,” a man of official position, a government agent in Koti, where he died of cholera, alas! a victim to duty, like a good Catholic, and a good man. It sounded very respectable, and Willems approved of those feeling references. Moreover, he prided himself upon having no colour-prejudices and no racial antipathies. He consented to drink curacoa one afternoon on the verandah of Mrs. da Souza’s house. He remembered Joanna that day, swinging in a hammock. She was untidy even then, he remembered, and that was the only impression he carried away from that visit. He had no time for love in those glorious days, no time even for a passing fancy, but gradually he fell into the habit of calling almost every day at that little house where he was greeted by Mrs. da Souza’s shrill voice screaming for Joanna to come and entertain the gentleman from Hudig & Co. And then the sudden and unexpected visit of the priest. He remembered the man’s flat, yellow face, his thin legs,

his propitiatory smile, his beaming black eyes, his conciliating manner, his veiled hints which he did not understand at the time. How he wondered what the man wanted, and how unceremoniously he got rid of him. And then came vividly into his recollection the morning when he met again that fellow coming out of Hudig's office, and how he was amused at the incongruous visit. And that morning with Hudig! Would he ever forget it? Would he ever forget his surprise as the master, instead of plunging at once into business, looked at him thoughtfully before turning, with a furtive smile, to the papers on the desk? He could hear him now, his nose in the paper before him, dropping astonishing words in the intervals of wheezy breathing.

"Heard said . . . called there often . . . most respectable ladies . . . knew the father very well . . . estimable . . . best thing for a young man . . . settle down. . . . Personally, very glad to hear . . . thing arranged. . . . Suitable recognition of valuable services. . . . Best thing — best thing to do."

And he believed! What credulity! What an ass! Hudig knew the father! Rather. And so did everybody else probably; all except himself. How proud he had been of Hudig's benevolent interest in his fate! How proud he was when invited by Hudig to stay with him at his little house in the country — where he could meet men, men of official position — as a friend. Vinck had been green with envy. Oh, yes! He had believed in the best thing, and took the girl like a gift of fortune. How he boasted to Hudig of being free from prejudices. The old scoundrel must have been laughing in his sleeve at his fool of a confidential clerk. He took the girl, guessing nothing. How could he? There had been a father of some kind to the common knowledge. Men knew him; spoke about him. A lank man of hopelessly mixed descent, but otherwise — apparently — unobjectionable. The shady relations came out afterward, but — with his freedom from prejudices — he did not mind them, because, with their humble dependence, they completed his triumphant life. Taken in! taken in! Hudig had found an easy way to provide for the begging crowd. He had shifted the burden of his youthful vagaries on to the shoulders of his confidential clerk; and while he worked for the master, the master had cheated him; had stolen his very self from him. He was married. He belonged to that woman, no matter what she might do! . . . Had sworn . . . for all life! . . . Thrown himself away. . . . And that man dared this very morning call him a thief! Damnation!

"Let go, Lingard!" he shouted, trying to get away by a sudden jerk from the watchful old seaman. "Let me go and kill that . . ."

"No you don't!" panted Lingard, hanging on manfully. "You want to kill, do you? You lunatic. Ah! — I've got you now! Be quiet, I say!"

They struggled violently, Lingard forcing Willems slowly towards the guard-rail. Under their feet the jetty sounded like a drum in the quiet night. On the shore end the native caretaker of the wharf watched the combat, squatting behind the safe shelter of some big cases. The next day he informed his friends, with calm satisfaction, that two drunken white men had fought on the jetty.

It had been a great fight. They fought without arms, like wild beasts, after the manner of white men. No! nobody was killed, or there would have been trouble and

a report to make. How could he know why they fought? White men have no reason when they are like that.

Just as Lingard was beginning to fear that he would be unable to restrain much longer the violence of the younger man, he felt Willems' muscles relaxing, and took advantage of this opportunity to pin him, by a last effort, to the rail. They both panted heavily, speechless, their faces very close.

"All right," muttered Willems at last. "Don't break my back over this infernal rail. I will be quiet."

"Now you are reasonable," said Lingard, much relieved. "What made you fly into that passion?" he asked, leading him back to the end of the jetty, and, still holding him prudently with one hand, he fumbled with the other for his whistle and blew a shrill and prolonged blast. Over the smooth water of the roadstead came in answer a faint cry from one of the ships at anchor.

"My boat will be here directly," said Lingard. "Think of what you are going to do. I sail to-night."

"What is there for me to do, except one thing?" said Willems, gloomily.

"Look here," said Lingard; "I picked you up as a boy, and consider myself responsible for you in a way. You took your life into your own hands many years ago — but still . . ."

He paused, listening, till he heard the regular grind of the oars in the rowlocks of the approaching boat then went on again.

"I have made it all right with Hudig. You owe him nothing now. Go back to your wife. She is a good woman. Go back to her."

"Why, Captain Lingard," exclaimed Willems, "she . . ."

"It was most affecting," went on Lingard, without heeding him. "I went to your house to look for you and there I saw her despair. It was heart-breaking. She called for you; she entreated me to find you. She spoke wildly, poor woman, as if all this was her fault."

Willems listened amazed. The blind old idiot! How queerly he misunderstood! But if it was true, if it was even true, the very idea of seeing her filled his soul with intense loathing. He did not break his oath, but he would not go back to her. Let hers be the sin of that separation; of the sacred bond broken. He revelled in the extreme purity of his heart, and he would not go back to her. Let her come back to him. He had the comfortable conviction that he would never see her again, and that through her own fault only. In this conviction he told himself solemnly that if she would come to him he would receive her with generous forgiveness, because such was the praiseworthy solidity of his principles. But he hesitated whether he would or would not disclose to Lingard the revolting completeness of his humiliation. Turned out of his house — and by his wife; that woman who hardly dared to breathe in his presence, yesterday. He remained perplexed and silent. No. He lacked the courage to tell the ignoble story.

As the boat of the brig appeared suddenly on the black water close to the jetty, Lingard broke the painful silence.

"I always thought," he said, sadly, "I always thought you were somewhat heartless, Willems, and apt to cast adrift those that thought most of you. I appeal to what is best in you; do not abandon that woman."

"I have not abandoned her," answered Willems, quickly, with conscious truthfulness. "Why should I? As you so justly observed, she has been a good wife to me. A very good, quiet, obedient, loving wife, and I love her as much as she loves me. Every bit. But as to going back now, to that place where I . . . To walk again amongst those men who yesterday were ready to crawl before me, and then feel on my back the sting of their pitying or satisfied smiles — no! I can't. I would rather hide from them at the bottom of the sea," he went on, with resolute energy. "I don't think, Captain Lingard," he added, more quietly, "I don't think that you realize what my position was there."

In a wide sweep of his hand he took in the sleeping shore from north to south, as if wishing it a proud and threatening good-bye. For a short moment he forgot his downfall in the recollection of his brilliant triumphs. Amongst the men of his class and occupation who slept in those dark houses he had been indeed the first.

"It is hard," muttered Lingard, pensively. "But whose the fault? Whose the fault?"

"Captain Lingard!" cried Willems, under the sudden impulse of a felicitous inspiration, "if you leave me here on this jetty — it's murder. I shall never return to that place alive, wife or no wife. You may just as well cut my throat at once."

The old seaman started.

"Don't try to frighten me, Willems," he said, with great severity, and paused.

Above the accents of Willems' brazen despair he heard, with considerable uneasiness, the whisper of his own absurd conscience. He meditated for awhile with an irresolute air.

"I could tell you to go and drown yourself, and be damned to you," he said, with an unsuccessful assumption of brutality in his manner, "but I won't. We are responsible for one another — worse luck. I am almost ashamed of myself, but I can understand your dirty pride. I can! By . . ."

He broke off with a loud sigh and walked briskly to the steps, at the bottom of which lay his boat, rising and falling gently on the slight and invisible swell.

"Below there! Got a lamp in the boat? Well, light it and bring it up, one of you. Hurry now!"

He tore out a page of his pocketbook, moistened his pencil with great energy and waited, stamping his feet impatiently.

"I will see this thing through," he muttered to himself. "And I will have it all square and ship-shape; see if I don't! Are you going to bring that lamp, you son of a crippled mud-turtle? I am waiting."

The gleam of the light on the paper placated his professional anger, and he wrote rapidly, the final dash of his signature curling the paper up in a triangular tear.

"Take that to this white Tuan's house. I will send the boat back for you in half an hour."

The coxswain raised his lamp deliberately to Willem's face.

“This Tuan? Tau! I know.”

“Quick then!” said Lingard, taking the lamp from him — and the man went off at a run.

“Kassi mem! To the lady herself,” called Lingard after him.

Then, when the man disappeared, he turned to Willems.

“I have written to your wife,” he said. “If you do not return for good, you do not go back to that house only for another parting. You must come as you stand. I won’t have that poor woman tormented. I will see to it that you are not separated for long. Trust me!”

Willems shivered, then smiled in the darkness.

“No fear of that,” he muttered, enigmatically. “I trust you implicitly, Captain Lingard,” he added, in a louder tone.

Lingard led the way down the steps, swinging the lamp and speaking over his shoulder.

“It is the second time, Willems, I take you in hand. Mind it is the last. The second time; and the only difference between then and now is that you were bare-footed then and have boots now. In fourteen years. With all your smartness! A poor result that. A very poor result.”

He stood for awhile on the lowest platform of the steps, the light of the lamp falling on the upturned face of the stroke oar, who held the gunwale of the boat close alongside, ready for the captain to step in.

“You see,” he went on, argumentatively, fumbling about the top of the lamp, “you got yourself so crooked amongst those ‘longshore quill-drivers that you could not run clear in any way. That’s what comes of such talk as yours, and of such a life. A man sees so much falsehood that he begins to lie to himself. Pah!” he said, in disgust, “there’s only one place for an honest man. The sea, my boy, the sea! But you never would; didn’t think there was enough money in it; and now — look!”

He blew the light out, and, stepping into the boat, stretched quickly his hand towards Willems, with friendly care. Willems sat by him in silence, and the boat shoved off, sweeping in a wide circle towards the brig.

“Your compassion is all for my wife, Captain Lingard,” said Willems, moodily. “Do you think I am so very happy?”

“No! no!” said Lingard, heartily. “Not a word more shall pass my lips. I had to speak my mind once, seeing that I knew you from a child, so to speak. And now I shall forget; but you are young yet. Life is very long,” he went on, with unconscious sadness; “let this be a lesson to you.”

He laid his hand affectionately on Willems’ shoulder, and they both sat silent till the boat came alongside the ship’s ladder.

When on board Lingard gave orders to his mate, and leading Willems on the poop, sat on the breech of one of the brass six-pounders with which his vessel was armed. The boat went off again to bring back the messenger. As soon as it was seen returning dark forms appeared on the brig’s spars; then the sails fell in festoons with a swish

of their heavy folds, and hung motionless under the yards in the dead calm of the clear and dewy night. From the forward end came the clink of the windlass, and soon afterwards the hail of the chief mate informing Lingard that the cable was hove short.

“Hold on everything,” hailed back Lingard; “we must wait for the land-breeze before we let go our hold of the ground.”

He approached Willems, who sat on the skylight, his body bent down, his head low, and his hands hanging listlessly between his knees.

“I am going to take you to Sambir,” he said. “You’ve never heard of the place, have you? Well, it’s up that river of mine about which people talk so much and know so little. I’ve found out the entrance for a ship of Flash’s size. It isn’t easy. You’ll see. I will show you. You have been at sea long enough to take an interest. . . . Pity you didn’t stick to it. Well, I am going there. I have my own trading post in the place. Almayer is my partner. You knew him when he was at Hudig’s. Oh, he lives there as happy as a king. D’ye see, I have them all in my pocket. The rajah is an old friend of mine. My word is law — and I am the only trader. No other white man but Almayer had ever been in that settlement. You will live quietly there till I come back from my next cruise to the westward. We shall see then what can be done for you. Never fear. I have no doubt my secret will be safe with you. Keep mum about my river when you get amongst the traders again. There’s many would give their ears for the knowledge of it. I’ll tell you something: that’s where I get all my guttah and rattans. Simply inexhaustible, my boy.”

While Lingard spoke Willems looked up quickly, but soon his head fell on his breast in the discouraging certitude that the knowledge he and Hudig had wished for so much had come to him too late. He sat in a listless attitude.

“You will help Almayer in his trading if you have a heart for it,” continued Lingard, “just to kill time till I come back for you. Only six weeks or so.”

Over their heads the damp sails fluttered noisily in the first faint puff of the breeze; then, as the airs freshened, the brig tended to the wind, and the silenced canvas lay quietly aback. The mate spoke with low distinctness from the shadows of the quarter-deck.

“There’s the breeze. Which way do you want to cast her, Captain Lingard?”

Lingard’s eyes, that had been fixed aloft, glanced down at the dejected figure of the man sitting on the skylight. He seemed to hesitate for a minute.

“To the northward, to the northward,” he answered, testily, as if annoyed at his own fleeting thought, “and bear a hand there. Every puff of wind is worth money in these seas.”

He remained motionless, listening to the rattle of blocks and the creaking of trusses as the head-yards were hauled round. Sail was made on the ship and the windlass manned again while he stood still, lost in thought. He only roused himself when a barefooted seacannie glided past him silently on his way to the wheel.

“Put the helm aport! Hard over!” he said, in his harsh sea-voice, to the man whose face appeared suddenly out of the darkness in the circle of light thrown upwards from the binnacle lamps.

The anchor was secured, the yards trimmed, and the brig began to move out of the roadstead. The sea woke up under the push of the sharp cutwater, and whispered softly to the gliding craft in that tender and rippling murmur in which it speaks sometimes to those it nurses and loves. Lingard stood by the taff-rail listening, with a pleased smile till the Flash began to draw close to the only other vessel in the anchorage.

“Here, Willems,” he said, calling him to his side, “d’ye see that barque here? That’s an Arab vessel. White men have mostly given up the game, but this fellow drops in my wake often, and lives in hopes of cutting me out in that settlement. Not while I live, I trust. You see, Willems, I brought prosperity to that place. I composed their quarrels, and saw them grow under my eyes. There’s peace and happiness there. I am more master there than his Dutch Excellency down in Batavia ever will be when some day a lazy man-of-war blunders at last against the river. I mean to keep the Arabs out of it, with their lies and their intrigues. I shall keep the venomous breed out, if it costs me my fortune.”

The Flash drew quietly abreast of the barque, and was beginning to drop it astern when a white figure started up on the poop of the Arab vessel, and a voice called out

“Greeting to the Rajah Laut!”

“To you greeting!” answered Lingard, after a moment of hesitating surprise. Then he turned to Willems with a grim smile. “That’s Abdulla’s voice,” he said. “Mighty civil all of a sudden, isn’t he? I wonder what it means. Just like his impudence! No matter! His civility or his impudence are all one to me. I know that this fellow will be under way and after me like a shot. I don’t care! I have the heels of anything that floats in these seas,” he added, while his proud and loving glance ran over and rested fondly amongst the brig’s lofty and graceful spars.

Chapter 5

“It was the writing on his forehead,” said Babalatchi, adding a couple of small sticks to the little fire by which he was squatting, and without looking at Lakamba who lay down supported on his elbow on the other side of the embers. “It was written when he was born that he should end his life in darkness, and now he is like a man walking in a black night — with his eyes open, yet seeing not. I knew him well when he had slaves, and many wives, and much merchandise, and trading praus, and praus for fighting. Hai — ya! He was a great fighter in the days before the breath of the Merciful put out the light in his eyes. He was a pilgrim, and had many virtues: he was brave, his hand was open, and he was a great robber. For many years he led the men that drank blood on the sea: first in prayer and first in fight! Have I not stood behind him when his face was turned to the West? Have I not watched by his side ships with high masts burning in a straight flame on the calm water? Have I not followed him on dark nights amongst sleeping men that woke up only to die? His sword was swifter than the fire from Heaven, and struck before it flashed. Hai! Tuan! Those were the days and that was a leader, and I myself was younger; and in those days there were not so many fireships with guns that deal fiery death from afar. Over the hill and over the forest — O! Tuan Lakamba! they dropped whistling fireballs into the creek where our praus took refuge, and where they dared not follow men who had arms in their hands.”

He shook his head with mournful regret and threw another handful of fuel on the fire. The burst of clear flame lit up his broad, dark, and pock-marked face, where the big lips, stained with betel-juice, looked like a deep and bleeding gash of a fresh wound. The reflection of the firelight gleamed brightly in his solitary eye, lending it for a moment a fierce animation that died out together with the short-lived flame. With quick touches of his bare hands he raked the embers into a heap, then, wiping the warm ash on his waistcloth — his only garment — he clasped his thin legs with his entwined fingers, and rested his chin on his drawn-up knees. Lakamba stirred slightly without changing his position or taking his eyes off the glowing coals, on which they had been fixed in dreamy immobility.

“Yes,” went on Babalatchi, in a low monotone, as if pursuing aloud a train of thought that had its beginning in the silent contemplation of the unstable nature of earthly greatness — “yes. He has been rich and strong, and now he lives on alms: old, feeble, blind, and without companions, but for his daughter. The Rajah Patalolo gives him rice, and the pale woman — his daughter — cooks it for him, for he has no slave.”

“I saw her from afar,” muttered Lakamba, disparagingly. “A she-dog with white teeth, like a woman of the Orang-Putih.”

"Right, right," assented Babalatchi; "but you have not seen her near. Her mother was a woman from the west; a Baghdadi woman with veiled face. Now she goes uncovered, like our women do, for she is poor and he is blind, and nobody ever comes near them unless to ask for a charm or a blessing and depart quickly for fear of his anger and of the Rajah's hand. You have not been on that side of the river?"

"Not for a long time. If I go . . ."

"True! true!" interrupted Babalatchi, soothingly, "but I go often alone — for your good — and look — and listen. When the time comes; when we both go together towards the Rajah's campong, it will be to enter — and to remain."

Lakamba sat up and looked at Babalatchi gloomily.

"This is good talk, once, twice; when it is heard too often it becomes foolish, like the prattle of children."

"Many, many times have I seen the cloudy sky and have heard the wind of the rainy seasons," said Babalatchi, impressively.

"And where is your wisdom? It must be with the wind and the clouds of seasons past, for I do not hear it in your talk."

"Those are the words of the ungrateful!" shouted Babalatchi, with sudden exasperation. "Verily, our only refuge is with the One, the Mighty, the Redresser of . . ."

"Peace! Peace!" growled the startled Lakamba. "It is but a friend's talk."

Babalatchi subsided into his former attitude, muttering to himself. After awhile he went on again in a louder voice —

"Since the Rajah Laut left another white man here in Sambir, the daughter of the blind Omar el Badavi has spoken to other ears than mine."

"Would a white man listen to a beggar's daughter?" said Lakamba, doubtingly.

"Hai! I have seen . . ."

"And what did you see? O one-eyed one!" exclaimed Lakamba, contemptuously.

"I have seen the strange white man walking on the narrow path before the sun could dry the drops of dew on the bushes, and I have heard the whisper of his voice when he spoke through the smoke of the morning fire to that woman with big eyes and a pale skin. Woman in body, but in heart a man! She knows no fear and no shame. I have heard her voice too."

He nodded twice at Lakamba sagaciously and gave himself up to silent musing, his solitary eye fixed immovably upon the straight wall of forest on the opposite bank. Lakamba lay silent, staring vacantly. Under them Lingard's own river rippled softly amongst the piles supporting the bamboo platform of the little watch-house before which they were lying. Behind the house the ground rose in a gentle swell of a low hill cleared of the big timber, but thickly overgrown with the grass and bushes, now withered and burnt up in the long drought of the dry season. This old rice clearing, which had been several years lying fallow, was framed on three sides by the impenetrable and tangled growth of the untouched forest, and on the fourth came down to the muddy river bank. There was not a breath of wind on the land or river, but high above, in the transparent sky, little clouds rushed past the moon, now appearing in her diffused rays

with the brilliance of silver, now obscuring her face with the blackness of ebony. Far away, in the middle of the river, a fish would leap now and then with a short splash, the very loudness of which measured the profundity of the overpowering silence that swallowed up the sharp sound suddenly.

Lakamba dozed uneasily off, but the wakeful Babalatchi sat thinking deeply, sighing from time to time, and slapping himself over his naked torso incessantly in a vain endeavour to keep off an occasional and wandering mosquito that, rising as high as the platform above the swarms of the riverside, would settle with a ping of triumph on the unexpected victim. The moon, pursuing her silent and toilsome path, attained her highest elevation, and chasing the shadow of the roof-eaves from Lakamba's face, seemed to hang arrested over their heads. Babalatchi revived the fire and woke up his companion, who sat up yawning and shivering discontentedly.

Babalatchi spoke again in a voice which was like the murmur of a brook that runs over the stones: low, monotonous, persistent; irresistible in its power to wear out and to destroy the hardest obstacles. Lakamba listened, silent but interested. They were Malay adventurers; ambitious men of that place and time; the Bohemians of their race. In the early days of the settlement, before the ruler Patalolo had shaken off his allegiance to the Sultan of Koti, Lakamba appeared in the river with two small trading vessels. He was disappointed to find already some semblance of organization amongst the settlers of various races who recognized the unobtrusive sway of old Patalolo, and he was not politic enough to conceal his disappointment. He declared himself to be a man from the east, from those parts where no white man ruled, and to be of an oppressed race, but of a princely family. And truly enough he had all the gifts of an exiled prince. He was discontented, ungrateful, turbulent; a man full of envy and ready for intrigue, with brave words and empty promises for ever on his lips. He was obstinate, but his will was made up of short impulses that never lasted long enough to carry him to the goal of his ambition. Received coldly by the suspicious Patalolo, he persisted — permission or no permission — in clearing the ground on a good spot some fourteen miles down the river from Sambir, and built himself a house there, which he fortified by a high palisade. As he had many followers and seemed very reckless, the old Rajah did not think it prudent at the time to interfere with him by force. Once settled, he began to intrigue. The quarrel of Patalolo with the Sultan of Koti was of his fomenting, but failed to produce the result he expected because the Sultan could not back him up effectively at such a great distance. Disappointed in that scheme, he promptly organized an outbreak of the Bugis settlers, and besieged the old Rajah in his stockade with much noisy valour and a fair chance of success; but Lingard then appeared on the scene with the armed brig, and the old seaman's hairy forefinger, shaken menacingly in his face, quelled his martial ardour. No man cared to encounter the Rajah Laut, and Lakamba, with momentary resignation, subsided into a half-cultivator, half-trader, and nursed in his fortified house his wrath and his ambition, keeping it for use on a more propitious occasion. Still faithful to his character of a prince-pretender, he would not recognize the constituted authorities, answering sulkily the Rajah's messenger, who claimed the

tribute for the cultivated fields, that the Rajah had better come and take it himself. By Lingard's advice he was left alone, notwithstanding his rebellious mood; and for many days he lived undisturbed amongst his wives and retainers, cherishing that persistent and causeless hope of better times, the possession of which seems to be the universal privilege of exiled greatness.

But the passing days brought no change. The hope grew faint and the hot ambition burnt itself out, leaving only a feeble and expiring spark amongst a heap of dull and tepid ashes of indolent acquiescence with the decrees of Fate, till Babalatchi fanned it again into a bright flame. Babalatchi had blundered upon the river while in search of a safe refuge for his disreputable head.

He was a vagabond of the seas, a true Orang-Laut, living by rapine and plunder of coasts and ships in his prosperous days; earning his living by honest and irksome toil when the days of adversity were upon him. So, although at times leading the Sulu rovers, he had also served as Serang of country ships, and in that wise had visited the distant seas, beheld the glories of Bombay, the might of the Mascati Sultan; had even struggled in a pious throng for the privilege of touching with his lips the Sacred Stone of the Holy City. He gathered experience and wisdom in many lands, and after attaching himself to Omar el Badavi, he affected great piety (as became a pilgrim), although unable to read the inspired words of the Prophet. He was brave and bloodthirsty without any affection, and he hated the white men who interfered with the manly pursuits of throat-cutting, kidnapping, slave-dealing, and fire-raising, that were the only possible occupation for a true man of the sea. He found favour in the eyes of his chief, the fearless Omar el Badavi, the leader of Brunei rovers, whom he followed with unquestioning loyalty through the long years of successful depredation. And when that long career of murder, robbery and violence received its first serious check at the hands of white men, he stood faithfully by his chief, looked steadily at the bursting shells, was undismayed by the flames of the burning stronghold, by the death of his companions, by the shrieks of their women, the wailing of their children; by the sudden ruin and destruction of all that he deemed indispensable to a happy and glorious existence. The beaten ground between the houses was slippery with blood, and the dark mangroves of the muddy creeks were full of sighs of the dying men who were stricken down before they could see their enemy. They died helplessly, for into the tangled forest there was no escape, and their swift praus, in which they had so often scoured the coast and the seas, now wedged together in the narrow creek, were burning fiercely. Babalatchi, with the clear perception of the coming end, devoted all his energies to saving if it was but only one of them. He succeeded in time. When the end came in the explosion of the stored powder-barrels, he was ready to look for his chief. He found him half dead and totally blinded, with nobody near him but his daughter Aissa: — the sons had fallen earlier in the day, as became men of their courage. Helped by the girl with the steadfast heart, Babalatchi carried Omar on board the light prau and succeeded in escaping, but with very few companions only. As they hauled their craft into the network of dark and silent creeks, they could hear the cheering of the crews of the

man-of-war's boats dashing to the attack of the rover's village. Aissa, sitting on the high after-deck, her father's blackened and bleeding head in her lap, looked up with fearless eyes at Babalatchi. "They shall find only smoke, blood and dead men, and women mad with fear there, but nothing else living," she said, mournfully. Babalatchi, pressing with his right hand the deep gash on his shoulder, answered sadly: "They are very strong. When we fight with them we can only die. Yet," he added, menacingly — "some of us still live! Some of us still live!"

For a short time he dreamed of vengeance, but his dream was dispelled by the cold reception of the Sultan of Sulu, with whom they sought refuge at first and who gave them only a contemptuous and grudging hospitality. While Omar, nursed by Aissa, was recovering from his wounds, Babalatchi attended industriously before the exalted Presence that had extended to them the hand of Protection. For all that, when Babalatchi spoke into the Sultan's ear certain proposals of a great and profitable raid, that was to sweep the islands from Ternate to Acheen, the Sultan was very angry. "I know you, you men from the west," he exclaimed, angrily. "Your words are poison in a Ruler's ears. Your talk is of fire and murder and booty — but on our heads falls the vengeance of the blood you drink. Begone!"

There was nothing to be done. Times were changed. So changed that, when a Spanish frigate appeared before the island and a demand was sent to the Sultan to deliver Omar and his companions, Babalatchi was not surprised to hear that they were going to be made the victims of political expediency. But from that sane appreciation of danger to tame submission was a very long step. And then began Omar's second flight. It began arms in hand, for the little band had to fight in the night on the beach for the possession of the small canoes in which those that survived got away at last. The story of that escape lives in the hearts of brave men even to this day. They talk of Babalatchi and of the strong woman who carried her blind father through the surf under the fire of the warship from the north. The companions of that piratical and son-less Aeneas are dead now, but their ghosts wander over the waters and the islands at night — after the manner of ghosts — and haunt the fires by which sit armed men, as is meet for the spirits of fearless warriors who died in battle. There they may hear the story of their own deeds, of their own courage, suffering and death, on the lips of living men. That story is told in many places. On the cool mats in breezy verandahs of Rajahs' houses it is alluded to disdainfully by impassive statesmen, but amongst armed men that throng the courtyards it is a tale which stills the murmur of voices and the tinkle of anklets; arrests the passage of the siri-vessel, and fixes the eyes in absorbed gaze. They talk of the fight, of the fearless woman, of the wise man; of long suffering on the thirsty sea in leaky canoes; of those who died. . . . Many died. A few survived. The chief, the woman, and another one who became great.

There was no hint of incipient greatness in Babalatchi's unostentatious arrival in Sambir. He came with Omar and Aissa in a small prau loaded with green cocoanuts, and claimed the ownership of both vessel and cargo. How it came to pass that Babalatchi, fleeing for his life in a small canoe, managed to end his hazardous journey in a

vessel full of a valuable commodity, is one of those secrets of the sea that baffle the most searching inquiry. In truth nobody inquired much. There were rumours of a missing trading prau belonging to Menado, but they were vague and remained mysterious. Babalatchi told a story which — it must be said in justice to Patalolo's knowledge of the world — was not believed. When the Rajah ventured to state his doubts, Babalatchi asked him in tones of calm remonstrance whether he could reasonably suppose that two oldish men — who had only one eye amongst them — and a young woman were likely to gain possession of anything whatever by violence? Charity was a virtue recommended by the Prophet. There were charitable people, and their hand was open to the deserving. Patalolo wagged his aged head doubtfully, and Babalatchi withdrew with a shocked mien and put himself forthwith under Lakamba's protection. The two men who completed the prau's crew followed him into that magnate's campong. The blind Omar, with Aissa, remained under the care of the Rajah, and the Rajah confiscated the cargo. The prau hauled up on the mud-bank, at the junction of the two branches of the Pantai, rotted in the rain, warped in the sun, fell to pieces and gradually vanished into the smoke of household fires of the settlement. Only a forgotten plank and a rib or two, sticking neglected in the shiny ooze for a long time, served to remind Babalatchi during many months that he was a stranger in the land.

Otherwise, he felt perfectly at home in Lakamba's establishment, where his peculiar position and influence were quickly recognized and soon submitted to even by the women. He had all a true vagabond's pliability to circumstances and adaptiveness to momentary surroundings. In his readiness to learn from experience that contempt for early principles so necessary to a true statesman, he equalled the most successful politicians of any age; and he had enough persuasiveness and firmness of purpose to acquire a complete mastery over Lakamba's vacillating mind — where there was nothing stable but an all-pervading discontent. He kept the discontent alive, he rekindled the expiring ambition, he moderated the poor exile's not unnatural impatience to attain a high and lucrative position. He — the man of violence — deprecated the use of force, for he had a clear comprehension of the difficult situation. From the same cause, he — the hater of white men — would to some extent admit the eventual expediency of Dutch protection. But nothing should be done in a hurry. Whatever his master Lakamba might think, there was no use in poisoning old Patalolo, he maintained. It could be done, of course; but what then? As long as Lingard's influence was paramount — as long as Almayer, Lingard's representative, was the only great trader of the settlement, it was not worth Lakamba's while — even if it had been possible — to grasp the rule of the young state. Killing Almayer and Lingard was so difficult and so risky that it might be dismissed as impracticable. What was wanted was an alliance; somebody to set up against the white men's influence — and somebody who, while favourable to Lakamba, would at the same time be a person of a good standing with the Dutch authorities. A rich and considered trader was wanted. Such a person once firmly established in Sambir would help them to oust the old Rajah, to remove him from power or from life if there was no other way. Then it would be time to apply to the Orang Blanda for a flag; for a

recognition of their meritorious services; for that protection which would make them safe for ever! The word of a rich and loyal trader would mean something with the Ruler down in Batavia. The first thing to do was to find such an ally and to induce him to settle in Sambir. A white trader would not do. A white man would not fall in with their ideas — would not be trustworthy. The man they wanted should be rich, unscrupulous, have many followers, and be a well-known personality in the islands. Such a man might be found amongst the Arab traders. Lingard's jealousy, said Babalatchi, kept all the traders out of the river. Some were afraid, and some did not know how to get there; others ignored the very existence of Sambir; a good many did not think it worth their while to run the risk of Lingard's enmity for the doubtful advantage of trade with a comparatively unknown settlement. The great majority were undesirable or untrustworthy. And Babalatchi mentioned regretfully the men he had known in his young days: wealthy, resolute, courageous, reckless, ready for any enterprise! But why lament the past and speak about the dead? There is one man — living — great — not far off . . .

Such was Babalatchi's line of policy laid before his ambitious protector. Lakamba assented, his only objection being that it was very slow work. In his extreme desire to grasp dollars and power, the unintellectual exile was ready to throw himself into the arms of any wandering cut-throat whose help could be secured, and Babalatchi experienced great difficulty in restraining him from unconsidered violence. It would not do to let it be seen that they had any hand in introducing a new element into the social and political life of Sambir. There was always a possibility of failure, and in that case Lingard's vengeance would be swift and certain. No risk should be run. They must wait.

Meantime he pervaded the settlement, squatting in the course of each day by many household fires, testing the public temper and public opinion — and always talking about his impending departure.

At night he would often take Lakamba's smallest canoe and depart silently to pay mysterious visits to his old chief on the other side of the river. Omar lived in odour of sanctity under the wing of Patalolo. Between the bamboo fence, enclosing the houses of the Rajah, and the wild forest, there was a banana plantation, and on its further edge stood two little houses built on low piles under a few precious fruit trees that grew on the banks of a clear brook, which, bubbling up behind the house, ran in its short and rapid course down to the big river. Along the brook a narrow path led through the dense second growth of a neglected clearing to the banana plantation and to the houses in it which the Rajah had given for residence to Omar. The Rajah was greatly impressed by Omar's ostentatious piety, by his oracular wisdom, by his many misfortunes, by the solemn fortitude with which he bore his affliction. Often the old ruler of Sambir would visit informally the blind Arab and listen gravely to his talk during the hot hours of an afternoon. In the night, Babalatchi would call and interrupt Omar's repose, unrebuked. Aissa, standing silently at the door of one of the huts, could see the two old friends as they sat very still by the fire in the middle of

the beaten ground between the two houses, talking in an indistinct murmur far into the night. She could not hear their words, but she watched the two formless shadows curiously. Finally Babalatchi would rise and, taking her father by the wrist, would lead him back to the house, arrange his mats for him, and go out quietly. Instead of going away, Babalatchi, unconscious of Aissa's eyes, often sat again by the fire, in a long and deep meditation. Aissa looked with respect on that wise and brave man — she was accustomed to see at her father's side as long as she could remember — sitting alone and thoughtful in the silent night by the dying fire, his body motionless and his mind wandering in the land of memories, or — who knows? — perhaps groping for a road in the waste spaces of the uncertain future.

Babalatchi noted the arrival of Willems with alarm at this new accession to the white men's strength. Afterwards he changed his opinion. He met Willems one night on the path leading to Omar's house, and noticed later on, with only a moderate surprise, that the blind Arab did not seem to be aware of the new white man's visits to the neighbourhood of his dwelling. Once, coming unexpectedly in the daytime, Babalatchi fancied he could see the gleam of a white jacket in the bushes on the other side of the brook. That day he watched Aissa pensively as she moved about preparing the evening rice; but after awhile he went hurriedly away before sunset, refusing Omar's hospitable invitation, in the name of Allah, to share their meal. That same evening he startled Lakamba by announcing that the time had come at last to make the first move in their long-deferred game. Lakamba asked excitedly for explanation. Babalatchi shook his head and pointed to the flitting shadows of moving women and to the vague forms of men sitting by the evening fires in the courtyard. Not a word would he speak here, he declared. But when the whole household was reposing, Babalatchi and Lakamba passed silent amongst sleeping groups to the riverside, and, taking a canoe, paddled off stealthily on their way to the dilapidated guard-hut in the old rice-clearing. There they were safe from all eyes and ears, and could account, if need be, for their excursion by the wish to kill a deer, the spot being well known as the drinking-place of all kinds of game. In the seclusion of its quiet solitude Babalatchi explained his plan to the attentive Lakamba. His idea was to make use of Willems for the destruction of Lingard's influence.

"I know the white men, Tuan," he said, in conclusion. "In many lands have I seen them; always the slaves of their desires, always ready to give up their strength and their reason into the hands of some woman. The fate of the Believers is written by the hand of the Mighty One, but they who worship many gods are thrown into the world with smooth foreheads, for any woman's hand to mark their destruction there. Let one white man destroy another. The will of the Most High is that they should be fools. They know how to keep faith with their enemies, but towards each other they know only deception. Hai! I have seen! I have seen!"

He stretched himself full length before the fire, and closed his eye in real or simulated sleep. Lakamba, not quite convinced, sat for a long time with his gaze riveted on the dull embers. As the night advanced, a slight white mist rose from the river, and the

declining moon, bowed over the tops of the forest, seemed to seek the repose of the earth, like a wayward and wandering lover who returns at last to lay his tired and silent head on his beloved's breast.

Chapter 6

“Lend me your gun, Almayer,” said Willems, across the table on which a smoky lamp shone redly above the disorder of a finished meal. “I have a mind to go and look for a deer when the moon rises to-night.”

Almayer, sitting sidewise to the table, his elbow pushed amongst the dirty plates, his chin on his breast and his legs stretched stiffly out, kept his eyes steadily on the toes of his grass slippers and laughed abruptly.

“You might say yes or no instead of making that unpleasant noise,” remarked Willems, with calm irritation.

“If I believed one word of what you say, I would,” answered Almayer without changing his attitude and speaking slowly, with pauses, as if dropping his words on the floor. “As it is — what’s the use? You know where the gun is; you may take it or leave it. Gun. Deer. Bosh! Hunt deer! Pah! It’s a . . . gazelle you are after, my honoured guest. You want gold anklets and silk sarongs for that game — my mighty hunter. And you won’t get those for the asking, I promise you. All day amongst the natives. A fine help you are to me.”

“You shouldn’t drink so much, Almayer,” said Willems, disguising his fury under an affected drawl. “You have no head. Never had, as far as I can remember, in the old days in Macassar. You drink too much.”

“I drink my own,” retorted Almayer, lifting his head quickly and darting an angry glance at Willems.

Those two specimens of the superior race glared at each other savagely for a minute, then turned away their heads at the same moment as if by previous arrangement, and both got up. Almayer kicked off his slippers and scrambled into his hammock, which hung between two wooden columns of the verandah so as to catch every rare breeze of the dry season, and Willems, after standing irresolutely by the table for a short time, walked without a word down the steps of the house and over the courtyard towards the little wooden jetty, where several small canoes and a couple of big white whale-boats were made fast, tugging at their short painters and bumping together in the swift current of the river. He jumped into the smallest canoe, balancing himself clumsily, slipped the rattan painter, and gave an unnecessary and violent shove, which nearly sent him headlong overboard. By the time he regained his balance the canoe had drifted some fifty yards down the river. He knelt in the bottom of his little craft and fought the current with long sweeps of the paddle. Almayer sat up in his hammock, grasping his feet and peering over the river with parted lips till he made out the shadowy form of man and canoe as they struggled past the jetty again.

“I thought you would go,” he shouted. “Won’t you take the gun? Hey?” he yelled, straining his voice. Then he fell back in his hammock and laughed to himself feebly till he fell asleep. On the river, Willems, his eyes fixed intently ahead, swept his paddle right and left, unheeding the words that reached him faintly.

It was now three months since Lingard had landed Willems in Sambir and had departed hurriedly, leaving him in Almayer’s care.

The two white men did not get on well together. Almayer, remembering the time when they both served Hudig, and when the superior Willems treated him with offensive condescension, felt a great dislike towards his guest. He was also jealous of Lingard’s favour. Almayer had married a Malay girl whom the old seaman had adopted in one of his accesses of unreasoning benevolence, and as the marriage was not a happy one from a domestic point of view, he looked to Lingard’s fortune for compensation in his matrimonial unhappiness. The appearance of that man, who seemed to have a claim of some sort upon Lingard, filled him with considerable uneasiness, the more so because the old seaman did not choose to acquaint the husband of his adopted daughter with Willems’ history, or to confide to him his intentions as to that individual’s future fate. Suspicious from the first, Almayer discouraged Willems’ attempts to help him in his trading, and then when Willems drew back, he made, with characteristic perverseness, a grievance of his unconcern. From cold civility in their relations, the two men drifted into silent hostility, then into outspoken enmity, and both wished ardently for Lingard’s return and the end of a situation that grew more intolerable from day to day. The time dragged slowly. Willems watched the succeeding sunrises wondering dismally whether before the evening some change would occur in the deadly dullness of his life. He missed the commercial activity of that existence which seemed to him far off, irreparably lost, buried out of sight under the ruins of his past success — now gone from him beyond the possibility of redemption. He mooned disconsolately about Almayer’s courtyard, watching from afar, with uninterested eyes, the up-country canoes discharging guttah or rattans, and loading rice or European goods on the little wharf of Lingard & Co. Big as was the extent of ground owned by Almayer, Willems yet felt that there was not enough room for him inside those neat fences. The man who, during long years, became accustomed to think of himself as indispensable to others, felt a bitter and savage rage at the cruel consciousness of his superfluity, of his uselessness; at the cold hostility visible in every look of the only white man in this barbarous corner of the world. He gnashed his teeth when he thought of the wasted days, of the life thrown away in the unwilling company of that peevish and suspicious fool. He heard the reproach of his idleness in the murmurs of the river, in the unceasing whisper of the great forests. Round him everything stirred, moved, swept by in a rush; the earth under his feet and the heavens above his head. The very savages around him strove, struggled, fought, worked — if only to prolong a miserable existence; but they lived, they lived! And it was only himself that seemed to be left outside the scheme of creation in a hopeless immobility filled with tormenting anger and with ever-stinging regret.

He took to wandering about the settlement. The afterwards flourishing Sambir was born in a swamp and passed its youth in malodorous mud. The houses crowded the bank, and, as if to get away from the unhealthy shore, stepped boldly into the river, shooting over it in a close row of bamboo platforms elevated on high piles, amongst which the current below spoke in a soft and unceasing plaint of murmuring eddies. There was only one path in the whole town and it ran at the back of the houses along the succession of blackened circular patches that marked the place of the household fires. On the other side the virgin forest bordered the path, coming close to it, as if to provoke impudently any passer-by to the solution of the gloomy problem of its depths. Nobody would accept the deceptive challenge. There were only a few feeble attempts at a clearing here and there, but the ground was low and the river, retiring after its yearly floods, left on each a gradually diminishing mudhole, where the imported buffaloes of the Bugis settlers wallowed happily during the heat of the day. When Willems walked on the path, the indolent men stretched on the shady side of the houses looked at him with calm curiosity, the women busy round the cooking fires would send after him wondering and timid glances, while the children would only look once, and then run away yelling with fright at the horrible appearance of the man with a red and white face. These manifestations of childish disgust and fear stung Willems with a sense of absurd humiliation; he sought in his walks the comparative solitude of the rudimentary clearings, but the very buffaloes snorted with alarm at his sight, scrambled lumberingly out of the cool mud and stared wildly in a compact herd at him as he tried to slink unperceived along the edge of the forest. One day, at some unguarded and sudden movement of his, the whole herd stampeded down the path, scattered the fires, sent the women flying with shrill cries, and left behind a track of smashed pots, trampled rice, overturned children, and a crowd of angry men brandishing sticks in loud-voiced pursuit. The innocent cause of that disturbance ran shamefacedly the gauntlet of black looks and unfriendly remarks, and hastily sought refuge in Almayer's campong. After that he left the settlement alone.

Later, when the enforced confinement grew irksome, Willems took one of Almayer's many canoes and crossed the main branch of the Pantai in search of some solitary spot where he could hide his discouragement and his weariness. He skirted in his little craft the wall of tangled verdure, keeping in the dead water close to the bank where the spreading nipa palms nodded their broad leaves over his head as if in contemptuous pity of the wandering outcast. Here and there he could see the beginnings of chopped-out pathways, and, with the fixed idea of getting out of sight of the busy river, he would land and follow the narrow and winding path, only to find that it led nowhere, ending abruptly in the discouragement of thorny thickets. He would go back slowly, with a bitter sense of unreasonable disappointment and sadness; oppressed by the hot smell of earth, dampness, and decay in that forest which seemed to push him mercilessly back into the glittering sunshine of the river. And he would recommence paddling with tired arms to seek another opening, to find another deception.

As he paddled up to the point where the Rajah's stockade came down to the river, the nipas were left behind rattling their leaves over the brown water, and the big trees would appear on the bank, tall, strong, indifferent in the immense solidity of their life, which endures for ages, to that short and fleeting life in the heart of the man who crept painfully amongst their shadows in search of a refuge from the unceasing reproach of his thoughts. Amongst their smooth trunks a clear brook meandered for a time in twining lacets before it made up its mind to take a leap into the hurrying river, over the edge of the steep bank. There was also a pathway there and it seemed frequented. Willems landed, and following the capricious promise of the track soon found himself in a comparatively clear space, where the confused tracery of sunlight fell through the branches and the foliage overhead, and lay on the stream that shone in an easy curve like a bright sword-blade dropped amongst the long and feathery grass.

Further on, the path continued, narrowed again in the thick undergrowth. At the end of the first turning Willems saw a flash of white and colour, a gleam of gold like a sun-ray lost in shadow, and a vision of blackness darker than the deepest shade of the forest. He stopped, surprised, and fancied he had heard light footsteps — growing lighter — ceasing. He looked around. The grass on the bank of the stream trembled and a tremulous path of its shivering, silver-grey tops ran from the water to the beginning of the thicket. And yet there was not a breath of wind. Somebody kind passed there. He looked pensive while the tremor died out in a quick tremble under his eyes; and the grass stood high, unstirring, with drooping heads in the warm and motionless air.

He hurried on, driven by a suddenly awakened curiosity, and entered the narrow way between the bushes. At the next turn of the path he caught again the glimpse of coloured stuff and of a woman's black hair before him. He hastened his pace and came in full view of the object of his pursuit. The woman, who was carrying two bamboo vessels full of water, heard his footsteps, stopped, and putting the bamboos down half turned to look back. Willems also stood still for a minute, then walked steadily on with a firm tread, while the woman moved aside to let him pass. He kept his eyes fixed straight before him, yet almost unconsciously he took in every detail of the tall and graceful figure. As he approached her the woman tossed her head slightly back, and with a free gesture of her strong, round arm, caught up the mass of loose black hair and brought it over her shoulder and across the lower part of her face. The next moment he was passing her close, walking rigidly, like a man in a trance. He heard her rapid breathing and he felt the touch of a look darted at him from half-open eyes. It touched his brain and his heart together. It seemed to him to be something loud and stirring like a shout, silent and penetrating like an inspiration. The momentum of his motion carried him past her, but an invisible force made up of surprise and curiosity and desire spun him round as soon as he had passed.

She had taken up her burden already, with the intention of pursuing her path. His sudden movement arrested her at the first step, and again she stood straight, slim, expectant, with a readiness to dart away suggested in the light immobility of her pose. High above, the branches of the trees met in a transparent shimmer of waving green

mist, through which the rain of yellow rays descended upon her head, streamed in glints down her black tresses, shone with the changing glow of liquid metal on her face, and lost itself in vanishing sparks in the sombre depths of her eyes that, wide open now, with enlarged pupils, looked steadily at the man in her path. And Willems stared at her, charmed with a charm that carries with it a sense of irreparable loss, tingling with that feeling which begins like a caress and ends in a blow, in that sudden hurt of a new emotion making its way into a human heart, with the brusque stirring of sleeping sensations awakening suddenly to the rush of new hopes, new fears, new desires — and to the flight of one's old self.

She moved a step forward and again halted. A breath of wind that came through the trees, but in Willems' fancy seemed to be driven by her moving figure, rippled in a hot wave round his body and scorched his face in a burning touch. He drew it in with a long breath, the last long breath of a soldier before the rush of battle, of a lover before he takes in his arms the adored woman; the breath that gives courage to confront the menace of death or the storm of passion.

Who was she? Where did she come from? Wonderingly he took his eyes off her face to look round at the serried trees of the forest that stood big and still and straight, as if watching him and her breathlessly. He had been baffled, repelled, almost frightened by the intensity of that tropical life which wants the sunshine but works in gloom; which seems to be all grace of colour and form, all brilliance, all smiles, but is only the blossoming of the dead; whose mystery holds the promise of joy and beauty, yet contains nothing but poison and decay. He had been frightened by the vague perception of danger before, but now, as he looked at that life again, his eyes seemed able to pierce the fantastic veil of creepers and leaves, to look past the solid trunks, to see through the forbidding gloom — and the mystery was disclosed — enchanting, subduing, beautiful. He looked at the woman. Through the checkered light between them she appeared to him with the impalpable distinctness of a dream. The very spirit of that land of mysterious forests, standing before him like an apparition behind a transparent veil — a veil woven of sunbeams and shadows.

She had approached him still nearer. He felt a strange impatience within him at her advance. Confused thoughts rushed through his head, disordered, shapeless, stunning. Then he heard his own voice asking —

“Who are you?”

“I am the daughter of the blind Omar,” she answered, in a low but steady tone. “And you,” she went on, a little louder, “you are the white trader — the great man of this place.”

“Yes,” said Willems, holding her eyes with his in a sense of extreme effort, “Yes, I am white.” Then he added, feeling as if he spoke about some other man, “But I am the outcast of my people.”

She listened to him gravely. Through the mesh of scattered hair her face looked like the face of a golden statue with living eyes. The heavy eyelids dropped slightly, and from between the long eyelashes she sent out a sidelong look: hard, keen, and narrow,

like the gleam of sharp steel. Her lips were firm and composed in a graceful curve, but the distended nostrils, the upward poise of the half-averted head, gave to her whole person the expression of a wild and resentful defiance.

A shadow passed over Willems' face. He put his hand over his lips as if to keep back the words that wanted to come out in a surge of impulsive necessity, the outcome of dominant thought that rushes from the heart to the brain and must be spoken in the face of doubt, of danger, of fear, of destruction itself.

"You are beautiful," he whispered.

She looked at him again with a glance that running in one quick flash of her eyes over his sunburnt features, his broad shoulders, his straight, tall, motionless figure, rested at last on the ground at his feet. Then she smiled. In the sombre beauty of her face that smile was like the first ray of light on a stormy daybreak that darts evanescent and pale through the gloomy clouds: the forerunner of sunrise and of thunder.

Chapter 7

There are in our lives short periods which hold no place in memory but only as the recollection of a feeling. There is no remembrance of gesture, of action, of any outward manifestation of life; those are lost in the unearthly brilliance or in the unearthly gloom of such moments. We are absorbed in the contemplation of that something, within our bodies, which rejoices or suffers while the body goes on breathing, instinctively runs away or, not less instinctively, fights — perhaps dies. But death in such a moment is the privilege of the fortunate, it is a high and rare favour, a supreme grace.

Willems never remembered how and when he parted from Aissa. He caught himself drinking the muddy water out of the hollow of his hand, while his canoe was drifting in mid-stream past the last houses of Sambir. With his returning wits came the fear of something unknown that had taken possession of his heart, of something inarticulate and masterful which could not speak and would be obeyed. His first impulse was that of revolt. He would never go back there. Never! He looked round slowly at the brilliance of things in the deadly sunshine and took up his paddle! How changed everything seemed! The river was broader, the sky was higher. How fast the canoe flew under the strokes of his paddle! Since when had he acquired the strength of two men or more? He looked up and down the reach at the forests of the bank with a confused notion that with one sweep of his hand he could tumble all these trees into the stream. His face felt burning. He drank again, and shuddered with a depraved sense of pleasure at the after-taste of slime in the water.

It was late when he reached Almayer's house, but he crossed the dark and uneven courtyard, walking lightly in the radiance of some light of his own, invisible to other eyes. His host's sulky greeting jarred him like a sudden fall down a great height. He took his place at the table opposite Almayer and tried to speak cheerfully to his gloomy companion, but when the meal was ended and they sat smoking in silence he felt an abrupt discouragement, a lassitude in all his limbs, a sense of immense sadness as after some great and irreparable loss. The darkness of the night entered his heart, bringing with it doubt and hesitation and dull anger with himself and all the world. He had an impulse to shout horrible curses, to quarrel with Almayer, to do something violent. Quite without any immediate provocation he thought he would like to assault the wretched, sulky beast. He glanced at him ferociously from under his eyebrows. The unconscious Almayer smoked thoughtfully, planning to-morrow's work probably. The man's composure seemed to Willems an unpardonable insult. Why didn't that idiot talk to-night when he wanted him to? . . . on other nights he was ready enough to chatter.

And such dull nonsense too! And Willems, trying hard to repress his own senseless rage, looked fixedly through the thick tobacco-smoke at the stained tablecloth.

They retired early, as usual, but in the middle of the night Willems leaped out of his hammock with a stifled execration and ran down the steps into the courtyard. The two night watchmen, who sat by a little fire talking together in a monotonous undertone, lifted their heads to look wonderingly at the discomposed features of the white man as he crossed the circle of light thrown out by their fire. He disappeared in the darkness and then came back again, passing them close, but with no sign of consciousness of their presence on his face. Backwards and forwards he paced, muttering to himself, and the two Malays, after a short consultation in whispers left the fire quietly, not thinking it safe to remain in the vicinity of a white man who behaved in such a strange manner. They retired round the corner of the godown and watched Willems curiously through the night, till the short daybreak was followed by the sudden blaze of the rising sun, and Almayer's establishment woke up to life and work.

As soon as he could get away unnoticed in the bustle of the busy riverside, Willems crossed the river on his way to the place where he had met Aissa. He threw himself down in the grass by the side of the brook and listened for the sound of her footsteps. The brilliant light of day fell through the irregular opening in the high branches of the trees and streamed down, softened, amongst the shadows of big trunks. Here and there a narrow sunbeam touched the rugged bark of a tree with a golden splash, sparkled on the leaping water of the brook, or rested on a leaf that stood out, shimmering and distinct, on the monotonous background of sombre green tints. The clear gap of blue above his head was crossed by the quick flight of white rice-birds whose wings flashed in the sunlight, while through it the heat poured down from the sky, clung about the steaming earth, rolled among the trees, and wrapped up Willems in the soft and odorous folds of air heavy with the faint scent of blossoms and with the acrid smell of decaying life. And in that atmosphere of Nature's workshop Willems felt soothed and lulled into forgetfulness of his past, into indifference as to his future. The recollections of his triumphs, of his wrongs and of his ambition vanished in that warmth, which seemed to melt all regrets, all hope, all anger, all strength out of his heart. And he lay there, dreamily contented, in the tepid and perfumed shelter, thinking of Aissa's eyes; recalling the sound of her voice, the quiver of her lips — her frowns and her smile.

She came, of course. To her he was something new, unknown and strange. He was bigger, stronger than any man she had seen before, and altogether different from all those she knew. He was of the victorious race. With a vivid remembrance of the great catastrophe of her life he appeared to her with all the fascination of a great and dangerous thing; of a terror vanquished, surmounted, made a plaything of. They spoke with just such a deep voice — those victorious men; they looked with just such hard blue eyes at their enemies. And she made that voice speak softly to her, those eyes look tenderly at her face! He was indeed a man. She could not understand all he told her of his life, but the fragments she understood she made up for herself into a story of a man great amongst his own people, valorous and unfortunate; an undaunted fugitive

dreaming of vengeance against his enemies. He had all the attractiveness of the vague and the unknown — of the unforeseen and of the sudden; of a being strong, dangerous, alive, and human, ready to be enslaved.

She felt that he was ready. She felt it with the unerring intuition of a primitive woman confronted by a simple impulse. Day after day, when they met and she stood a little way off, listening to his words, holding him with her look, the undefined terror of the new conquest became faint and blurred like the memory of a dream, and the certitude grew distinct, and convincing, and visible to the eyes like some material thing in full sunlight. It was a deep joy, a great pride, a tangible sweetness that seemed to leave the taste of honey on her lips. He lay stretched at her feet without moving, for he knew from experience how a slight movement of his could frighten her away in those first days of their intercourse. He lay very quiet, with all the ardour of his desire ringing in his voice and shining in his eyes, whilst his body was still, like death itself. And he looked at her, standing above him, her head lost in the shadow of broad and graceful leaves that touched her cheek; while the slender spikes of pale green orchids streamed down from amongst the boughs and mingled with the black hair that framed her face, as if all those plants claimed her for their own — the animated and brilliant flower of all that exuberant life which, born in gloom, struggles for ever towards the sunshine.

Every day she came a little nearer. He watched her slow progress — the gradual taming of that woman by the words of his love. It was the monotonous song of praise and desire that, commencing at creation, wraps up the world like an atmosphere and shall end only in the end of all things — when there are no lips to sing and no ears to hear. He told her that she was beautiful and desirable, and he repeated it again and again; for when he told her that, he had said all there was within him — he had expressed his only thought, his only feeling. And he watched the startled look of wonder and mistrust vanish from her face with the passing days, her eyes soften, the smile dwell longer and longer on her lips; a smile as of one charmed by a delightful dream; with the slight exaltation of intoxicating triumph lurking in its dawning tenderness.

And while she was near there was nothing in the whole world — for that idle man — but her look and her smile. Nothing in the past, nothing in the future; and in the present only the luminous fact of her existence. But in the sudden darkness of her going he would be left weak and helpless, as though despoiled violently of all that was himself. He who had lived all his life with no preoccupation but that of his own career, contemptuously indifferent to all feminine influence, full of scorn for men that would submit to it, if ever so little; he, so strong, so superior even in his errors, realized at last that his very individuality was snatched from within himself by the hand of a woman. Where was the assurance and pride of his cleverness; the belief in success, the anger of failure, the wish to retrieve his fortune, the certitude of his ability to accomplish it yet? Gone. All gone. All that had been a man within him was gone, and there remained only the trouble of his heart — that heart which had become a contemptible thing; which could be fluttered by a look or a smile, tormented by a word, soothed by a promise.

When the longed-for day came at last, when she sank on the grass by his side and with a quick gesture took his hand in hers, he sat up suddenly with the movement and look of a man awakened by the crash of his own falling house. All his blood, all his sensation, all his life seemed to rush into that hand leaving him without strength, in a cold shiver, in the sudden clamminess and collapse as of a deadly gun-shot wound. He flung her hand away brutally, like something burning, and sat motionless, his head fallen forward, staring on the ground and catching his breath in painful gasps. His impulse of fear and apparent horror did not dismay her in the least. Her face was grave and her eyes looked seriously at him. Her fingers touched the hair of his temple, ran in a light caress down his cheek, twisted gently the end of his long moustache: and while he sat in the tremor of that contact she ran off with startling fleetness and disappeared in a peal of clear laughter, in the stir of grass, in the nod of young twigs growing over the path; leaving behind only a vanishing trail of motion and sound.

He scrambled to his feet slowly and painfully, like a man with a burden on his shoulders, and walked towards the riverside. He hugged to his breast the recollection of his fear and of his delight, but told himself seriously over and over again that this must be the end of that adventure. After shoving off his canoe into the stream he lifted his eyes to the bank and gazed at it long and steadily, as if taking his last look at a place of charming memories. He marched up to Almayer's house with the concentrated expression and the determined step of a man who had just taken a momentous resolution. His face was set and rigid, his gestures and movements were guarded and slow. He was keeping a tight hand on himself. A very tight hand. He had a vivid illusion — as vivid as reality almost — of being in charge of a slippery prisoner. He sat opposite Almayer during that dinner — which was their last meal together — with a perfectly calm face and within him a growing terror of escape from his own self.

Now and then he would grasp the edge of the table and set his teeth hard in a sudden wave of acute despair, like one who, falling down a smooth and rapid declivity that ends in a precipice, digs his finger nails into the yielding surface and feels himself slipping helplessly to inevitable destruction.

Then, abruptly, came a relaxation of his muscles, the giving way of his will. Something seemed to snap in his head, and that wish, that idea kept back during all those hours, darted into his brain with the heat and noise of a conflagration. He must see her! See her at once! Go now! To-night! He had the raging regret of the lost hour, of every passing moment. There was no thought of resistance now. Yet with the instinctive fear of the irrevocable, with the innate falseness of the human heart, he wanted to keep open the way of retreat. He had never absented himself during the night. What did Almayer know? What would Almayer think? Better ask him for the gun. A moonlight night. . . . Look for deer. . . . A colourable pretext. He would lie to Almayer. What did it matter! He lied to himself every minute of his life. And for what? For a woman. And such. . . .

Almayer's answer showed him that deception was useless. Everything gets to be known, even in this place. Well, he did not care. Cared for nothing but for the lost seconds. What if he should suddenly die. Die before he saw her. Before he could . . .

As, with the sound of Almayer's laughter in his ears, he urged his canoe in a slanting course across the rapid current, he tried to tell himself that he could return at any moment. He would just go and look at the place where they used to meet, at the tree under which he lay when she took his hand, at the spot where she sat by his side. Just go there and then return — nothing more; but when his little skiff touched the bank he leaped out, forgetting the painter, and the canoe hung for a moment amongst the bushes and then swung out of sight before he had time to dash into the water and secure it. He was thunderstruck at first. Now he could not go back unless he called up the Rajah's people to get a boat and rowers — and the way to Patalolo's campong led past Aissa's house!

He went up the path with the eager eyes and reluctant steps of a man pursuing a phantom, and when he found himself at a place where a narrow track branched off to the left towards Omar's clearing he stood still, with a look of strained attention on his face as if listening to a far-off voice — the voice of his fate. It was a sound inarticulate but full of meaning; and following it there came a rending and tearing within his breast. He twisted his fingers together, and the joints of his hands and arms cracked. On his forehead the perspiration stood out in small pearly drops. He looked round wildly. Above the shapeless darkness of the forest undergrowth rose the treetops with their high boughs and leaves standing out black on the pale sky — like fragments of night floating on moonbeams. Under his feet warm steam rose from the heated earth. Round him there was a great silence.

He was looking round for help. This silence, this immobility of his surroundings seemed to him a cold rebuke, a stern refusal, a cruel unconcern. There was no safety outside of himself — and in himself there was no refuge; there was only the image of that woman. He had a sudden moment of lucidity — of that cruel lucidity that comes once in life to the most benighted. He seemed to see what went on within him, and was horrified at the strange sight. He, a white man whose worst fault till then had been a little want of judgment and too much confidence in the rectitude of his kind! That woman was a complete savage, and . . . He tried to tell himself that the thing was of no consequence. It was a vain effort. The novelty of the sensations he had never experienced before in the slightest degree, yet had despised on hearsay from his safe position of a civilized man, destroyed his courage. He was disappointed with himself. He seemed to be surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization. He had a notion of being lost amongst shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly. He struggled with the sense of certain defeat — lost his footing — fell back into the darkness. With a faint cry and an upward throw of his arms he gave up as a tired swimmer gives up: because the swamped craft is gone from under his feet; because the night is dark and the shore is far — because death is better than strife.

Part 2

Chapter 1

The light and heat fell upon the settlement, the clearings, and the river as if flung down by an angry hand. The land lay silent, still, and brilliant under the avalanche of burning rays that had destroyed all sound and all motion, had buried all shadows, had choked every breath. No living thing dared to affront the serenity of this cloudless sky, dared to revolt against the oppression of this glorious and cruel sunshine. Strength and resolution, body and mind alike were helpless, and tried to hide before the rush of the fire from heaven. Only the frail butterflies, the fearless children of the sun, the capricious tyrants of the flowers, fluttered audaciously in the open, and their minute shadows hovered in swarms over the drooping blossoms, ran lightly on the withering grass, or glided on the dry and cracked earth. No voice was heard in this hot noontide but the faint murmur of the river that hurried on in swirls and eddies, its sparkling wavelets chasing each other in their joyous course to the sheltering depths, to the cool refuge of the sea.

Almayer had dismissed his workmen for the midday rest, and, his little daughter on his shoulder, ran quickly across the courtyard, making for the shade of the verandah of his house. He laid the sleepy child on the seat of the big rocking-chair, on a pillow which he took out of his own hammock, and stood for a while looking down at her with tender and pensive eyes. The child, tired and hot, moved uneasily, sighed, and looked up at him with the veiled look of sleepy fatigue. He picked up from the floor a broken palm-leaf fan, and began fanning gently the flushed little face. Her eyelids fluttered and Almayer smiled. A responsive smile brightened for a second her heavy eyes, broke with a dimple the soft outline of her cheek; then the eyelids dropped suddenly, she drew a long breath through the parted lips — and was in a deep sleep before the fleeting smile could vanish from her face.

Almayer moved lightly off, took one of the wooden armchairs, and placing it close to the balustrade of the verandah sat down with a sigh of relief. He spread his elbows on the top rail and resting his chin on his clasped hands looked absently at the river, at the dance of sunlight on the flowing water. Gradually the forest of the further bank became smaller, as if sinking below the level of the river. The outlines wavered, grew thin, dissolved in the air. Before his eyes there was now only a space of undulating blue — one big, empty sky growing dark at times. . . . Where was the sunshine? . . . He felt soothed and happy, as if some gentle and invisible hand had removed from his soul the burden of his body. In another second he seemed to float out into a cool brightness where there was no such thing as memory or pain. Delicious. His eyes closed — opened — closed again.

“Almayer!”

With a sudden jerk of his whole body he sat up, grasping the front rail with both his hands, and blinked stupidly.

“What? What’s that?” he muttered, looking round vaguely.

“Here! Down here, Almayer.”

Half rising in his chair, Almayer looked over the rail at the foot of the verandah, and fell back with a low whistle of astonishment.

“A ghost, by heavens!” he exclaimed softly to himself.

“Will you listen to me?” went on the husky voice from the courtyard. “May I come up, Almayer?”

Almayer stood up and leaned over the rail. “Don’t you dare,” he said, in a voice subdued but distinct. “Don’t you dare! The child sleeps here. And I don’t want to hear you — or speak to you either.”

“You must listen to me! It’s something important.”

“Not to me, surely.”

“Yes! To you. Very important.”

“You were always a humbug,” said Almayer, after a short silence, in an indulgent tone. “Always! I remember the old days. Some fellows used to say there was no one like you for smartness — but you never took me in. Not quite. I never quite believed in you, Mr. Willems.”

“I admit your superior intelligence,” retorted Willems, with scornful impatience, from below. “Listening to me would be a further proof of it. You will be sorry if you don’t.”

“Oh, you funny fellow!” said Almayer, banteringly. “Well, come up. Don’t make a noise, but come up. You’ll catch a sunstroke down there and die on my doorstep perhaps. I don’t want any tragedy here. Come on!”

Before he finished speaking Willems’ head appeared above the level of the floor, then his shoulders rose gradually and he stood at last before Almayer — a masquerading spectre of the once so very confidential clerk of the richest merchant in the islands. His jacket was soiled and torn; below the waist he was clothed in a worn-out and faded sarong. He flung off his hat, uncovering his long, tangled hair that stuck in wisps on his perspiring forehead and straggled over his eyes, which glittered deep down in the sockets like the last sparks amongst the black embers of a burnt-out fire. An unclean beard grew out of the caverns of his sunburnt cheeks. The hand he put out towards Almayer was very unsteady. The once firm mouth had the tell-tale droop of mental suffering and physical exhaustion. He was barefooted. Almayer surveyed him with leisurely composure.

“Well!” he said at last, without taking the extended hand which dropped slowly along Willems’ body.

“I am come,” began Willems.

"So I see," interrupted Almayer. "You might have spared me this treat without making me unhappy. You have been away five weeks, if I am not mistaken. I got on very well without you — and now you are here you are not pretty to look at."

"Let me speak, will you!" exclaimed Willems.

"Don't shout like this. Do you think yourself in the forest with your . . . your friends? This is a civilized man's house. A white man's. Understand?"

"I am come," began Willems again; "I am come for your good and mine."

"You look as if you had come for a good feed," chimed in the irrepressible Almayer, while Willems waved his hand in a discouraged gesture. "Don't they give you enough to eat," went on Almayer, in a tone of easy banter, "those — what am I to call them — those new relations of yours? That old blind scoundrel must be delighted with your company. You know, he was the greatest thief and murderer of those seas. Say! do you exchange confidences? Tell me, Willems, did you kill somebody in Macassar or did you only steal something?"

"It is not true!" exclaimed Willems, hotly. "I only borrowed. . . . They all lied! I . . ."

"Sh-sh!" hissed Almayer, warningly, with a look at the sleeping child. "So you did steal," he went on, with repressed exultation. "I thought there was something of the kind. And now, here, you steal again."

For the first time Willems raised his eyes to Almayer's face.

"Oh, I don't mean from me. I haven't missed anything," said Almayer, with mocking haste. "But that girl. Hey! You stole her. You did not pay the old fellow. She is no good to him now, is she?"

"Stop that. Almayer!"

Something in Willems' tone caused Almayer to pause. He looked narrowly at the man before him, and could not help being shocked at his appearance.

"Almayer," went on Willems, "listen to me. If you are a human being you will. I suffer horribly — and for your sake."

Almayer lifted his eyebrows. "Indeed! How? But you are raving," he added, negligently.

"Ah! You don't know," whispered Willems. "She is gone. Gone," he repeated, with tears in his voice, "gone two days ago."

"No!" exclaimed the surprised Almayer. "Gone! I haven't heard that news yet." He burst into a subdued laugh. "How funny! Had enough of you already? You know it's not flattering for you, my superior countryman."

Willems — as if not hearing him — leaned against one of the columns of the roof and looked over the river. "At first," he whispered, dreamily, "my life was like a vision of heaven — or hell; I didn't know which. Since she went I know what perdition means; what darkness is. I know what it is to be torn to pieces alive. That's how I feel."

"You may come and live with me again," said Almayer, coldly. "After all, Lingard — whom I call my father and respect as such — left you under my care. You pleased yourself by going away. Very good. Now you want to come back. Be it so. I am no friend of yours. I act for Captain Lingard."

"Come back?" repeated Willems, passionately. "Come back to you and abandon her? Do you think I am mad? Without her! Man! what are you made of? To think that she moves, lives, breathes out of my sight. I am jealous of the wind that fans her, of the air she breathes, of the earth that receives the caress of her foot, of the sun that looks at her now while I . . . I haven't seen her for two days — two days."

The intensity of Willems' feeling moved Almayer somewhat, but he affected to yawn elaborately, "You do bore me," he muttered. "Why don't you go after her instead of coming here?"

"Why indeed?"

"Don't you know where she is? She can't be very far. No native craft has left this river for the last fortnight."

"No! not very far — and I will tell you where she is. She is in Lakamba's campong." And Willems fixed his eyes steadily on Almayer's face.

"Phew! Patalolo never sent to let me know. Strange," said Almayer, thoughtfully. "Are you afraid of that lot?" he added, after a short pause.

"I — afraid!"

"Then is it the care of your dignity which prevents you from following her there, my high-minded friend?" asked Almayer, with mock solicitude. "How noble of you!"

There was a short silence; then Willems said, quietly, "You are a fool. I should like to kick you."

"No fear," answered Almayer, carelessly; "you are too weak for that. You look starved."

"I don't think I have eaten anything for the last two days; perhaps more — I don't remember. It does not matter. I am full of live embers," said Willems, gloomily. "Look!" and he bared an arm covered with fresh scars. "I have been biting myself to forget in that pain the fire that hurts me there!" He struck his breast violently with his fist, reeled under his own blow, fell into a chair that stood near and closed his eyes slowly.

"Disgusting exhibition," said Almayer, loftily. "What could father ever see in you? You are as estimable as a heap of garbage."

"You talk like that! You, who sold your soul for a few guilders," muttered Willems, wearily, without opening his eyes.

"Not so few," said Almayer, with instinctive readiness, and stopped confused for a moment. He recovered himself quickly, however, and went on: "But you — you have thrown yours away for nothing; flung it under the feet of a damned savage woman who has made you already the thing you are, and will kill you very soon, one way or another, with her love or with her hate. You spoke just now about guilders. You meant Lingard's money, I suppose. Well, whatever I have sold, and for whatever price, I never meant you — you of all people — to spoil my bargain. I feel pretty safe though. Even father, even Captain Lingard, would not touch you now with a pair of tongs; not with a ten-foot pole. . . ."

He spoke excitedly, all in one breath, and, ceasing suddenly, glared at Willems and breathed hard through his nose in sulky resentment. Willems looked at him steadily for a moment, then got up.

“Almayer,” he said resolutely, “I want to become a trader in this place.”

Almayer shrugged his shoulders.

“Yes. And you shall set me up. I want a house and trade goods — perhaps a little money. I ask you for it.”

“Anything else you want? Perhaps this coat?” and here Almayer unbuttoned his jacket — “or my house — or my boots?”

“After all it’s natural,” went on Willems, without paying any attention to Almayer — “it’s natural that she should expect the advantages which . . . and then I could shut up that old wretch and then . . .”

He paused, his face brightened with the soft light of dreamy enthusiasm, and he turned his eyes upwards. With his gaunt figure and dilapidated appearance he looked like some ascetic dweller in a wilderness, finding the reward of a self-denying life in a vision of dazzling glory. He went on in an impassioned murmur —

“And then I would have her all to myself away from her people — all to myself — under my own influence — to fashion — to mould — to adore — to soften — to . . . Oh! Delight! And then — then go away to some distant place where, far from all she knew, I would be all the world to her! All the world to her!”

His face changed suddenly. His eyes wandered for awhile and then became steady all at once.

“I would repay every cent, of course,” he said, in a business-like tone, with something of his old assurance, of his old belief in himself, in it. “Every cent. I need not interfere with your business. I shall cut out the small native traders. I have ideas — but never mind that now. And Captain Lingard would approve, I feel sure. After all it’s a loan, and I shall be at hand. Safe thing for you.”

“Ah! Captain Lingard would approve! He would app . . .” Almayer choked. The notion of Lingard doing something for Willems enraged him. His face was purple. He spluttered insulting words. Willems looked at him coolly.

“I assure you, Almayer,” he said, gently, “that I have good grounds for my demand.”

“Your cursed impudence!”

“Believe me, Almayer, your position here is not so safe as you may think. An unscrupulous rival here would destroy your trade in a year. It would be ruin. Now Lingard’s long absence gives courage to certain individuals. You know? — I have heard much lately. They made proposals to me . . . You are very much alone here. Even Patalolo . . .”

“Damn Patalolo! I am master in this place.”

“But, Almayer, don’t you see . . .”

“Yes, I see. I see a mysterious ass,” interrupted Almayer, violently. “What is the meaning of your veiled threats? Don’t you think I know something also? They have been intriguing for years — and nothing has happened. The Arabs have been hanging

about outside this river for years — and I am still the only trader here; the master here. Do you bring me a declaration of war? Then it's from yourself only. I know all my other enemies. I ought to knock you on the head. You are not worth powder and shot though. You ought to be destroyed with a stick — like a snake.”

Almayer's voice woke up the little girl, who sat up on the pillow with a sharp cry. He rushed over to the chair, caught up the child in his arms, walked back blindly, stumbled against Willems' hat which lay on the floor, and kicked it furiously down the steps.

“Clear out of this! Clear out!” he shouted.

Willems made an attempt to speak, but Almayer howled him down.

“Take yourself off! Don't you see you frighten the child — you scarecrow! No, no! dear,” he went on to his little daughter, soothingly, while Willems walked down the steps slowly. “No. Don't cry. See! Bad man going away. Look! He is afraid of your papa. Nasty, bad man. Never come back again. He shall live in the woods and never come near my little girl. If he comes papa will kill him — so!” He struck his fist on the rail of the balustrade to show how he would kill Willems, and, perching the consoled child on his shoulder held her with one hand, while he pointed toward the retreating figure of his visitor.

“Look how he runs away, dearest,” he said, coaxingly. “Isn't he funny. Call 'pig' after him, dearest. Call after him.”

The seriousness of her face vanished into dimples. Under the long eyelashes, glistening with recent tears, her big eyes sparkled and danced with fun. She took firm hold of Almayer's hair with one hand, while she waved the other joyously and called out with all her might, in a clear note, soft and distinct like the pipe of a bird: —

“Pig! Pig! Pig!”

Chapter 2

A sigh under the flaming blue, a shiver of the sleeping sea, a cool breath as if a door had been swung upon the frozen spaces of the universe, and with a stir of leaves, with the nod of boughs, with the tremble of slender branches the sea breeze struck the coast, rushed up the river, swept round the broad reaches, and travelled on in a soft ripple of darkening water, in the whisper of branches, in the rustle of leaves of the awakened forests. It fanned in Lakamba's campong the dull red of expiring embers into a pale brilliance; and, under its touch, the slender, upright spirals of smoke that rose from every glowing heap swayed, wavered, and eddying down filled the twilight of clustered shade trees with the aromatic scent of the burning wood. The men who had been dozing in the shade during the hot hours of the afternoon woke up, and the silence of the big courtyard was broken by the hesitating murmur of yet sleepy voices, by coughs and yawns, with now and then a burst of laughter, a loud hail, a name or a joke sent out in a soft drawl. Small groups squatted round the little fires, and the monotonous undertone of talk filled the enclosure; the talk of barbarians, persistent, steady, repeating itself in the soft syllables, in musical tones of the never-ending discourses of those men of the forests and the sea, who can talk most of the day and all the night; who never exhaust a subject, never seem able to thresh a matter out; to whom that talk is poetry and painting and music, all art, all history; their only accomplishment, their only superiority, their only amusement. The talk of camp fires, which speaks of bravery and cunning, of strange events and of far countries, of the news of yesterday and the news of to-morrow. The talk about the dead and the living — about those who fought and those who loved.

Lakamba came out on the platform before his own house and sat down — perspiring, half asleep, and sulky — in a wooden armchair under the shade of the overhanging eaves. Through the darkness of the doorway he could hear the soft warbling of his womenkind, busy round the looms where they were weaving the checkered pattern of his gala sarongs. Right and left of him on the flexible bamboo floor those of his followers to whom their distinguished birth, long devotion, or faithful service had given the privilege of using the chief's house, were sleeping on mats or just sat up rubbing their eyes: while the more wakeful had mustered enough energy to draw a chessboard with red clay on a fine mat and were now meditating silently over their moves. Above the prostrate forms of the players, who lay face downward supported on elbow, the soles of their feet waving irresolutely about, in the absorbed meditation of the game, there towered here and there the straight figure of an attentive spectator looking down with dispassionate but profound interest. On the edge of the platform a row of high-heeled

leather sandals stood ranged carefully in a level line, and against the rough wooden rail leaned the slender shafts of the spears belonging to these gentlemen, the broad blades of dulled steel looking very black in the reddening light of approaching sunset.

A boy of about twelve — the personal attendant of Lakamba — squatted at his master's feet and held up towards him a silver siri box. Slowly Lakamba took the box, opened it, and tearing off a piece of green leaf deposited in it a pinch of lime, a morsel of gambier, a small bit of areca nut, and wrapped up the whole with a dexterous twist. He paused, morsel in hand, seemed to miss something, turned his head from side to side, slowly, like a man with a stiff neck, and ejaculated in an ill-humoured bass —

“Babalatchi!”

The players glanced up quickly, and looked down again directly. Those men who were standing stirred uneasily as if prodded by the sound of the chief's voice. The one nearest to Lakamba repeated the call, after a while, over the rail into the courtyard. There was a movement of upturned faces below by the fires, and the cry trailed over the enclosure in sing-song tones. The thumping of wooden pestles husking the evening rice stopped for a moment and Babalatchi's name rang afresh shrilly on women's lips in various keys. A voice far off shouted something — another, nearer, repeated it; there was a short hubbub which died out with extreme suddenness. The first crier turned to Lakamba, saying indolently —

“He is with the blind Omar.”

Lakamba's lips moved inaudibly. The man who had just spoken was again deeply absorbed in the game going on at his feet; and the chief — as if he had forgotten all about it already — sat with a stolid face amongst his silent followers, leaning back squarely in his chair, his hands on the arms of his seat, his knees apart, his big blood-shot eyes blinking solemnly, as if dazzled by the noble vacuity of his thoughts.

Babalatchi had gone to see old Omar late in the afternoon. The delicate manipulation of the ancient pirate's susceptibilities, the skilful management of Aissa's violent impulses engrossed him to the exclusion of every other business — interfered with his regular attendance upon his chief and protector — even disturbed his sleep for the last three nights. That day when he left his own bamboo hut — which stood amongst others in Lakamba's campong — his heart was heavy with anxiety and with doubt as to the success of his intrigue. He walked slowly, with his usual air of detachment from his surroundings, as if unaware that many sleepy eyes watched from all parts of the courtyard his progress towards a small gate at its upper end. That gate gave access to a separate enclosure in which a rather large house, built of planks, had been prepared by Lakamba's orders for the reception of Omar and Aissa. It was a superior kind of habitation which Lakamba intended for the dwelling of his chief adviser — whose abilities were worth that honour, he thought. But after the consultation in the deserted clearing — when Babalatchi had disclosed his plan — they both had agreed that the new house should be used at first to shelter Omar and Aissa after they had been persuaded to leave the Rajah's place, or had been kidnapped from there — as the case might be. Babalatchi did not mind in the least the putting off of his own occupation

of the house of honour, because it had many advantages for the quiet working out of his plans. It had a certain seclusion, having an enclosure of its own, and that enclosure communicated also with Lakamba's private courtyard at the back of his residence — a place set apart for the female household of the chief. The only communication with the river was through the great front courtyard always full of armed men and watchful eyes. Behind the whole group of buildings there stretched the level ground of rice-clearings, which in their turn were closed in by the wall of untouched forests with undergrowth so thick and tangled that nothing but a bullet — and that fired at pretty close range — could penetrate any distance there.

Babalatchi slipped quietly through the little gate and, closing it, tied up carefully the rattan fastenings. Before the house there was a square space of ground, beaten hard into the level smoothness of asphalt. A big buttressed tree, a giant left there on purpose during the process of clearing the land, roofed in the clear space with a high canopy of gnarled boughs and thick, sombre leaves. To the right — and some small distance away from the large house — a little hut of reeds, covered with mats, had been put up for the special convenience of Omar, who, being blind and infirm, had some difficulty in ascending the steep plankway that led to the more substantial dwelling, which was built on low posts and had an uncovered verandah. Close by the trunk of the tree, and facing the doorway of the hut, the household fire glowed in a small handful of embers in the midst of a large circle of white ashes. An old woman — some humble relation of one of Lakamba's wives, who had been ordered to attend on Aissa — was squatting over the fire and lifted up her bleared eyes to gaze at Babalatchi in an uninterested manner, as he advanced rapidly across the courtyard.

Babalatchi took in the courtyard with a keen glance of his solitary eye, and without looking down at the old woman muttered a question. Silently, the woman stretched a tremulous and emaciated arm towards the hut. Babalatchi made a few steps towards the doorway, but stopped outside in the sunlight.

“O! Tuan Omar, Omar besar! It is I — Babalatchi!”

Within the hut there was a feeble groan, a fit of coughing and an indistinct murmur in the broken tones of a vague plaint. Encouraged evidently by those signs of dismal life within, Babalatchi entered the hut, and after some time came out leading with rigid carefulness the blind Omar, who followed with both his hands on his guide's shoulders. There was a rude seat under the tree, and there Babalatchi led his old chief, who sat down with a sigh of relief and leaned wearily against the rugged trunk. The rays of the setting sun, darting under the spreading branches, rested on the white-robed figure sitting with head thrown back in stiff dignity, on the thin hands moving uneasily, and on the stolid face with its eyelids dropped over the destroyed eyeballs; a face set into the immobility of a plaster cast yellowed by age.

“Is the sun near its setting?” asked Omar, in a dull voice.

“Very near,” answered Babalatchi.

“Where am I? Why have I been taken away from the place which I knew — where I, blind, could move without fear? It is like black night to those who see. And the sun is

near its setting — and I have not heard the sound of her footsteps since the morning! Twice a strange hand has given me my food to-day. Why? Why? Where is she?”

“She is near,” said Babalatchi.

“And he?” went on Omar, with sudden eagerness, and a drop in his voice. “Where is he? Not here. Not here!” he repeated, turning his head from side to side as if in deliberate attempt to see.

“No! He is not here now,” said Babalatchi, soothingly. Then, after a pause, he added very low, “But he shall soon return.”

“Return! O crafty one! Will he return? I have cursed him three times,” exclaimed Omar, with weak violence.

“He is — no doubt — accursed,” assented Babalatchi, in a conciliating manner — “and yet he will be here before very long — I know!”

“You are crafty and faithless. I have made you great. You were dirt under my feet — less than dirt,” said Omar, with tremulous energy.

“I have fought by your side many times,” said Babalatchi, calmly.

“Why did he come?” went on Omar. “Did you send him? Why did he come to defile the air I breathe — to mock at my fate — to poison her mind and steal her body? She has grown hard of heart to me. Hard and merciless and stealthy like rocks that tear a ship’s life out under the smooth sea.” He drew a long breath, struggled with his anger, then broke down suddenly. “I have been hungry,” he continued, in a whimpering tone — “often I have been very hungry — and cold — and neglected — and nobody near me. She has often forgotten me — and my sons are dead, and that man is an infidel and a dog. Why did he come? Did you show him the way?”

“He found the way himself, O Leader of the brave,” said Babalatchi, sadly. “I only saw a way for their destruction and our own greatness. And if I saw aright, then you shall never suffer from hunger any more. There shall be peace for us, and glory and riches.”

“And I shall die to-morrow,” murmured Omar, bitterly.

“Who knows? Those things have been written since the beginning of the world,” whispered Babalatchi, thoughtfully.

“Do not let him come back,” exclaimed Omar.

“Neither can he escape his fate,” went on Babalatchi. “He shall come back, and the power of men we always hated, you and I, shall crumble into dust in our hand.” Then he added with enthusiasm, “They shall fight amongst themselves and perish both.”

“And you shall see all this, while, I . . .”

“True!” murmured Babalatchi, regretfully. “To you life is darkness.”

“No! Flame!” exclaimed the old Arab, half rising, then falling back in his seat. “The flame of that last day! I see it yet — the last thing I saw! And I hear the noise of the rent earth — when they all died. And I live to be the plaything of a crafty one,” he added, with inconsequential peevishness.

“You are my master still,” said Babalatchi, humbly. “You are very wise — and in your wisdom you shall speak to Syed Abdulla when he comes here — you shall speak

to him as I advised, I, your servant, the man who fought at your right hand for many years. I have heard by a messenger that the Syed Abdulla is coming to-night, perhaps late; for those things must be done secretly, lest the white man, the trader up the river, should know of them. But he will be here. There has been a surat delivered to Lakamba. In it, Syed Abdulla says he will leave his ship, which is anchored outside the river, at the hour of noon to-day. He will be here before daylight if Allah wills."

He spoke with his eye fixed on the ground, and did not become aware of Aissa's presence till he lifted his head when he ceased speaking. She had approached so quietly that even Omar did not hear her footsteps, and she stood now looking at them with troubled eyes and parted lips, as if she was going to speak; but at Babalatchi's entreating gesture she remained silent. Omar sat absorbed in thought.

"Ay wa! Even so!" he said at last, in a weak voice. "I am to speak your wisdom, O Babalatchi! Tell him to trust the white man! I do not understand. I am old and blind and weak. I do not understand. I am very cold," he continued, in a lower tone, moving his shoulders uneasily. He ceased, then went on rambling in a faint whisper. "They are the sons of witches, and their father is Satan the stoned. Sons of witches. Sons of witches." After a short silence he asked suddenly, in a firmer voice — "How many white men are there here, O crafty one?"

"There are two here. Two white men to fight one another," answered Babalatchi, with alacrity.

"And how many will be left then? How many? Tell me, you who are wise."

"The downfall of an enemy is the consolation of the unfortunate," said Babalatchi, sententiously. "They are on every sea; only the wisdom of the Most High knows their number — but you shall know that some of them suffer."

"Tell me, Babalatchi, will they die? Will they both die?" asked Omar, in sudden agitation.

Aissa made a movement. Babalatchi held up a warning hand.

"They shall, surely, die," he said steadily, looking at the girl with unflinching eye.

"Ay wa! But die soon! So that I can pass my hand over their faces when Allah has made them stiff."

"If such is their fate and yours," answered Babalatchi, without hesitation. "God is great!"

A violent fit of coughing doubled Omar up, and he rocked himself to and fro, wheezing and moaning in turns, while Babalatchi and the girl looked at him in silence. Then he leaned back against the tree, exhausted.

"I am alone, I am alone," he wailed feebly, groping vaguely about with his trembling hands. "Is there anybody near me? Is there anybody? I am afraid of this strange place."

"I am by your side, O Leader of the brave," said Babalatchi, touching his shoulder lightly. "Always by your side as in the days when we both were young: as in the time when we both went with arms in our hands."

"Has there been such a time, Babalatchi?" said Omar, wildly; "I have forgotten. And now when I die there will be no man, no fearless man to speak of his father's bravery."

There was a woman! A woman! And she has forsaken me for an infidel dog. The hand of the Compassionate is heavy on my head! Oh, my calamity! Oh, my shame!"

He calmed down after a while, and asked quietly —

"Is the sun set, Babalatchi?"

"It is now as low as the highest tree I can see from here," answered Babalatchi.

"It is the time of prayer," said Omar, attempting to get up.

Dutifully Babalatchi helped his old chief to rise, and they walked slowly towards the hut. Omar waited outside, while Babalatchi went in and came out directly, dragging after him the old Arab's praying carpet. Out of a brass vessel he poured the water of ablution on Omar's outstretched hands, and eased him carefully down into a kneeling posture, for the venerable robber was far too infirm to be able to stand. Then as Omar droned out the first words and made his first bow towards the Holy City, Babalatchi stepped noiselessly towards Aissa, who did not move all the time.

Aissa looked steadily at the one-eyed sage, who was approaching her slowly and with a great show of deference. For a moment they stood facing each other in silence. Babalatchi appeared embarrassed. With a sudden and quick gesture she caught hold of his arm, and with the other hand pointed towards the sinking red disc that glowed, rayless, through the floating mists of the evening.

"The third sunset! The last! And he is not here," she whispered; "what have you done, man without faith? What have you done?"

"Indeed I have kept my word," murmured Babalatchi, earnestly. "This morning Bulangani went with a canoe to look for him. He is a strange man, but our friend, and shall keep close to him and watch him without ostentation. And at the third hour of the day I have sent another canoe with four rowers. Indeed, the man you long for, O daughter of Omar! may come when he likes."

"But he is not here! I waited for him yesterday. To-day! To-morrow I shall go."

"Not alive!" muttered Babalatchi to himself. "And do you doubt your power," he went on in a louder tone — "you that to him are more beautiful than an houri of the seventh Heaven? He is your slave."

"A slave does run away sometimes," she said, gloomily, "and then the master must go and seek him out."

"And do you want to live and die a beggar?" asked Babalatchi, impatiently.

"I care not," she exclaimed, wringing her hands; and the black pupils of her wide-open eyes darted wildly here and there like petrels before the storm.

"Sh! Sh!" hissed Babalatchi, with a glance towards Omar. "Do you think, O girl! that he himself would live like a beggar, even with you?"

"He is great," she said, ardently. "He despises you all! He despises you all! He is indeed a man!"

"You know that best," muttered Babalatchi, with a fugitive smile — "but remember, woman with the strong heart, that to hold him now you must be to him like the great sea to thirsty men — a never-ceasing torment, and a madness."

He ceased and they stood in silence, both looking on the ground, and for a time nothing was heard above the crackling of the fire but the intoning of Omar glorifying the God — his God, and the Faith — his faith. Then Babalatchi cocked his head on one side and appeared to listen intently to the hum of voices in the big courtyard. The dull noise swelled into distinct shouts, then into a great tumult of voices, dying away, recommencing, growing louder, to cease again abruptly; and in those short pauses the shrill vociferations of women rushed up, as if released, towards the quiet heaven. Aissa and Babalatchi started, but the latter gripped in his turn the girl's arm and restrained her with a strong grasp.

"Wait," he whispered.

The little door in the heavy stockade which separated Lakamba's private ground from Omar's enclosure swung back quickly, and the noble exile appeared with disturbed mien and a naked short sword in his hand. His turban was half unrolled, and the end trailed on the ground behind him. His jacket was open. He breathed thickly for a moment before he spoke.

"He came in Bulangi's boat," he said, "and walked quietly till he was in my presence, when the senseless fury of white men caused him to rush upon me. I have been in great danger," went on the ambitious nobleman in an aggrieved tone. "Do you hear that, Babalatchi? That eater of swine aimed a blow at my face with his unclean fist. He tried to rush amongst my household. Six men are holding him now."

A fresh outburst of yells stopped Lakamba's discourse. Angry voices shouted: "Hold him. Beat him down. Strike at his head."

Then the clamour ceased with sudden completeness, as if strangled by a mighty hand, and after a second of surprising silence the voice of Willems was heard alone, howling maledictions in Malay, in Dutch, and in English.

"Listen," said Lakamba, speaking with unsteady lips, "he blasphemes his God. His speech is like the raving of a mad dog. Can we hold him for ever? He must be killed!"

"Fool!" muttered Babalatchi, looking up at Aissa, who stood with set teeth, with gleaming eyes and distended nostrils, yet obedient to the touch of his restraining hand. "It is the third day, and I have kept my promise," he said to her, speaking very low. "Remember," he added warningly — "like the sea to the thirsty! And now," he said aloud, releasing her and stepping back, "go, fearless daughter, go!"

Like an arrow, rapid and silent she flew down the enclosure, and disappeared through the gate of the courtyard. Lakamba and Babalatchi looked after her. They heard the renewed tumult, the girl's clear voice calling out, "Let him go!" Then after a pause in the din no longer than half the human breath the name of Aissa rang in a shout loud, discordant, and piercing, which sent through them an involuntary shudder. Old Omar collapsed on his carpet and moaned feebly; Lakamba stared with gloomy contempt in the direction of the inhuman sound; but Babalatchi, forcing a smile, pushed his distinguished protector through the narrow gate in the stockade, followed him, and closed it quickly.

The old woman, who had been most of the time kneeling by the fire, now rose, glanced round fearfully and crouched hiding behind the tree. The gate of the great courtyard flew open with a great clatter before a frantic kick, and Willems darted in carrying Aissa in his arms. He rushed up the enclosure like a tornado, pressing the girl to his breast, her arms round his neck, her head hanging back over his arm, her eyes closed and her long hair nearly touching the ground. They appeared for a second in the glare of the fire, then, with immense strides, he dashed up the planks and disappeared with his burden in the doorway of the big house.

Inside and outside the enclosure there was silence. Omar lay supporting himself on his elbow, his terrified face with its closed eyes giving him the appearance of a man tormented by a nightmare.

“What is it? Help! Help me to rise!” he called out faintly.

The old hag, still crouching in the shadow, stared with bleared eyes at the doorway of the big house, and took no notice of his call. He listened for a while, then his arm gave way, and, with a deep sigh of discouragement, he let himself fall on the carpet.

The boughs of the tree nodded and trembled in the unsteady currents of the light wind. A leaf fluttered down slowly from some high branch and rested on the ground, immobile, as if resting for ever, in the glow of the fire; but soon it stirred, then soared suddenly, and flew, spinning and turning before the breath of the perfumed breeze, driven helplessly into the dark night that had closed over the land.

Chapter 3

For upwards of forty years Abdulla had walked in the way of his Lord. Son of the rich Syed Selim bin Sali, the great Mohammedan trader of the Straits, he went forth at the age of seventeen on his first commercial expedition, as his father's representative on board a pilgrim ship chartered by the wealthy Arab to convey a crowd of pious Malays to the Holy Shrine. That was in the days when steam was not in those seas — or, at least, not so much as now. The voyage was long, and the young man's eyes were opened to the wonders of many lands. Allah had made it his fate to become a pilgrim very early in life. This was a great favour of Heaven, and it could not have been bestowed upon a man who prized it more, or who made himself more worthy of it by the unswerving piety of his heart and by the religious solemnity of his demeanour. Later on it became clear that the book of his destiny contained the programme of a wandering life. He visited Bombay and Calcutta, looked in at the Persian Gulf, beheld in due course the high and barren coasts of the Gulf of Suez, and this was the limit of his wanderings westward. He was then twenty-seven, and the writing on his forehead decreed that the time had come for him to return to the Straits and take from his dying father's hands the many threads of a business that was spread over all the Archipelago: from Sumatra to New Guinea, from Batavia to Palawan.

Very soon his ability, his will — strong to obstinacy — his wisdom beyond his years, caused him to be recognized as the head of a family whose members and connections were found in every part of those seas. An uncle here — a brother there; a father-in-law in Batavia, another in Palembang; husbands of numerous sisters; cousins innumerable scattered north, south, east, and west — in every place where there was trade: the great family lay like a network over the islands. They lent money to princes, influenced the council-rooms, faced — if need be — with peaceful intrepidity the white rulers who held the land and the sea under the edge of sharp swords; and they all paid great deference to Abdulla, listened to his advice, entered into his plans — because he was wise, pious, and fortunate.

He bore himself with the humility becoming a Believer, who never forgets, even for one moment of his waking life, that he is the servant of the Most High. He was largely charitable because the charitable man is the friend of Allah, and when he walked out of his house — built of stone, just outside the town of Penang — on his way to his godowns in the port, he had often to snatch his hand away sharply from under the lips of men of his race and creed; and often he had to murmur deprecating words, or even to rebuke with severity those who attempted to touch his knees with their finger-tips in gratitude or supplication. He was very handsome, and carried his small head high with

meek gravity. His lofty brow, straight nose, narrow, dark face with its chiselled delicacy of feature, gave him an aristocratic appearance which proclaimed his pure descent. His beard was trimmed close and to a rounded point. His large brown eyes looked out steadily with a sweetness that was belied by the expression of his thin-lipped mouth. His aspect was serene. He had a belief in his own prosperity which nothing could shake.

Restless, like all his people, he very seldom dwelt for many days together in his splendid house in Penang. Owner of ships, he was often on board one or another of them, traversing in all directions the field of his operations. In every port he had a household — his own or that of a relation — to hail his advent with demonstrative joy. In every port there were rich and influential men eager to see him, there was business to talk over, there were important letters to read: an immense correspondence, enclosed in silk envelopes — a correspondence which had nothing to do with the infidels of colonial post-offices, but came into his hands by devious, yet safe, ways. It was left for him by taciturn nakhodas of native trading craft, or was delivered with profound salaams by travel-stained and weary men who would withdraw from his presence calling upon Allah to bless the generous giver of splendid rewards. And the news was always good, and all his attempts always succeeded, and in his ears there rang always a chorus of admiration, of gratitude, of humble entreaties.

A fortunate man. And his felicity was so complete that the good genii, who ordered the stars at his birth, had not neglected — by a refinement of benevolence strange in such primitive beings — to provide him with a desire difficult to attain, and with an enemy hard to overcome. The envy of Lingard's political and commercial successes, and the wish to get the best of him in every way, became Abdulla's mania, the paramount interest of his life, the salt of his existence.

For the last few months he had been receiving mysterious messages from Sambir urging him to decisive action. He had found the river a couple of years ago, and had been anchored more than once off that estuary where the, till then, rapid Pantai, spreading slowly over the lowlands, seems to hesitate, before it flows gently through twenty outlets; over a maze of mudflats, sandbanks and reefs, into the expectant sea. He had never attempted the entrance, however, because men of his race, although brave and adventurous travellers, lack the true seamanlike instincts, and he was afraid of getting wrecked. He could not bear the idea of the Rajah Laut being able to boast that Abdulla bin Selim, like other and lesser men, had also come to grief when trying to wrest his secret from him. Meantime he returned encouraging answers to his unknown friends in Sambir, and waited for his opportunity in the calm certitude of ultimate triumph.

Such was the man whom Lakamba and Babalatchi expected to see for the first time on the night of Willems' return to Aissa. Babalatchi, who had been tormented for three days by the fear of having over-reached himself in his little plot, now, feeling sure of his white man, felt lighthearted and happy as he superintended the preparations in the courtyard for Abdulla's reception. Half-way between Lakamba's house and the river a pile of dry wood was made ready for the torch that would set fire to it at the

moment of Abdulla's landing. Between this and the house again there was, ranged in a semicircle, a set of low bamboo frames, and on those were piled all the carpets and cushions of Lakamba's household. It had been decided that the reception was to take place in the open air, and that it should be made impressive by the great number of Lakamba's retainers, who, clad in clean white, with their red sarongs gathered round their waists, chopper at side and lance in hand, were moving about the compound or, gathering into small knots, discussed eagerly the coming ceremony.

Two little fires burned brightly on the water's edge on each side of the landing place. A small heap of damar-gum torches lay by each, and between them Babalatchi strolled backwards and forwards, stopping often with his face to the river and his head on one side, listening to the sounds that came from the darkness over the water. There was no moon and the night was very clear overhead, but, after the afternoon breeze had expired in fitful puffs, the vapours hung thickening over the glancing surface of the Pantai and clung to the shore, hiding from view the middle of the stream.

A cry in the mist — then another — and, before Babalatchi could answer, two little canoes dashed up to the landing-place, and two of the principal citizens of Sambir, Daoud Sahamin and Hamet Bahassoen, who had been confidentially invited to meet Abdulla, landed quickly and after greeting Babalatchi walked up the dark courtyard towards the house. The little stir caused by their arrival soon subsided, and another silent hour dragged its slow length while Babalatchi tramped up and down between the fires, his face growing more anxious with every passing moment.

At last there was heard a loud hail from down the river. At a call from Babalatchi men ran down to the riverside and, snatching the torches, thrust them into the fires, then waved them above their heads till they burst into a flame. The smoke ascended in thick, wispy streams, and hung in a ruddy cloud above the glare that lit up the courtyard and flashed over the water, showing three long canoes manned by many paddlers lying a little off; the men in them lifting their paddles on high and dipping them down together, in an easy stroke that kept the small flotilla motionless in the strong current, exactly abreast of the landing-place. A man stood up in the largest craft and called out —

“Syed Abdulla bin Selim is here!”

Babalatchi answered aloud in a formal tone —

“Allah gladdens our hearts! Come to the land!”

Abdulla landed first, steadying himself by the help of Babalatchi's extended hand. In the short moment of his passing from the boat to the shore they exchanged sharp glances and a few rapid words.

“Who are you?”

“Babalatchi. The friend of Omar. The protected of Lakamba.”

“You wrote?”

“My words were written, O Giver of alms!”

And then Abdulla walked with composed face between the two lines of men holding torches, and met Lakamba in front of the big fire that was crackling itself up into a

great blaze. For a moment they stood with clasped hands invoking peace upon each other's head, then Lakamba, still holding his honoured guest by the hand, led him round the fire to the prepared seats. Babalatchi followed close behind his protector. Abdulla was accompanied by two Arabs. He, like his companions, was dressed in a white robe of starched muslin, which fell in stiff folds straight from the neck. It was buttoned from the throat halfway down with a close row of very small gold buttons; round the tight sleeves there was a narrow braid of gold lace. On his shaven head he wore a small skull-cap of plaited grass. He was shod in patent leather slippers over his naked feet. A rosary of heavy wooden beads hung by a round turn from his right wrist. He sat down slowly in the place of honour, and, dropping his slippers, tucked up his legs under him decorously.

The improvised divan was arranged in a wide semi-circle, of which the point most distant from the fire — some ten yards — was also the nearest to Lakamba's dwelling. As soon as the principal personages were seated, the verandah of the house was filled silently by the muffled-up forms of Lakamba's female belongings. They crowded close to the rail and looked down, whispering faintly. Below, the formal exchange of compliments went on for some time between Lakamba and Abdulla, who sat side by side. Babalatchi squatted humbly at his protector's feet, with nothing but a thin mat between himself and the hard ground.

Then there was a pause. Abdulla glanced round in an expectant manner, and after a while Babalatchi, who had been sitting very still in a pensive attitude, seemed to rouse himself with an effort, and began to speak in gentle and persuasive tones. He described in flowing sentences the first beginnings of Sambir, the dispute of the present ruler, Patalolo, with the Sultan of Koti, the consequent troubles ending with the rising of Bugis settlers under the leadership of Lakamba. At different points of the narrative he would turn for confirmation to Sahamin and Bahassoen, who sat listening eagerly and assented together with a "Betul! Betul! Right! Right!" ejaculated in a fervent undertone.

Warming up with his subject as the narrative proceeded, Babalatchi went on to relate the facts connected with Lingard's action at the critical period of those internal dissensions. He spoke in a restrained voice still, but with a growing energy of indignation. What was he, that man of fierce aspect, to keep all the world away from them? Was he a government? Who made him ruler? He took possession of Patalolo's mind and made his heart hard; he put severe words into his mouth and caused his hand to strike right and left. That unbeliever kept the Faithful panting under the weight of his senseless oppression. They had to trade with him — accept such goods as he would give — such credit as he would accord. And he exacted payment every year . . .

"Very true!" exclaimed Sahamin and Bahassoen together.

Babalatchi glanced at them approvingly and turned to Abdulla.

"Listen to those men, O Protector of the oppressed!" he exclaimed. "What could we do? A man must trade. There was nobody else."

Sahamin got up, staff in hand, and spoke to Abdulla with ponderous courtesy, emphasizing his words by the solemn flourishes of his right arm.

"It is so. We are weary of paying our debts to that white man here, who is the son of the Rajah Laut. That white man — may the grave of his mother be defiled! — is not content to hold us all in his hand with a cruel grasp. He seeks to cause our very death. He trades with the Dyaks of the forest, who are no better than monkeys. He buys from them guttah and rattans — while we starve. Only two days ago I went to him and said, 'Tuan Almayer' — even so; we must speak politely to that friend of Satan — 'Tuan Almayer, I have such and such goods to sell. Will you buy?' And he spoke thus — because those white men have no understanding of any courtesy — he spoke to me as if I was a slave: 'Daoud, you are a lucky man' — remark, O First amongst the Believers! that by those words he could have brought misfortune on my head — 'you are a lucky man to have anything in these hard times. Bring your goods quickly, and I shall receive them in payment of what you owe me from last year.' And he laughed, and struck me on the shoulder with his open hand. May Jehannum be his lot!"

"We will fight him," said young Bahassoan, crisply. "We shall fight if there is help and a leader. Tuan Abdulla, will you come among us?"

Abdulla did not answer at once. His lips moved in an inaudible whisper and the beads passed through his fingers with a dry click. All waited in respectful silence. "I shall come if my ship can enter this river," said Abdulla at last, in a solemn tone.

"It can, Tuan," exclaimed Babalatchi. "There is a white man here who . . ."

"I want to see Omar el Badavi and that white man you wrote about," interrupted Abdulla.

Babalatchi got on his feet quickly, and there was a general move.

The women on the verandah hurried indoors, and from the crowd that had kept discreetly in distant parts of the courtyard a couple of men ran with armfuls of dry fuel, which they cast upon the fire. One of them, at a sign from Babalatchi, approached and, after getting his orders, went towards the little gate and entered Omar's enclosure. While waiting for his return, Lakamba, Abdulla, and Babalatchi talked together in low tones. Sahamin sat by himself chewing betel-nut sleepily with a slight and indolent motion of his heavy jaw. Bahassoan, his hand on the hilt of his short sword, strutted backwards and forwards in the full light of the fire, looking very warlike and reckless; the envy and admiration of Lakamba's retainers, who stood in groups or flitted about noiselessly in the shadows of the courtyard.

The messenger who had been sent to Omar came back and stood at a distance, waiting till somebody noticed him. Babalatchi beckoned him close.

"What are his words?" asked Babalatchi.

"He says that Syed Abdulla is welcome now," answered the man.

Lakamba was speaking low to Abdulla, who listened to him with deep interest.

". . . We could have eighty men if there was need," he was saying — "eighty men in fourteen canoes. The only thing we want is gunpowder . . ."

"Hai! there will be no fighting," broke in Babalatchi. "The fear of your name will be enough and the terror of your coming."

"There may be powder too," muttered Abdulla with great nonchalance, "if only the ship enters the river safely."

"If the heart is stout the ship will be safe," said Babalatchi. "We will go now and see Omar el Badavi and the white man I have here."

Lakamba's dull eyes became animated suddenly.

"Take care, Tuan Abdulla," he said, "take care. The behaviour of that unclean white madman is furious in the extreme. He offered to strike . . ."

"On my head, you are safe, O Giver of alms!" interrupted Babalatchi.

Abdulla looked from one to the other, and the faintest flicker of a passing smile disturbed for a moment his grave composure. He turned to Babalatchi, and said with decision —

"Let us go."

"This way, O Uplifter of our hearts!" rattled on Babalatchi, with fussy deference. "Only a very few paces and you shall behold Omar the brave, and a white man of great strength and cunning. This way."

He made a sign for Lakamba to remain behind, and with respectful touches on the elbow steered Abdulla towards the gate at the upper end of the court-yard. As they walked on slowly, followed by the two Arabs, he kept on talking in a rapid undertone to the great man, who never looked at him once, although appearing to listen with flattering attention. When near the gate Babalatchi moved forward and stopped, facing Abdulla, with his hand on the fastenings.

"You shall see them both," he said. "All my words about them are true. When I saw him enslaved by the one of whom I spoke, I knew he would be soft in my hand like the mud of the river. At first he answered my talk with bad words of his own language, after the manner of white men. Afterwards, when listening to the voice he loved, he hesitated. He hesitated for many days — too many. I, knowing him well, made Omar withdraw here with his . . . household. Then this red-faced man raged for three days like a black panther that is hungry. And this evening, this very evening, he came. I have him here. He is in the grasp of one with a merciless heart. I have him here," ended Babalatchi, exultingly tapping the upright of the gate with his hand.

"That is good," murmured Abdulla.

"And he shall guide your ship and lead in the fight — if fight there be," went on Babalatchi. "If there is any killing — let him be the slayer. You should give him arms — a short gun that fires many times."

"Yes, by Allah!" assented Abdulla, with slow thoughtfulness.

"And you will have to open your hand, O First amongst the generous!" continued Babalatchi. "You will have to satisfy the rapacity of a white man, and also of one who is not a man, and therefore greedy of ornaments."

"They shall be satisfied," said Abdulla; "but . . ." He hesitated, looking down on the ground and stroking his beard, while Babalatchi waited, anxious, with parted lips. After a short time he spoke again jerkily in an indistinct whisper, so that Babalatchi had to turn his head to catch the words. "Yes. But Omar is the son of my father's uncle

. . . and all belonging to him are of the Faith . . . while that man is an unbeliever. It is most unseemly . . . very unseemly. He cannot live under my shadow. Not that dog. Penitence! I take refuge with my God," he mumbled rapidly. "How can he live under my eyes with that woman, who is of the Faith? Scandal! O abomination!"

He finished with a rush and drew a long breath, then added dubiously —

"And when that man has done all we want, what is to be done with him?"

They stood close together, meditative and silent, their eyes roaming idly over the courtyard. The big bonfire burned brightly, and a wavering splash of light lay on the dark earth at their feet, while the lazy smoke wreathed itself slowly in gleaming coils amongst the black boughs of the trees. They could see Lakamba, who had returned to his place, sitting hunched up spiritlessly on the cushions, and Sahamin, who had got on his feet again and appeared to be talking to him with dignified animation. Men in twos or threes came out of the shadows into the light, strolling slowly, and passed again into the shadows, their faces turned to each other, their arms moving in restrained gestures. Bahassoen, his head proudly thrown back, his ornaments, embroideries, and sword-hilt flashing in the light, circled steadily round the fire like a planet round the sun. A cool whiff of damp air came from the darkness of the riverside; it made Abdulla and Babalatchi shiver, and woke them up from their abstraction.

"Open the gate and go first," said Abdulla; "there is no danger?"

"On my life, no!" answered Babalatchi, lifting the rattan ring. "He is all peace and content, like a thirsty man who has drunk water after many days."

He swung the gate wide, made a few paces into the gloom of the enclosure, and retraced his steps suddenly.

"He may be made useful in many ways," he whispered to Abdulla, who had stopped short, seeing him come back.

"O Sin! O Temptation!" sighed out Abdulla, faintly. "Our refuge is with the Most High. Can I feed this infidel for ever and for ever?" he added, impatiently.

"No," breathed out Babalatchi. "No! Not for ever. Only while he serves your designs, O Dispenser of Allah's gifts! When the time comes — and your order . . ."

He sidled close to Abdulla, and brushed with a delicate touch the hand that hung down listlessly, holding the prayer-beads.

"I am your slave and your offering," he murmured, in a distinct and polite tone, into Abdulla's ear. "When your wisdom speaks, there may be found a little poison that will not lie. Who knows?"

Chapter 4

Babalatchi saw Abdulla pass through the low and narrow entrance into the darkness of Omar's hut; heard them exchange the usual greetings and the distinguished visitor's grave voice asking: "There is no misfortune — please God — but the sight?" and then, becoming aware of the disapproving looks of the two Arabs who had accompanied Abdulla, he followed their example and fell back out of earshot. He did it unwillingly, although he did not ignore that what was going to happen in there was now absolutely beyond his control. He roamed irresolutely about for awhile, and at last wandered with careless steps towards the fire, which had been moved, from under the tree, close to the hut and a little to windward of its entrance. He squatted on his heels and began playing pensively with live embers, as was his habit when engrossed in thought, withdrawing his hand sharply and shaking it above his head when he burnt his fingers in a fit of deeper abstraction. Sitting there he could hear the murmur of the talk inside the hut, and he could distinguish the voices but not the words. Abdulla spoke in deep tones, and now and then this flowing monotone was interrupted by a querulous exclamation, a weak moan or a plaintive quaver of the old man. Yes. It was annoying not to be able to make out what they were saying, thought Babalatchi, as he sat gazing fixedly at the unsteady glow of the fire. But it will be right. All will be right. Abdulla inspired him with confidence. He came up fully to his expectation. From the very first moment when he set his eye on him he felt sure that this man — whom he had known by reputation only — was very resolute. Perhaps too resolute. Perhaps he would want to grasp too much later on. A shadow flitted over Babalatchi's face. On the eve of the accomplishment of his desires he felt the bitter taste of that drop of doubt which is mixed with the sweetness of every success.

When, hearing footsteps on the verandah of the big house, he lifted his head, the shadow had passed away and on his face there was an expression of watchful alertness. Willems was coming down the plankway, into the courtyard. The light within trickled through the cracks of the badly joined walls of the house, and in the illuminated doorway appeared the moving form of Aissa. She also passed into the night outside and disappeared from view. Babalatchi wondered where she had got to, and for the moment forgot the approach of Willems. The voice of the white man speaking roughly above his head made him jump to his feet as if impelled upwards by a powerful spring.

"Where's Abdulla?"

Babalatchi waved his hand towards the hut and stood listening intently. The voices within had ceased, then recommenced again. He shot an oblique glance at Willems, whose indistinct form towered above the glow of dying embers.

“Make up this fire,” said Willems, abruptly. “I want to see your face.”

With obliging alacrity Babalatchi put some dry brushwood on the coals from a handy pile, keeping all the time a watchful eye on Willems. When he straightened himself up his hand wandered almost involuntarily towards his left side to feel the handle of a kriss amongst the folds of his sarong, but he tried to look unconcerned under the angry stare.

“You are in good health, please God?” he murmured.

“Yes!” answered Willems, with an unexpected loudness that caused Babalatchi to start nervously. “Yes! . . . Health! . . . You . . .”

He made a long stride and dropped both his hands on the Malay’s shoulders. In the powerful grip Babalatchi swayed to and fro limply, but his face was as peaceful as when he sat — a little while ago — dreaming by the fire. With a final vicious jerk Willems let go suddenly, and turning away on his heel stretched his hands over the fire. Babalatchi stumbled backwards, recovered himself, and wriggled his shoulders laboriously.

“Tse! Tse! Tse!” he clicked, deprecatingly. After a short silence he went on with accentuated admiration: “What a man it is! What a strong man! A man like that” — he concluded, in a tone of meditative wonder — “a man like that could upset mountains — mountains!”

He gazed hopefully for a while at Willems’ broad shoulders, and continued, addressing the inimical back, in a low and persuasive voice —

“But why be angry with me? With me who think only of your good? Did I not give her refuge, in my own house? Yes, Tuan! This is my own house. I will let you have it without any recompense because she must have a shelter. Therefore you and she shall live here. Who can know a woman’s mind? And such a woman! If she wanted to go away from that other place, who am I — to say no! I am Omar’s servant. I said: ‘Gladden my heart by taking my house.’ Did I say right?”

“I’ll tell you something,” said Willems, without changing his position; “if she takes a fancy to go away from this place it is you who shall suffer. I will wring your neck.”

“When the heart is full of love there is no room in it for justice,” recommenced Babalatchi, with unmoved and persistent softness. “Why slay me? You know, Tuan, what she wants. A splendid destiny is her desire — as of all women. You have been wronged and cast out by your people. She knows that. But you are brave, you are strong — you are a man; and, Tuan — I am older than you — you are in her hand. Such is the fate of strong men. And she is of noble birth and cannot live like a slave. You know her — and you are in her hand. You are like a snared bird, because of your strength. And — remember I am a man that has seen much — submit, Tuan! Submit! . . . Or else . . .”

He drawled out the last words in a hesitating manner and broke off his sentence. Still stretching his hands in turns towards the blaze and without moving his head, Willems gave a short, lugubrious laugh, and asked —

“Or else what?”

“She may go away again. Who knows?” finished Babalatchi, in a gentle and insinuating tone.

This time Willems spun round sharply. Babalatchi stepped back.

“If she does it will be the worse for you,” said Willems, in a menacing voice. “It will be your doing, and I . . .”

Babalatchi spoke, from beyond the circle of light, with calm disdain.

“Hai — ya! I have heard before. If she goes — then I die. Good! Will that bring her back do you think — Tuan? If it is my doing it shall be well done, O white man! and — who knows — you will have to live without her.”

Willems gasped and started back like a confident wayfarer who, pursuing a path he thinks safe, should see just in time a bottomless chasm under his feet. Babalatchi came into the light and approached Willems sideways, with his head thrown back and a little on one side so as to bring his only eye to bear full on the countenance of the tall white man.

“You threaten me,” said Willems, indistinctly.

“I, Tuan!” exclaimed Babalatchi, with a slight suspicion of irony in the affected surprise of his tone. “I, Tuan? Who spoke of death? Was it I? No! I spoke of life only. Only of life. Of a long life for a lonely man!”

They stood with the fire between them, both silent, both aware, each in his own way, of the importance of the passing minutes. Babalatchi’s fatalism gave him only an insignificant relief in his suspense, because no fatalism can kill the thought of the future, the desire of success, the pain of waiting for the disclosure of the immutable decrees of Heaven. Fatalism is born of the fear of failure, for we all believe that we carry success in our own hands, and we suspect that our hands are weak. Babalatchi looked at Willems and congratulated himself upon his ability to manage that white man. There was a pilot for Abdulla — a victim to appease Lingard’s anger in case of any mishap. He would take good care to put him forward in everything. In any case let the white men fight it out amongst themselves. They were fools. He hated them — the strong fools — and knew that for his righteous wisdom was reserved the safe triumph.

Willems measured dismally the depth of his degradation. He — a white man, the admired of white men, was held by those miserable savages whose tool he was about to become. He felt for them all the hate of his race, of his morality, of his intelligence. He looked upon himself with dismay and pity. She had him. He had heard of such things. He had heard of women who . . . He would never believe such stories. . . . Yet they were true. But his own captivity seemed more complete, terrible, and final — without the hope of any redemption. He wondered at the wickedness of Providence that had made him what he was; that, worse still, permitted such a creature as Almayr to live. He had done his duty by going to him. Why did he not understand? All men were fools. He gave him his chance. The fellow did not see it. It was hard, very hard on himself — Willems. He wanted to take her from amongst her own people. That’s why he had condescended to go to Almayr. He examined himself. With a sinking heart he

thought that really he could not — somehow — live without her. It was terrible and sweet. He remembered the first days. Her appearance, her face, her smile, her eyes, her words. A savage woman! Yet he perceived that he could think of nothing else but of the three days of their separation, of the few hours since their reunion. Very well. If he could not take her away, then he would go to her. . . . He had, for a moment, a wicked pleasure in the thought that what he had done could not be undone. He had given himself up. He felt proud of it. He was ready to face anything, do anything. He cared for nothing, for nobody. He thought himself very fearless, but as a matter of fact he was only drunk; drunk with the poison of passionate memories.

He stretched his hands over the fire, looked round and called out —
“Aissa!”

She must have been near, for she appeared at once within the light of the fire. The upper part of her body was wrapped up in the thick folds of a head covering which was pulled down over her brow, and one end of it thrown across from shoulder to shoulder hid the lower part of her face. Only her eyes were visible — sombre and gleaming like a starry night.

Willems, looking at this strange, muffled figure, felt exasperated, amazed and helpless. The ex-confidential clerk of the rich Hudig would hug to his breast settled conceptions of respectable conduct. He sought refuge within his ideas of propriety from the dismal mangroves, from the darkness of the forests and of the heathen souls of the savages that were his masters. She looked like an animated package of cheap cotton goods! It made him furious. She had disguised herself so because a man of her race was near! He told her not to do it, and she did not obey. Would his ideas ever change so as to agree with her own notions of what was becoming, proper and respectable? He was really afraid they would, in time. It seemed to him awful. She would never change! This manifestation of her sense of proprieties was another sign of their hopeless diversity; something like another step downwards for him. She was too different from him. He was so civilized! It struck him suddenly that they had nothing in common — not a thought, not a feeling; he could not make clear to her the simplest motive of any act of his . . . and he could not live without her.

The courageous man who stood facing Babalatchi gasped unexpectedly with a gasp that was half a groan. This little matter of her veiling herself against his wish acted upon him like a disclosure of some great disaster. It increased his contempt for himself as the slave of a passion he had always derided, as the man unable to assert his will. This will, all his sensations, his personality — all this seemed to be lost in the abominable desire, in the priceless promise of that woman. He was not, of course, able to discern clearly the causes of his misery; but there are none so ignorant as not to know suffering, none so simple as not to feel and suffer from the shock of warring impulses. The ignorant must feel and suffer from their complexity as well as the wisest; but to them the pain of struggle and defeat appears strange, mysterious, remediable and unjust. He stood watching her, watching himself. He tingled with rage from head

to foot, as if he had been struck in the face. Suddenly he laughed; but his laugh was like a distorted echo of some insincere mirth very far away.

From the other side of the fire Babalatchi spoke hurriedly —
“Here is Tuan Abdulla.”

Chapter 5

Directly on stepping outside Omar's hut Abdulla caught sight of Willems. He expected, of course, to see a white man, but not that white man, whom he knew so well. Everybody who traded in the islands, and who had any dealings with Hudig, knew Willems. For the last two years of his stay in Macassar the confidential clerk had been managing all the local trade of the house under a very slight supervision only on the part of the master. So everybody knew Willems, Abdulla amongst others — but he was ignorant of Willems' disgrace. As a matter of fact the thing had been kept very quiet — so quiet that a good many people in Macassar were expecting Willems' return there, supposing him to be absent on some confidential mission. Abdulla, in his surprise, hesitated on the threshold. He had prepared himself to see some seaman — some old officer of Lingard's; a common man — perhaps difficult to deal with, but still no match for him. Instead, he saw himself confronted by an individual whose reputation for sagacity in business was well known to him. How did he get here, and why? Abdulla, recovering from his surprise, advanced in a dignified manner towards the fire, keeping his eyes fixed steadily on Willems. When within two paces from Willems he stopped and lifted his right hand in grave salutation. Willems nodded slightly and spoke after a while.

“We know each other, Tuan Abdulla,” he said, with an assumption of easy indifference.

“We have traded together,” answered Abdulla, solemnly, “but it was far from here.”

“And we may trade here also,” said Willems.

“The place does not matter. It is the open mind and the true heart that are required in business.”

“Very true. My heart is as open as my mind. I will tell you why I am here.”

“What need is there? In leaving home one learns life. You travel. Travelling is victory! You shall return with much wisdom.”

“I shall never return,” interrupted Willems. “I have done with my people. I am a man without brothers. Injustice destroys fidelity.”

Abdulla expressed his surprise by elevating his eyebrows. At the same time he made a vague gesture with his arm that could be taken as an equivalent of an approving and conciliating “just so!”

Till then the Arab had not taken any notice of Aissa, who stood by the fire, but now she spoke in the interval of silence following Willems' declaration. In a voice that was much deadened by her wrappings she addressed Abdulla in a few words of greeting, calling him a kinsman. Abdulla glanced at her swiftly for a second, and

then, with perfect good breeding, fixed his eyes on the ground. She put out towards him her hand, covered with a corner of her face-veil, and he took it, pressed it twice, and dropping it turned towards Willems. She looked at the two men searchingly, then backed away and seemed to melt suddenly into the night.

"I know what you came for, Tuan Abdulla," said Willems; "I have been told by that man there." He nodded towards Babalatchi, then went on slowly, "It will be a difficult thing."

"Allah makes everything easy," interjected Babalatchi, piously, from a distance.

The two men turned quickly and stood looking at him thoughtfully, as if in deep consideration of the truth of that proposition. Under their sustained gaze Babalatchi experienced an unwonted feeling of shyness, and dared not approach nearer. At last Willems moved slightly, Abdulla followed readily, and they both walked down the courtyard, their voices dying away in the darkness. Soon they were heard returning, and the voices grew distinct as their forms came out of the gloom. By the fire they wheeled again, and Babalatchi caught a few words. Willems was saying —

"I have been at sea with him many years when young. I have used my knowledge to observe the way into the river when coming in, this time."

Abdulla assented in general terms.

"In the variety of knowledge there is safety," he said; and then they passed out of earshot.

Babalatchi ran to the tree and took up his position in the solid blackness under its branches, leaning against the trunk. There he was about midway between the fire and the other limit of the two men's walk. They passed him close. Abdulla slim, very straight, his head high, and his hands hanging before him and twisting mechanically the string of beads; Willems tall, broad, looking bigger and stronger in contrast to the slight white figure by the side of which he strolled carelessly, taking one step to the other's two; his big arms in constant motion as he gesticulated vehemently, bending forward to look Abdulla in the face.

They passed and repassed close to Babalatchi some half a dozen times, and, whenever they were between him and the fire, he could see them plain enough. Sometimes they would stop short, Willems speaking emphatically, Abdulla listening with rigid attention, then, when the other had ceased, bending his head slightly as if consenting to some demand, or admitting some statement. Now and then Babalatchi caught a word here and there, a fragment of a sentence, a loud exclamation. Impelled by curiosity he crept to the very edge of the black shadow under the tree. They were nearing him, and he heard Willems say —

"You will pay that money as soon as I come on board. That I must have."

He could not catch Abdulla's reply. When they went past again, Willems was saying —

"My life is in your hand anyway. The boat that brings me on board your ship shall take the money to Omar. You must have it ready in a sealed bag."

Again they were out of hearing, but instead of coming back they stopped by the fire facing each other. Willems moved his arm, shook his hand on high talking all the time, then brought it down jerkily — stamped his foot. A short period of immobility ensued. Babalatchi, gazing intently, saw Abdulla's lips move almost imperceptibly. Suddenly Willems seized the Arab's passive hand and shook it. Babalatchi drew the long breath of relieved suspense. The conference was over. All well, apparently.

He ventured now to approach the two men, who saw him and waited in silence. Willems had retired within himself already, and wore a look of grim indifference. Abdulla moved away a step or two. Babalatchi looked at him inquisitively.

"I go now," said Abdulla, "and shall wait for you outside the river, Tuan Willems, till the second sunset. You have only one word, I know."

"Only one word," repeated Willems.

Abdulla and Babalatchi walked together down the enclosure, leaving the white man alone by the fire. The two Arabs who had come with Abdulla preceded them and passed at once through the little gate into the light and the murmur of voices of the principal courtyard, but Babalatchi and Abdulla stopped on this side of it. Abdulla said —

"It is well. We have spoken of many things. He consents."

"When?" asked Babalatchi, eagerly.

"On the second day from this. I have promised every thing. I mean to keep much."

"Your hand is always open, O Most Generous amongst Believers! You will not forget your servant who called you here. Have I not spoken the truth? She has made roast meat of his heart."

With a horizontal sweep of his arm Abdulla seemed to push away that last statement, and said slowly, with much meaning —

"He must be perfectly safe; do you understand? Perfectly safe — as if he was amongst his own people — till . . ."

"Till when?" whispered Babalatchi.

"Till I speak," said Abdulla. "As to Omar." He hesitated for a moment, then went on very low: "He is very old."

"Hai-ya! Old and sick," murmured Babalatchi, with sudden melancholy.

"He wanted me to kill that white man. He begged me to have him killed at once," said Abdulla, contemptuously, moving again towards the gate.

"He is impatient, like those who feel death near them," exclaimed Babalatchi, apologetically.

"Omar shall dwell with me," went on Abdulla, "when . . . But no matter. Remember! The white man must be safe."

"He lives in your shadow," answered Babalatchi, solemnly. "It is enough!" He touched his forehead and fell back to let Abdulla go first.

And now they are back in the courtyard wherefrom, at their appearance, listlessness vanishes, and all the faces become alert and interested once more. Lakamba approaches his guest, but looks at Babalatchi, who reassures him by a confident nod. Lakamba clumsily attempts a smile, and looking, with natural and ineradicable sulkiness, from

under his eyebrows at the man whom he wants to honour, asks whether he would condescend to visit the place of sitting down and take food. Or perhaps he would prefer to give himself up to repose? The house is his, and what is in it, and those many men that stand afar watching the interview are his. Syed Abdulla presses his host's hand to his breast, and informs him in a confidential murmur that his habits are ascetic and his temperament inclines to melancholy. No rest; no food; no use whatever for those many men who are his. Syed Abdulla is impatient to be gone. Lakamba is sorrowful but polite, in his hesitating, gloomy way. Tuan Abdulla must have fresh boatmen, and many, to shorten the dark and fatiguing road. Hai-ya! There! Boats!

By the riverside indistinct forms leap into a noisy and disorderly activity. There are cries, orders, banter, abuse. Torches blaze sending out much more smoke than light, and in their red glare Babalatchi comes up to say that the boats are ready.

Through that lurid glare Syed Abdulla, in his long white gown, seems to glide fantastically, like a dignified apparition attended by two inferior shades, and stands for a moment at the landing-place to take leave of his host and ally — whom he loves. Syed Abdulla says so distinctly before embarking, and takes his seat in the middle of the canoe under a small canopy of blue calico stretched on four sticks. Before and behind Syed Abdulla, the men squatting by the gunwales hold high the blades of their paddles in readiness for a dip, all together. Ready? Not yet. Hold on all! Syed Abdulla speaks again, while Lakamba and Babalatchi stand close on the bank to hear his words. His words are encouraging. Before the sun rises for the second time they shall meet, and Syed Abdulla's ship shall float on the waters of this river — at last! Lakamba and Babalatchi have no doubt — if Allah wills. They are in the hands of the Compassionate. No doubt. And so is Syed Abdulla, the great trader who does not know what the word failure means; and so is the white man — the smartest business man in the islands — who is lying now by Omar's fire with his head on Aissa's lap, while Syed Abdulla flies down the muddy river with current and paddles between the sombre walls of the sleeping forest; on his way to the clear and open sea where the Lord of the Isles (formerly of Greenock, but condemned, sold, and registered now as of Penang) waits for its owner, and swings erratically at anchor in the currents of the capricious tide, under the crumbling red cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah.

For some time Lakamba, Sahamin, and Bahassoen looked silently into the humid darkness which had swallowed the big canoe that carried Abdulla and his unvarying good fortune. Then the two guests broke into a talk expressive of their joyful anticipations. The venerable Sahamin, as became his advanced age, found his delight in speculation as to the activities of a rather remote future. He would buy praus, he would send expeditions up the river, he would enlarge his trade, and, backed by Abdulla's capital, he would grow rich in a very few years. Very few. Meantime it would be a good thing to interview Almayer to-morrow and, profiting by the last day of the hated man's prosperity, obtain some goods from him on credit. Sahamin thought it could be done by skilful wheedling. After all, that son of Satan was a fool, and the thing was worth doing, because the coming revolution would wipe all debts out. Sa-

hamin did not mind imparting that idea to his companions, with much senile chuckling, while they strolled together from the riverside towards the residence. The bull-necked Lakamba, listening with pouted lips without the sign of a smile, without a gleam in his dull, bloodshot eyes, shuffled slowly across the courtyard between his two guests. But suddenly Bahassoen broke in upon the old man's prattle with the generous enthusiasm of his youth. . . . Trading was very good. But was the change that would make them happy effected yet? The white man should be despoiled with a strong hand! . . . He grew excited, spoke very loud, and his further discourse, delivered with his hand on the hilt of his sword, dealt incoherently with the honourable topics of throat-cutting, fire-raising, and with the far-famed valour of his ancestors.

Babalatchi remained behind, alone with the greatness of his conceptions. The sagacious statesman of Sambir sent a scornful glance after his noble protector and his noble protector's friends, and then stood meditating about that future which to the others seemed so assured. Not so to Babalatchi, who paid the penalty of his wisdom by a vague sense of insecurity that kept sleep at arm's length from his tired body. When he thought at last of leaving the waterside, it was only to strike a path for himself and to creep along the fences, avoiding the middle of the courtyard where small fires glimmered and winked as though the sinister darkness there had reflected the stars of the serene heaven. He slunk past the wicket-gate of Omar's enclosure, and crept on patiently along the light bamboo palisade till he was stopped by the angle where it joined the heavy stockade of Lakamba's private ground. Standing there, he could look over the fence and see Omar's hut and the fire before its door. He could also see the shadow of two human beings sitting between him and the red glow. A man and a woman. The sight seemed to inspire the careworn sage with a frivolous desire to sing. It could hardly be called a song; it was more in the nature of a recitative without any rhythm, delivered rapidly but distinctly in a croaking and unsteady voice; and if Babalatchi considered it a song, then it was a song with a purpose and, perhaps for that reason, artistically defective. It had all the imperfections of unskilful improvisation and its subject was gruesome. It told a tale of shipwreck and of thirst, and of one brother killing another for the sake of a gourd of water. A repulsive story which might have had a purpose but possessed no moral whatever. Yet it must have pleased Babalatchi for he repeated it twice, the second time even in louder tones than at first, causing a disturbance amongst the white rice-birds and the wild fruit-pigeons which roosted on the boughs of the big tree growing in Omar's compound. There was in the thick foliage above the singer's head a confused beating of wings, sleepy remarks in bird-language, a sharp stir of leaves. The forms by the fire moved; the shadow of the woman altered its shape, and Babalatchi's song was cut short abruptly by a fit of soft and persistent coughing. He did not try to resume his efforts after that interruption, but went away stealthily to seek — if not sleep — then, at least, repose.

Chapter 6

As soon as Abdulla and his companions had left the enclosure, Aissa approached Willems and stood by his side. He took no notice of her expectant attitude till she touched him gently, when he turned furiously upon her and, tearing off her face-veil, trampled upon it as though it had been a mortal enemy. She looked at him with the faint smile of patient curiosity, with the puzzled interest of ignorance watching the running of a complicated piece of machinery. After he had exhausted his rage, he stood again severe and unbending looking down at the fire, but the touch of her fingers at the nape of his neck effaced instantly the hard lines round his mouth; his eyes wavered uneasily; his lips trembled slightly. Starting with the unresisting rapidity of a particle of iron — which, quiescent one moment, leaps in the next to a powerful magnet — he moved forward, caught her in his arms and pressed her violently to his breast. He released her as suddenly, and she stumbled a little, stepped back, breathed quickly through her parted lips, and said in a tone of pleased reproof —

“O Fool-man! And if you had killed me in your strong arms what would you have done?”

“You want to live . . . and to run away from me again,” he said gently. “Tell me — do you?”

She moved towards him with very short steps, her head a little on one side, hands on hips, with a slight balancing of her body: an approach more tantalizing than an escape. He looked on, eager — charmed. She spoke jestingly.

“What am I to say to a man who has been away three days from me? Three!” she repeated, holding up playfully three fingers before Willems’ eyes. He snatched at the hand, but she was on her guard and whisked it behind her back.

“No!” she said. “I cannot be caught. But I will come. I am coming myself because I like. Do not move. Do not touch me with your mighty hands, O child!”

As she spoke she made a step nearer, then another. Willems did not stir. Pressing against him she stood on tiptoe to look into his eyes, and her own seemed to grow bigger, glistening and tender, appealing and promising. With that look she drew the man’s soul away from him through his immobile pupils, and from Willems’ features the spark of reason vanished under her gaze and was replaced by an appearance of physical well-being, an ecstasy of the senses which had taken possession of his rigid body; an ecstasy that drove out regrets, hesitation and doubt, and proclaimed its terrible work by an appalling aspect of idiotic beatitude. He never stirred a limb, hardly breathed, but stood in stiff immobility, absorbing the delight of her close contact by every pore.

“Closer! Closer!” he murmured.

Slowly she raised her arms, put them over his shoulders, and clasping her hands at the back of his neck, swung off the full length of her arms. Her head fell back, the eyelids dropped slightly, and her thick hair hung straight down: a mass of ebony touched by the red gleams of the fire. He stood unyielding under the strain, as solid and motionless as one of the big trees of the surrounding forests; and his eyes looked at the modelling of her chin, at the outline of her neck, at the swelling lines of her bosom, with the famished and concentrated expression of a starving man looking at food. She drew herself up to him and rubbed her head against his cheek slowly and gently. He sighed. She, with her hands still on his shoulders, glanced up at the placid stars and said —

“The night is half gone. We shall finish it by this fire. By this fire you shall tell me all: your words and Syed Abdulla’s words; and listening to you I shall forget the three days — because I am good. Tell me — am I good?”

He said “Yes” dreamily, and she ran off towards the big house.

When she came back, balancing a roll of fine mats on her head, he had replenished the fire and was ready to help her in arranging a couch on the side of it nearest to the hut. She sank down with a quick but gracefully controlled movement, and he threw himself full length with impatient haste, as if he wished to forestall somebody. She took his head on her knees, and when he felt her hands touching his face, her fingers playing with his hair, he had an expression of being taken possession of; he experienced a sense of peace, of rest, of happiness, and of soothing delight. His hands strayed upwards about her neck, and he drew her down so as to have her face above his. Then he whispered — “I wish I could die like this — now!” She looked at him with her big sombre eyes, in which there was no responsive light. His thought was so remote from her understanding that she let the words pass by unnoticed, like the breath of the wind, like the flight of a cloud. Woman though she was, she could not comprehend, in her simplicity, the tremendous compliment of that speech, that whisper of deadly happiness, so sincere, so spontaneous, coming so straight from the heart — like every corruption. It was the voice of madness, of a delirious peace, of happiness that is infamous, cowardly, and so exquisite that the debased mind refuses to contemplate its termination: for to the victims of such happiness the moment of its ceasing is the beginning afresh of that torture which is its price.

With her brows slightly knitted in the determined preoccupation of her own desires, she said —

“Now tell me all. All the words spoken between you and Syed Abdulla.”

Tell what? What words? Her voice recalled back the consciousness that had departed under her touch, and he became aware of the passing minutes every one of which was like a reproach; of those minutes that falling, slow, reluctant, irresistible into the past, marked his footsteps on the way to perdition. Not that he had any conviction about it, any notion of the possible ending on that painful road. It was an indistinct feeling, a threat of suffering like the confused warning of coming disease, an inarticulate monition of evil made up of fear and pleasure, of resignation and of revolt. He was ashamed of

his state of mind. After all, what was he afraid of? Were those scruples? Why that hesitation to think, to speak of what he intended doing? Scruples were for imbeciles. His clear duty was to make himself happy. Did he ever take an oath of fidelity to Lingard? No. Well then — he would not let any interest of that old fool stand between Willems and Willems' happiness. Happiness? Was he not, perchance, on a false track? Happiness meant money. Much money. At least he had always thought so till he had experienced those new sensations which . . .

Aissa's question, repeated impatiently, interrupted his musings, and looking up at her face shining above him in the dim light of the fire he stretched his limbs luxuriously and obedient to her desire, he spoke slowly and hardly above his breath. She, with her head close to his lips, listened absorbed, interested, in attentive immobility. The many noises of the great courtyard were hushed up gradually by the sleep that stilled all voices and closed all eyes. Then somebody droned out a song with a nasal drawl at the end of every verse. He stirred. She put her hand suddenly on his lips and sat upright. There was a feeble coughing, a rustle of leaves, and then a complete silence took possession of the land; a silence cold, mournful, profound; more like death than peace; more hard to bear than the fiercest tumult. As soon as she removed her hand he hastened to speak, so insupportable to him was that stillness perfect and absolute in which his thoughts seemed to ring with the loudness of shouts.

"Who was there making that noise?" he asked.

"I do not know. He is gone now," she answered, hastily. "Tell me, you will not return to your people; not without me. Not with me. Do you promise?"

"I have promised already. I have no people of my own. Have I not told you, that you are everybody to me?"

"Ah, yes," she said, slowly, "but I like to hear you say that again — every day, and every night, whenever I ask; and never to be angry because I ask. I am afraid of white women who are shameless and have fierce eyes." She scanned his features close for a moment and added:

"Are they very beautiful? They must be."

"I do not know," he whispered, thoughtfully. "And if I ever did know, looking at you I have forgotten."

"Forgotten! And for three days and two nights you have forgotten me also! Why? Why were you angry with me when I spoke at first of Tuan Abdulla, in the days when we lived beside the brook? You remembered somebody then. Somebody in the land whence you come. Your tongue is false. You are white indeed, and your heart is full of deception. I know it. And yet I cannot help believing you when you talk of your love for me. But I am afraid!"

He felt flattered and annoyed by her vehemence, and said —

"Well, I am with you now. I did come back. And it was you that went away."

"When you have helped Abdulla against the Rajah Laut, who is the first of white men, I shall not be afraid any more," she whispered.

“You must believe what I say when I tell you that there never was another woman; that there is nothing for me to regret, and nothing but my enemies to remember.”

“Where do you come from?” she said, impulsive and inconsequent, in a passionate whisper. “What is that land beyond the great sea from which you come? A land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us — who are not white. Did you not at first ask me to go there with you? That is why I went away.”

“I shall never ask you again.”

“And there is no woman waiting for you there?”

“No!” said Willems, firmly.

She bent over him. Her lips hovered above his face and her long hair brushed his cheeks.

“You taught me the love of your people which is of the Devil,” she murmured, and bending still lower, she said faintly, “Like this?”

“Yes, like this!” he answered very low, in a voice that trembled slightly with eagerness; and she pressed suddenly her lips to his while he closed his eyes in an ecstasy of delight.

There was a long interval of silence. She stroked his head with gentle touches, and he lay dreamily, perfectly happy but for the annoyance of an indistinct vision of a well-known figure; a man going away from him and diminishing in a long perspective of fantastic trees, whose every leaf was an eye looking after that man, who walked away growing smaller, but never getting out of sight for all his steady progress. He felt a desire to see him vanish, a hurried impatience of his disappearance, and he watched for it with a careful and irksome effort. There was something familiar about that figure. Why! Himself! He gave a sudden start and opened his eyes, quivering with the emotion of that quick return from so far, of finding himself back by the fire with the rapidity of a flash of lightning. It had been half a dream; he had slumbered in her arms for a few seconds. Only the beginning of a dream — nothing more. But it was some time before he recovered from the shock of seeing himself go away so deliberately, so definitely, so unguardedly; and going away — where? Now, if he had not woke up in time he would never have come back again from there; from whatever place he was going to. He felt indignant. It was like an evasion, like a prisoner breaking his parole — that thing slinking off stealthily while he slept. He was very indignant, and was also astonished at the absurdity of his own emotions.

She felt him tremble, and murmuring tender words, pressed his head to her breast. Again he felt very peaceful with a peace that was as complete as the silence round them. He muttered —

“You are tired, Aissa.”

She answered so low that it was like a sigh shaped into faint words.

“I shall watch your sleep, O child!”

He lay very quiet, and listened to the beating of her heart. That sound, light, rapid, persistent, and steady; her very life beating against his cheek, gave him a clear perception of secure ownership, strengthened his belief in his possession of that human being, was like an assurance of the vague felicity of the future. There were no regrets,

no doubts, no hesitation now. Had there ever been? All that seemed far away, ages ago — as unreal and pale as the fading memory of some delirium. All the anguish, suffering, strife of the past days; the humiliation and anger of his downfall; all that was an infamous nightmare, a thing born in sleep to be forgotten and leave no trace — and true life was this: this dreamy immobility with his head against her heart that beat so steadily.

He was broad awake now, with that tingling wakefulness of the tired body which succeeds to the few refreshing seconds of irresistible sleep, and his wide-open eyes looked absently at the doorway of Omar's hut. The reed walls glistened in the light of the fire, the smoke of which, thin and blue, drifted slanting in a succession of rings and spirals across the doorway, whose empty blackness seemed to him impenetrable and enigmatical like a curtain hiding vast spaces full of unexpected surprises. This was only his fancy, but it was absorbing enough to make him accept the sudden appearance of a head, coming out of the gloom, as part of his idle fantasy or as the beginning of another short dream, of another vagary of his overtired brain. A face with drooping eyelids, old, thin, and yellow, above the scattered white of a long beard that touched the earth. A head without a body, only a foot above the ground, turning slightly from side to side on the edge of the circle of light as if to catch the radiating heat of the fire on either cheek in succession. He watched it in passive amazement, growing distinct, as if coming nearer to him, and the confused outlines of a body crawling on all fours came out, creeping inch by inch towards the fire, with a silent and all but imperceptible movement. He was astounded at the appearance of that blind head dragging that crippled body behind, without a sound, without a change in the composure of the sightless face, which was plain one second, blurred the next in the play of the light that drew it to itself steadily. A mute face with a kriss between its lips. This was no dream. Omar's face. But why? What was he after?

He was too indolent in the happy languor of the moment to answer the question. It darted through his brain and passed out, leaving him free to listen again to the beating of her heart; to that precious and delicate sound which filled the quiet immensity of the night. Glancing upwards he saw the motionless head of the woman looking down at him in a tender gleam of liquid white between the long eyelashes, whose shadow rested on the soft curve of her cheek; and under the caress of that look, the uneasy wonder and the obscure fear of that apparition, crouching and creeping in turns towards the fire that was its guide, were lost — were drowned in the quietude of all his senses, as pain is drowned in the flood of drowsy serenity that follows upon a dose of opium.

He altered the position of his head by ever so little, and now could see easily that apparition which he had seen a minute before and had nearly forgotten already. It had moved closer, gliding and noiseless like the shadow of some nightmare, and now it was there, very near, motionless and still as if listening; one hand and one knee advanced; the neck stretched out and the head turned full towards the fire. He could see the emaciated face, the skin shiny over the prominent bones, the black shadows of the hollow temples and sunken cheeks, and the two patches of blackness over the eyes,

over those eyes that were dead and could not see. What was the impulse which drove out this blind cripple into the night to creep and crawl towards that fire? He looked at him, fascinated, but the face, with its shifting lights and shadows, let out nothing, closed and impenetrable like a walled door.

Omar raised himself to a kneeling posture and sank on his heels, with his hands hanging down before him. Willems, looking out of his dreamy numbness, could see plainly the kriss between the thin lips, a bar across the face; the handle on one side where the polished wood caught a red gleam from the fire and the thin line of the blade running to a dull black point on the other. He felt an inward shock, which left his body passive in Aissa's embrace, but filled his breast with a tumult of powerless fear; and he perceived suddenly that it was his own death that was groping towards him; that it was the hate of himself and the hate of her love for him which drove this helpless wreck of a once brilliant and resolute pirate, to attempt a desperate deed that would be the glorious and supreme consolation of an unhappy old age. And while he looked, paralyzed with dread, at the father who had resumed his cautious advance — blind like fate, persistent like destiny — he listened with greedy eagerness to the heart of the daughter beating light, rapid, and steady against his head.

He was in the grip of horrible fear; of a fear whose cold hand robs its victim of all will and of all power; of all wish to escape, to resist, or to move; which destroys hope and despair alike, and holds the empty and useless carcass as if in a vise under the coming stroke. It was not the fear of death — he had faced danger before — it was not even the fear of that particular form of death. It was not the fear of the end, for he knew that the end would not come then. A movement, a leap, a shout would save him from the feeble hand of the blind old man, from that hand that even now was, with cautious sweeps along the ground, feeling for his body in the darkness. It was the unreasoning fear of this glimpse into the unknown things, into those motives, impulses, desires he had ignored, but that had lived in the breasts of despised men, close by his side, and were revealed to him for a second, to be hidden again behind the black mists of doubt and deception. It was not death that frightened him: it was the horror of bewildered life where he could understand nothing and nobody round him; where he could guide, control, comprehend nothing and no one — not even himself.

He felt a touch on his side. That contact, lighter than the caress of a mother's hand on the cheek of a sleeping child, had for him the force of a crushing blow. Omar had crept close, and now, kneeling above him, held the kriss in one hand while the other skimmed over his jacket up towards his breast in gentle touches; but the blind face, still turned to the heat of the fire, was set and immovable in its aspect of stony indifference to things it could not hope to see. With an effort Willems took his eyes off the deathlike mask and turned them up to Aissa's head. She sat motionless as if she had been part of the sleeping earth, then suddenly he saw her big sombre eyes open out wide in a piercing stare and felt the convulsive pressure of her hands pinning his arms along his body. A second dragged itself out, slow and bitter, like a day of mourning; a second full of regret and grief for that faith in her which took its flight

from the shattered ruins of his trust. She was holding him! She too! He felt her heart give a great leap, his head slipped down on her knees, he closed his eyes and there was nothing. Nothing! It was as if she had died; as though her heart had leaped out into the night, abandoning him, defenceless and alone, in an empty world.

His head struck the ground heavily as she flung him aside in her sudden rush. He lay as if stunned, face up and, daring not move, did not see the struggle, but heard the piercing shriek of mad fear, her low angry words; another shriek dying out in a moan. When he got up at last he looked at Aissa kneeling over her father, he saw her bent back in the effort of holding him down, Omar's contorted limbs, a hand thrown up above her head and her quick movement grasping the wrist. He made an impulsive step forward, but she turned a wild face to him and called out over her shoulder —

“Keep back! Do not come near! Do not. . . .”

And he stopped short, his arms hanging lifelessly by his side, as if those words had changed him into stone. She was afraid of his possible violence, but in the unsettling of all his convictions he was struck with the frightful thought that she preferred to kill her father all by herself; and the last stage of their struggle, at which he looked as though a red fog had filled his eyes, loomed up with an unnatural ferocity, with a sinister meaning; like something monstrous and depraved, forcing its complicity upon him under the cover of that awful night. He was horrified and grateful; drawn irresistibly to her — and ready to run away. He could not move at first — then he did not want to stir. He wanted to see what would happen. He saw her lift, with a tremendous effort, the apparently lifeless body into the hut, and remained standing, after they disappeared, with the vivid image in his eyes of that head swaying on her shoulder, the lower jaw hanging down, collapsed, passive, meaningless, like the head of a corpse.

Then after a while he heard her voice speaking inside, harshly, with an agitated abruptness of tone; and in answer there were groans and broken murmurs of exhaustion. She spoke louder. He heard her saying violently — “No! No! Never!”

And again a plaintive murmur of entreaty as of some one begging for a supreme favour, with a last breath. Then she said —

“Never! I would sooner strike it into my own heart.”

She came out, stood panting for a short moment in the doorway, and then stepped into the firelight. Behind her, through the darkness came the sound of words calling the vengeance of heaven on her head, rising higher, shrill, strained, repeating the curse over and over again — till the voice cracked in a passionate shriek that died out into hoarse muttering ending with a deep and prolonged sigh. She stood facing Willems, one hand behind her back, the other raised in a gesture compelling attention, and she listened in that attitude till all was still inside the hut. Then she made another step forward and her hand dropped slowly.

“Nothing but misfortune,” she whispered, absently, to herself. “Nothing but misfortune to us who are not white.” The anger and excitement died out of her face, and she looked straight at Willems with an intense and mournful gaze.

He recovered his senses and his power of speech with a sudden start.

“Aissa,” he exclaimed, and the words broke out through his lips with hurried nervousness. “Aissa! How can I live here? Trust me. Believe in me. Let us go away from here. Go very far away! Very far; you and I!”

He did not stop to ask himself whether he could escape, and how, and where. He was carried away by the flood of hate, disgust, and contempt of a white man for that blood which is not his blood, for that race which is not his race; for the brown skins; for the hearts false like the sea, blacker than night. This feeling of repulsion overmastered his reason in a clear conviction of the impossibility for him to live with her people. He urged her passionately to fly with him because out of all that abhorred crowd he wanted this one woman, but wanted her away from them, away from that race of slaves and cut-throats from which she sprang. He wanted her for himself — far from everybody, in some safe and dumb solitude. And as he spoke his anger and contempt rose, his hate became almost fear; and his desire of her grew immense, burning, illogical and merciless; crying to him through all his senses; louder than his hate, stronger than his fear, deeper than his contempt — irresistible and certain like death itself.

Standing at a little distance, just within the light — but on the threshold of that darkness from which she had come — she listened, one hand still behind her back, the other arm stretched out with the hand half open as if to catch the fleeting words that rang around her, passionate, menacing, imploring, but all tinged with the anguish of his suffering, all hurried by the impatience that gnawed his breast. And while she listened she felt a slowing down of her heart-beats as the meaning of his appeal grew clearer before her indignant eyes, as she saw with rage and pain the edifice of her love, her own work, crumble slowly to pieces, destroyed by that man’s fears, by that man’s falseness. Her memory recalled the days by the brook when she had listened to other words — to other thoughts — to promises and to pleadings for other things, which came from that man’s lips at the bidding of her look or her smile, at the nod of her head, at the whisper of her lips. Was there then in his heart something else than her image, other desires than the desires of her love, other fears than the fear of losing her? How could that be? Had she grown ugly or old in a moment? She was appalled, surprised and angry with the anger of unexpected humiliation; and her eyes looked fixedly, sombre and steady, at that man born in the land of violence and of evil wherefrom nothing but misfortune comes to those who are not white. Instead of thinking of her caresses, instead of forgetting all the world in her embrace, he was thinking yet of his people; of that people that steals every land, masters every sea, that knows no mercy and no truth — knows nothing but its own strength. O man of strong arm and of false heart! Go with him to a far country, be lost in the throng of cold eyes and false hearts — lose him there! Never! He was mad — mad with fear; but he should not escape her! She would keep him here a slave and a master; here where he was alone with her; where he must live for her — or die. She had a right to his love which was of her making, to the love that was in him now, while he spoke those words without sense. She must put between him and other white men a barrier of hate. He must not only stay, but he must also keep his promise to Abdulla, the fulfilment of which would make her safe.

“Aissa, let us go! With you by my side I would attack them with my naked hands. Or no! Tomorrow we shall be outside, on board Abdulla’s ship. You shall come with me and then I could . . . If the ship went ashore by some chance, then we could steal a canoe and escape in the confusion. . . . You are not afraid of the sea . . . of the sea that would give me freedom . . .”

He was approaching her gradually with extended arms, while he pleaded ardently in incoherent words that ran over and tripped each other in the extreme eagerness of his speech. She stepped back, keeping her distance, her eyes on his face, watching on it the play of his doubts and of his hopes with a piercing gaze, that seemed to search out the innermost recesses of his thought; and it was as if she had drawn slowly the darkness round her, wrapping herself in its undulating folds that made her indistinct and vague. He followed her step by step till at last they both stopped, facing each other under the big tree of the enclosure. The solitary exile of the forests, great, motionless and solemn in his abandonment, left alone by the life of ages that had been pushed away from him by those pigmies that crept at his foot, towered high and straight above their heads. He seemed to look on, dispassionate and imposing, in his lonely greatness, spreading his branches wide in a gesture of lofty protection, as if to hide them in the sombre shelter of innumerable leaves; as if moved by the disdainful compassion of the strong, by the scornful pity of an aged giant, to screen this struggle of two human hearts from the cold scrutiny of glittering stars.

The last cry of his appeal to her mercy rose loud, vibrated under the sombre canopy, darted among the boughs startling the white birds that slept wing to wing — and died without an echo, strangled in the dense mass of unstirring leaves. He could not see her face, but he heard her sighs and the distracted murmur of indistinct words. Then, as he listened holding his breath, she exclaimed suddenly —

“Have you heard him? He has cursed me because I love you. You brought me suffering and strife — and his curse. And now you want to take me far away where I would lose you, lose my life; because your love is my life now. What else is there? Do not move,” she cried violently, as he stirred a little — ”do not speak! Take this! Sleep in peace!”

He saw a shadowy movement of her arm. Something whizzed past and struck the ground behind him, close to the fire. Instinctively he turned round to look at it. A kriss without its sheath lay by the embers; a sinuous dark object, looking like something that had been alive and was now crushed, dead and very inoffensive; a black wavy outline very distinct and still in the dull red glow. Without thinking he moved to pick it up, stooping with the sad and humble movement of a beggar gathering the alms flung into the dust of the roadside. Was this the answer to his pleading, to the hot and living words that came from his heart? Was this the answer thrown at him like an insult, that thing made of wood and iron, insignificant and venomous, fragile and deadly? He held it by the blade and looked at the handle stupidly for a moment before he let it fall again at his feet; and when he turned round he faced only the night: — the night immense, profound and quiet; a sea of darkness in which she had disappeared without leaving a trace.

He moved forward with uncertain steps, putting out both his hands before him with the anguish of a man blinded suddenly.

“Aissa!” he cried — ”come to me at once.”

He peered and listened, but saw nothing, heard nothing. After a while the solid blackness seemed to wave before his eyes like a curtain disclosing movements but hiding forms, and he heard light and hurried footsteps, then the short clatter of the gate leading to Lakamba’s private enclosure. He sprang forward and brought up against the rough timber in time to hear the words, “Quick! Quick!” and the sound of the wooden bar dropped on the other side, securing the gate. With his arms thrown up, the palms against the paling, he slid down in a heap on the ground.

“Aissa,” he said, pleadingly, pressing his lips to a chink between the stakes. “Aissa, do you hear me? Come back! I will do what you want, give you all you desire — if I have to set the whole Sambir on fire and put that fire out with blood. Only come back. Now! At once! Are you there? Do you hear me? Aissa!”

On the other side there were startled whispers of feminine voices; a frightened little laugh suddenly interrupted; some woman’s admiring murmur — ”This is brave talk!” Then after a short silence Aissa cried —

“Sleep in peace — for the time of your going is near. Now I am afraid of you. Afraid of your fear. When you return with Tuan Abdulla you shall be great. You will find me here. And there will be nothing but love. Nothing else! — Always! — Till we die!”

He listened to the shuffle of footsteps going away, and staggered to his feet, mute with the excess of his passionate anger against that being so savage and so charming; loathing her, himself, everybody he had ever known; the earth, the sky, the very air he drew into his oppressed chest; loathing it because it made him live, loathing her because she made him suffer. But he could not leave that gate through which she had passed. He wandered a little way off, then swerved round, came back and fell down again by the stockade only to rise suddenly in another attempt to break away from the spell that held him, that brought him back there, dumb, obedient and furious. And under the immobilized gesture of lofty protection in the branches outspread wide above his head, under the high branches where white birds slept wing to wing in the shelter of countless leaves, he tossed like a grain of dust in a whirlwind — sinking and rising — round and round — always near that gate. All through the languid stillness of that night he fought with the impalpable; he fought with the shadows, with the darkness, with the silence. He fought without a sound, striking futile blows, dashing from side to side; obstinate, hopeless, and always beaten back; like a man bewitched within the invisible sweep of a magic circle.

Part 3

Chapter 1

“Yes! Cat, dog, anything that can scratch or bite; as long as it is harmful enough and mangy enough. A sick tiger would make you happy — of all things. A half-dead tiger that you could weep over and palm upon some poor devil in your power, to tend and nurse for you. Never mind the consequences — to the poor devil. Let him be mangled or eaten up, of course! You haven’t any pity to spare for the victims of your infernal charity. Not you! Your tender heart bleeds only for what is poisonous and deadly. I curse the day when you set your benevolent eyes on him. I curse it . . .”

“Now then! Now then!” growled Lingard in his moustache. Almayer, who had talked himself up to the choking point, drew a long breath and went on —

“Yes! It has been always so. Always. As far back as I can remember. Don’t you recollect? What about that half-starved dog you brought on board in Bangkok in your arms. In your arms by . . . ! It went mad next day and bit the serang. You don’t mean to say you have forgotten? The best serang you ever had! You said so yourself while you were helping us to lash him down to the chain-cable, just before he died in his fits. Now, didn’t you? Two wives and ever so many children the man left. That was your doing. . . . And when you went out of your way and risked your ship to rescue some Chinamen from a water-logged junk in Formosa Straits, that was also a clever piece of business. Wasn’t it? Those damned Chinamen rose on you before forty-eight hours. They were cut-throats, those poor fishermen. You knew they were cut-throats before you made up your mind to run down on a lee shore in a gale of wind to save them. A mad trick! If they hadn’t been scoundrels — hopeless scoundrels — you would not have put your ship in jeopardy for them, I know. You would not have risked the lives of your crew — that crew you loved so — and your own life. Wasn’t that foolish! And, besides, you were not honest. Suppose you had been drowned? I would have been in a pretty mess then, left alone here with that adopted daughter of yours. Your duty was to myself first. I married that girl because you promised to make my fortune. You know you did! And then three months afterwards you go and do that mad trick — for a lot of Chinamen too. Chinamen! You have no morality. I might have been ruined for the sake of those murderous scoundrels that, after all, had to be driven overboard after killing ever so many of your crew — of your beloved crew! Do you call that honest?”

“Well, well!” muttered Lingard, chewing nervously the stump of his cheroot that had gone out and looking at Almayer — who stamped wildly about the verandah — much as a shepherd might look at a pet sheep in his obedient flock turning unexpectedly upon him in enraged revolt. He seemed disconcerted, contemptuously angry yet somewhat amused; and also a little hurt as if at some bitter jest at his own expense. Almayer

stopped suddenly, and crossing his arms on his breast, bent his body forward and went on speaking.

“I might have been left then in an awkward hole — all on account of your absurd disregard for your safety — yet I bore no grudge. I knew your weaknesses. But now — when I think of it! Now we are ruined. Ruined! Ruined! My poor little Nina. Ruined!”

He slapped his thighs smartly, walked with small steps this way and that, seized a chair, planted it with a bang before Lingard, and sat down staring at the old seaman with haggard eyes. Lingard, returning his stare steadily, dived slowly into various pockets, fished out at last a box of matches and proceeded to light his cheroot carefully, rolling it round and round between his lips, without taking his gaze for a moment off the distressed Almayer. Then from behind a cloud of tobacco smoke he said calmly —

“If you had been in trouble as often as I have, my boy, you wouldn’t carry on so. I have been ruined more than once. Well, here I am.”

“Yes, here you are,” interrupted Almayer. “Much good it is to me. Had you been here a month ago it would have been of some use. But now! . . . You might as well be a thousand miles off.”

“You scold like a drunken fish-wife,” said Lingard, serenely. He got up and moved slowly to the front rail of the verandah. The floor shook and the whole house vibrated under his heavy step. For a moment he stood with his back to Almayer, looking out on the river and forest of the east bank, then turned round and gazed mildly down upon him.

“It’s very lonely this morning here. Hey?” he said.

Almayer lifted up his head.

“Ah! you notice it — don’t you? I should think it is lonely! Yes, Captain Lingard, your day is over in Sambir. Only a month ago this verandah would have been full of people coming to greet you. Fellows would be coming up those steps grinning and salaaming — to you and to me. But our day is over. And not by my fault either. You can’t say that. It’s all the doing of that pet rascal of yours. Ah! He is a beauty! You should have seen him leading that hellish crowd. You would have been proud of your old favourite.”

“Smart fellow that,” muttered Lingard, thoughtfully. Almayer jumped up with a shriek.

“And that’s all you have to say! Smart fellow! O Lord!”

“Don’t make a show of yourself. Sit down. Let’s talk quietly. I want to know all about it. So he led?”

“He was the soul of the whole thing. He piloted Abdulla’s ship in. He ordered everything and everybody,” said Almayer, who sat down again, with a resigned air.

“When did it happen — exactly?”

“On the sixteenth I heard the first rumours of Abdulla’s ship being in the river; a thing I refused to believe at first. Next day I could not doubt any more. There was a great council held openly in Lakamba’s place where almost everybody in Sambir

attended. On the eighteenth the Lord of the Isles was anchored in Sambir reach, abreast of my house. Let's see. Six weeks to-day, exactly."

"And all that happened like this? All of a sudden. You never heard anything — no warning. Nothing. Never had an idea that something was up? Come, Almayer!"

"Heard! Yes, I used to hear something every day. Mostly lies. Is there anything else in Sambir?"

"You might not have believed them," observed Lingard. "In fact you ought not to have believed everything that was told to you, as if you had been a green hand on his first voyage."

Almayer moved in his chair uneasily.

"That scoundrel came here one day," he said. "He had been away from the house for a couple of months living with that woman. I only heard about him now and then from Patalolo's people when they came over. Well one day, about noon, he appeared in this courtyard, as if he had been jerked up from hell-where he belongs."

Lingard took his cheroot out, and, with his mouth full of white smoke that oozed out through his parted lips, listened, attentive. After a short pause Almayer went on, looking at the floor moodily —

"I must say he looked awful. Had a bad bout of the ague probably. The left shore is very unhealthy. Strange that only the breadth of the river . . ."

He dropped off into deep thoughtfulness as if he had forgotten his grievances in a bitter meditation upon the unsanitary condition of the virgin forests on the left bank. Lingard took this opportunity to expel the smoke in a mighty expiration and threw the stump of his cheroot over his shoulder.

"Go on," he said, after a while. "He came to see you . . ."

"But it wasn't unhealthy enough to finish him, worse luck!" went on Almayer, rousing himself, "and, as I said, he turned up here with his brazen impudence. He bullied me, he threatened vaguely. He wanted to scare me, to blackmail me. Me! And, by heaven — he said you would approve. You! Can you conceive such impudence? I couldn't exactly make out what he was driving at. Had I known, I would have approved him. Yes! With a bang on the head. But how could I guess that he knew enough to pilot a ship through the entrance you always said was so difficult. And, after all, that was the only danger. I could deal with anybody here — but when Abdulla came. . . . That barque of his is armed. He carries twelve brass six-pounders, and about thirty men. Desperate beggars. Sumatra men, from Deli and Acheen. Fight all day and ask for more in the evening. That kind."

"I know, I know," said Lingard, impatiently.

"Of course, then, they were cheeky as much as you please after he anchored abreast of our jetty. Willems brought her up himself in the best berth. I could see him from this verandah standing forward, together with the half-caste master. And that woman was there too. Close to him. I heard they took her on board off Lakamba's place. Willems said he would not go higher without her. Stormed and raged. Frightened them, I believe. Abdulla had to interfere. She came off alone in a canoe, and no sooner on deck

than she fell at his feet before all hands, embraced his knees, wept, raved, begged his pardon. Why? I wonder. Everybody in Sambir is talking of it. They never heard tell or saw anything like it. I have all this from Ali, who goes about in the settlement and brings me the news. I had better know what is going on — hadn't I? From what I can make out, they — he and that woman — are looked upon as something mysterious — beyond comprehension. Some think them mad. They live alone with an old woman in a house outside Lakamba's campong and are greatly respected — or feared, I should say rather. At least, he is. He is very violent. She knows nobody, sees nobody, will speak to nobody but him. Never leaves him for a moment. It's the talk of the place. There are other rumours. From what I hear I suspect that Lakamba and Abdulla are tired of him. There's also talk of him going away in the Lord of the Isles — when she leaves here for the southward — as a kind of Abdulla's agent. At any rate, he must take the ship out. The half-caste is not equal to it as yet."

Lingard, who had listened absorbed till then, began now to walk with measured steps. Almayer ceased talking and followed him with his eyes as he paced up and down with a quarter-deck swing, tormenting and twisting his long white beard, his face perplexed and thoughtful.

"So he came to you first of all, did he?" asked Lingard, without stopping.

"Yes. I told you so. He did come. Came to extort money, goods — I don't know what else. Wanted to set up as a trader — the swine! I kicked his hat into the courtyard, and he went after it, and that was the last of him till he showed up with Abdulla. How could I know that he could do harm in that way? Or in any way at that! Any local rising I could put down easy with my own men and with Patalolo's help."

"Oh! yes. Patalolo. No good. Eh? Did you try him at all?"

"Didn't I!" exclaimed Almayer. "I went to see him myself on the twelfth. That was four days before Abdulla entered the river. In fact, same day Willems tried to get at me. I did feel a little uneasy then. Patalolo assured me that there was no human being that did not love me in Sambir. Looked as wise as an owl. Told me not to listen to the lies of wicked people from down the river. He was alluding to that man Bulangi, who lives up the sea reach, and who had sent me word that a strange ship was anchored outside — which, of course, I repeated to Patalolo. He would not believe. Kept on mumbling 'No! No! No!' like an old parrot, his head all of a tremble, all beslobbered with betel-nut juice. I thought there was something queer about him. Seemed so restless, and as if in a hurry to get rid of me. Well. Next day that one-eyed malefactor who lives with Lakamba — what's his name — Babalatchi, put in an appearance here! Came about mid-day, casually like, and stood there on this verandah chatting about one thing and another. Asking when I expected you, and so on. Then, incidentally, he mentioned that they — his master and himself — were very much bothered by a ferocious white man — my friend — who was hanging about that woman — Omar's daughter. Asked my advice. Very deferential and proper. I told him the white man was not my friend, and that they had better kick him out. Whereupon he went away salaaming, and protesting his friendship and his master's goodwill. Of course I know now the infernal nigger came

to spy and to talk over some of my men. Anyway, eight were missing at the evening muster. Then I took alarm. Did not dare to leave my house unguarded. You know what my wife is, don't you? And I did not care to take the child with me — it being late — so I sent a message to Patalolo to say that we ought to consult; that there were rumours and uneasiness in the settlement. Do you know what answer I got?"

Lingard stopped short in his walk before Almayer, who went on, after an impressive pause, with growing animation.

"All brought it: 'The Rajah sends a friend's greeting, and does not understand the message.' That was all. Not a word more could Ali get out of him. I could see that Ali was pretty well scared. He hung about, arranging my hammock — one thing and another. Then just before going away he mentioned that the water-gate of the Rajah's place was heavily barred, but that he could see only very few men about the courtyard. Finally he said, 'There is darkness in our Rajah's house, but no sleep. Only darkness and fear and the wailing of women.' Cheerful, wasn't it? It made me feel cold down my back somehow. After Ali slipped away I stood here — by this table, and listened to the shouting and drumming in the settlement. Racket enough for twenty weddings. It was a little past midnight then."

Again Almayer stopped in his narrative with an abrupt shutting of lips, as if he had said all that there was to tell, and Lingard stood staring at him, pensive and silent. A big bluebottle fly flew in recklessly into the cool verandah, and darted with loud buzzing between the two men. Lingard struck at it with his hat. The fly swerved, and Almayer dodged his head out of the way. Then Lingard aimed another ineffectual blow; Almayer jumped up and waved his arms about. The fly buzzed desperately, and the vibration of minute wings sounded in the peace of the early morning like a far-off string orchestra accompanying the hollow, determined stamping of the two men, who, with heads thrown back and arms gyrating on high, or again bending low with infuriated lunges, were intent upon killing the intruder. But suddenly the buzz died out in a thin thrill away in the open space of the courtyard, leaving Lingard and Almayer standing face to face in the fresh silence of the young day, looking very puzzled and idle, their arms hanging uselessly by their sides — like men disheartened by some portentous failure.

"Look at that!" muttered Lingard. "Got away after all."

"Nuisance," said Almayer in the same tone. "Riverside is overrun with them. This house is badly placed . . . mosquitos . . . and these big flies . . . last week stung Nina . . . been ill four days . . . poor child. . . . I wonder what such damned things are made for!"

Chapter 2

After a long silence, during which Almayer had moved towards the table and sat down, his head between his hands, staring straight before him, Lingard, who had recommenced walking, cleared his throat and said —

“What was it you were saying?”

“Ah! Yes! You should have seen this settlement that night. I don’t think anybody went to bed. I walked down to the point, and could see them. They had a big bonfire in the palm grove, and the talk went on there till the morning. When I came back here and sat in the dark verandah in this quiet house I felt so frightfully lonely that I stole in and took the child out of her cot and brought her here into my hammock. If it hadn’t been for her I am sure I would have gone mad; I felt so utterly alone and helpless. Remember, I hadn’t heard from you for four months. Didn’t know whether you were alive or dead. Patalolo would have nothing to do with me. My own men were deserting me like rats do a sinking hulk. That was a black night for me, Captain Lingard. A black night as I sat here not knowing what would happen next. They were so excited and rowdy that I really feared they would come and burn the house over my head. I went and brought my revolver. Laid it loaded on the table. There were such awful yells now and then. Luckily the child slept through it, and seeing her so pretty and peaceful steadied me somehow. Couldn’t believe there was any violence in this world, looking at her lying so quiet and so unconscious of what went on. But it was very hard. Everything was at an end. You must understand that on that night there was no government in Sambir. Nothing to restrain those fellows. Patalolo had collapsed. I was abandoned by my own people, and all that lot could vent their spite on me if they wanted. They know no gratitude. How many times haven’t I saved this settlement from starvation? Absolute starvation. Only three months ago I distributed again a lot of rice on credit. There was nothing to eat in this infernal place. They came begging on their knees. There isn’t a man in Sambir, big or little, who is not in debt to Lingard & Co. Not one. You ought to be satisfied. You always said that was the right policy for us. Well, I carried it out. Ah! Captain Lingard, a policy like that should be backed by loaded rifles . . .”

“You had them!” exclaimed Lingard in the midst of his promenade, that went on more rapid as Almayer talked: the headlong tramp of a man hurrying on to do something violent. The verandah was full of dust, oppressive and choking, which rose under the old seaman’s feet, and made Almayer cough again and again.

“Yes, I had! Twenty. And not a finger to pull a trigger. It’s easy to talk,” he spluttered, his face very red.

Lingard dropped into a chair, and leaned back with one hand stretched out at length upon the table, the other thrown over the back of his seat. The dust settled, and the sun surging above the forest flooded the verandah with a clear light. Almayer got up and busied himself in lowering the split rattan screens that hung between the columns of the verandah.

“Phew!” said Lingard, “it will be a hot day. That’s right, my boy. Keep the sun out. We don’t want to be roasted alive here.”

Almayer came back, sat down, and spoke very calmly —

“In the morning I went across to see Patalolo. I took the child with me, of course. I found the water-gate barred, and had to walk round through the bushes. Patalolo received me lying on the floor, in the dark, all the shutters closed. I could get nothing out of him but lamentations and groans. He said you must be dead. That Lakamba was coming now with Abdulla’s guns to kill everybody. Said he did not mind being killed, as he was an old man, but that the wish of his heart was to make a pilgrimage. He was tired of men’s ingratitude — he had no heirs — he wanted to go to Mecca and die there. He would ask Abdulla to let him go. Then he abused Lakamba — between sobs — and you, a little. You prevented him from asking for a flag that would have been respected — he was right there — and now when his enemies were strong he was weak, and you were not there to help him. When I tried to put some heart into him, telling him he had four big guns — you know the brass six-pounders you left here last year — and that I would get powder, and that, perhaps, together we could make head against Lakamba, he simply howled at me. No matter which way he turned — he shrieked — the white men would be the death of him, while he wanted only to be a pilgrim and be at peace. My belief is,” added Almayer, after a short pause, and fixing a dull stare upon Lingard, “that the old fool saw this thing coming for a long time, and was not only too frightened to do anything himself, but actually too scared to let you or me know of his suspicions. Another of your particular pets! Well! You have a lucky hand, I must say!”

Lingard struck a sudden blow on the table with his clenched hand. There was a sharp crack of splitting wood. Almayer started up violently, then fell back in his chair and looked at the table.

“There!” he said, moodily, “you don’t know your own strength. This table is completely ruined. The only table I had been able to save from my wife. By and by I will have to eat squatting on the floor like a native.”

Lingard laughed heartily. “Well then, don’t nag at me like a woman at a drunken husband!” He became very serious after awhile, and added, “If it hadn’t been for the loss of the Flash I would have been here three months ago, and all would have been well. No use crying over that. Don’t you be uneasy, Kaspar. We will have everything ship-shape here in a very short time.”

“What? You don’t mean to expel Abdulla out of here by force! I tell you, you can’t.”

“Not I!” exclaimed Lingard. “That’s all over, I am afraid. Great pity. They will suffer for it. He will squeeze them. Great pity. Damn it! I feel so sorry for them if I had the

Flash here I would try force. Eh! Why not? However, the poor Flash is gone, and there is an end of it. Poor old hooker. Hey, Almayer? You made a voyage or two with me. Wasn't she a sweet craft? Could make her do anything but talk. She was better than a wife to me. Never scolded. Hey? . . . And to think that it should come to this. That I should leave her poor old bones sticking on a reef as though I had been a damned fool of a southern-going man who must have half a mile of water under his keel to be safe! Well! well! It's only those who do nothing that make no mistakes, I suppose. But it's hard. Hard."

He nodded sadly, with his eyes on the ground. Almayer looked at him with growing indignation.

"Upon my word, you are heartless," he burst out; "perfectly heartless — and selfish. It does not seem to strike you — in all that — that in losing your ship — by your recklessness, I am sure — you ruin me — us, and my little Nina. What's going to become of me and of her? That's what I want to know. You brought me here, made me your partner, and now, when everything is gone to the devil — through your fault, mind you — you talk about your ship . . . ship! You can get another. But here. This trade. That's gone now, thanks to Willems. . . . Your dear Willems!"

"Never you mind about Willems. I will look after him," said Lingard, severely. "And as to the trade . . . I will make your fortune yet, my boy. Never fear. Have you got any cargo for the schooner that brought me here?"

"The shed is full of rattans," answered Almayer, "and I have about eighty tons of guttah in the well. The last lot I ever will have, no doubt," he added, bitterly.

"So, after all, there was no robbery. You've lost nothing actually. Well, then, you must . . . Hallo! What's the matter! . . . Here! . . ."

"Robbery! No!" screamed Almayer, throwing up his hands.

He fell back in the chair and his face became purple. A little white foam appeared on his lips and trickled down his chin, while he lay back, showing the whites of his upturned eyes. When he came to himself he saw Lingard standing over him, with an empty water-chatty in his hand.

"You had a fit of some kind," said the old seaman with much concern. "What is it? You did give me a fright. So very sudden."

Almayer, his hair all wet and stuck to his head, as if he had been diving, sat up and gasped.

"Outrage! A fiendish outrage. I . . ."

Lingard put the chatty on the table and looked at him in attentive silence. Almayer passed his hand over his forehead and went on in an unsteady tone:

"When I remember that, I lose all control," he said. "I told you he anchored Abdulla's ship abreast our jetty, but over to the other shore, near the Rajah's place. The ship was surrounded with boats. From here it looked as if she had been landed on a raft. Every dugout in Sambir was there. Through my glass I could distinguish the faces of people on the poop — Abdulla, Willems, Lakamba — everybody. That old cringing scoundrel Sahamin was there. I could see quite plain. There seemed to be much talk

and discussion. Finally I saw a ship's boat lowered. Some Arab got into her, and the boat went towards Patalolo's landing-place. It seems they had been refused admittance — so they say. I think myself that the water-gate was not unbarred quick enough to please the exalted messenger. At any rate I saw the boat come back almost directly. I was looking on, rather interested, when I saw Willems and some more go forward — very busy about something there. That woman was also amongst them. Ah, that woman . . .”

Almayer choked, and seemed on the point of having a relapse, but by a violent effort regained a comparative composure.

“All of a sudden,” he continued — ”bang! They fired a shot into Patalolo's gate, and before I had time to catch my breath — I was startled, you may believe — they sent another and burst the gate open. Whereupon, I suppose, they thought they had done enough for a while, and probably felt hungry, for a feast began aft. Abdulla sat amongst them like an idol, cross-legged, his hands on his lap. He's too great altogether to eat when others do, but he presided, you see. Willems kept on dodging about forward, aloof from the crowd, and looking at my house through the ship's long glass. I could not resist it. I shook my fist at him.”

“Just so,” said Lingard, gravely. “That was the thing to do, of course. If you can't fight a man the best thing is to exasperate him.”

Almayer waved his hand in a superior manner, and continued, unmoved: “You may say what you like. You can't realize my feelings. He saw me, and, with his eye still at the small end of the glass, lifted his arm as if answering a hail. I thought my turn to be shot at would come next after Patalolo, so I ran up the Union Jack to the flagstaff in the yard. I had no other protection. There were only three men besides Ali that stuck to me — three cripples, for that matter, too sick to get away. I would have fought singlehanded, I think, I was that angry, but there was the child. What to do with her? Couldn't send her up the river with the mother. You know I can't trust my wife. I decided to keep very quiet, but to let nobody land on our shore. Private property, that; under a deed from Patalolo. I was within my right — wasn't I? The morning was very quiet. After they had a feed on board the barque with Abdulla most of them went home; only the big people remained. Towards three o'clock Sahamin crossed alone in a small canoe. I went down on our wharf with my gun to speak to him, but didn't let him land. The old hypocrite said Abdulla sent greetings and wished to talk with me on business; would I come on board? I said no; I would not. Told him that Abdulla may write and I would answer, but no interview, neither on board his ship nor on shore. I also said that if anybody attempted to land within my fences I would shoot — no matter whom. On that he lifted his hands to heaven, scandalized, and then paddled away pretty smartly — to report, I suppose. An hour or so afterwards I saw Willems land a boat party at the Rajah's. It was very quiet. Not a shot was fired, and there was hardly any shouting. They tumbled those brass guns you presented to Patalolo last year down the bank into the river. It's deep there close to. The channel runs that way, you know. About five, Willems went back on board, and I saw him join Abdulla

by the wheel aft. He talked a lot, swinging his arms about — seemed to explain things — pointed at my house, then down the reach. Finally, just before sunset, they hove upon the cable and dredged the ship down nearly half a mile to the junction of the two branches of the river — where she is now, as you might have seen.”

Lingard nodded.

“That evening, after dark — I was informed — Abdulla landed for the first time in Sambir. He was entertained in Sahamin’s house. I sent Ali to the settlement for news. He returned about nine, and reported that Patalolo was sitting on Abdulla’s left hand before Sahamin’s fire. There was a great council. Ali seemed to think that Patalolo was a prisoner, but he was wrong there. They did the trick very neatly. Before midnight everything was arranged as I can make out. Patalolo went back to his demolished stockade, escorted by a dozen boats with torches. It appears he begged Abdulla to let him have a passage in the Lord of the Isles to Penang. From there he would go to Mecca. The firing business was alluded to as a mistake. No doubt it was in a sense. Patalolo never meant resisting. So he is going as soon as the ship is ready for sea. He went on board next day with three women and half a dozen fellows as old as himself. By Abdulla’s orders he was received with a salute of seven guns, and he has been living on board ever since — five weeks. I doubt whether he will leave the river alive. At any rate he won’t live to reach Penang. Lakamba took over all his goods, and gave him a draft on Abdulla’s house payable in Penang. He is bound to die before he gets there. Don’t you see?”

He sat silent for a while in dejected meditation, then went on:

“Of course there were several rows during the night. Various fellows took the opportunity of the unsettled state of affairs to pay off old scores and settle old grudges. I passed the night in that chair there, dozing uneasily. Now and then there would be a great tumult and yelling which would make me sit up, revolver in hand. However, nobody was killed. A few broken heads — that’s all. Early in the morning Willems caused them to make a fresh move which I must say surprised me not a little. As soon as there was daylight they busied themselves in setting up a flag-pole on the space at the other end of the settlement, where Abdulla is having his houses built now. Shortly after sunrise there was a great gathering at the flag-pole. All went there. Willems was standing leaning against the mast, one arm over that woman’s shoulders. They had brought an armchair for Patalolo, and Lakamba stood on the right hand of the old man, who made a speech. Everybody in Sambir was there: women, slaves, children — everybody! Then Patalolo spoke. He said that by the mercy of the Most High he was going on a pilgrimage. The dearest wish of his heart was to be accomplished. Then, turning to Lakamba, he begged him to rule justly during his — Patalolo’s — absence. There was a bit of play-acting there. Lakamba said he was unworthy of the honourable burden, and Patalolo insisted. Poor old fool! It must have been bitter to him. They made him actually entreat that scoundrel. Fancy a man compelled to beg of a robber to despoil him! But the old Rajah was so frightened. Anyway, he did it, and Lakamba accepted at last. Then Willems made a speech to the crowd. Said that on his way

to the west the Rajah — he meant Patalolo — would see the Great White Ruler in Batavia and obtain his protection for Sambir. Meantime, he went on, I, an Orang Blanda and your friend, hoist the flag under the shadow of which there is safety. With that he ran up a Dutch flag to the mast-head. It was made hurriedly, during the night, of cotton stuffs, and, being heavy, hung down the mast, while the crowd stared. Ali told me there was a great sigh of surprise, but not a word was spoken till Lakamba advanced and proclaimed in a loud voice that during all that day every one passing by the flagstaff must uncover his head and salaam before the emblem.”

“But, hang it all!” exclaimed Lingard — ”Abdulla is British!”

“Abdulla wasn’t there at all — did not go on shore that day. Yet Ali, who has his wits about him, noticed that the space where the crowd stood was under the guns of the Lord of the Isles. They had put a coir warp ashore, and gave the barque a cant in the current, so as to bring the broadside to bear on the flagstaff. Clever! Eh? But nobody dreamt of resistance. When they recovered from the surprise there was a little quiet jeering; and Bahassoen abused Lakamba violently till one of Lakamba’s men hit him on the head with a staff. Frightful crack, I am told. Then they left off jeering. Meantime Patalolo went away, and Lakamba sat in the chair at the foot of the flagstaff, while the crowd surged around, as if they could not make up their minds to go. Suddenly there was a great noise behind Lakamba’s chair. It was that woman, who went for Willems. Ali says she was like a wild beast, but he twisted her wrist and made her grovel in the dust. Nobody knows exactly what it was about. Some say it was about that flag. He carried her off, flung her into a canoe, and went on board Abdulla’s ship. After that Sahamin was the first to salaam to the flag. Others followed suit. Before noon everything was quiet in the settlement, and Ali came back and told me all this.”

Almayer drew a long breath. Lingard stretched out his legs.

“Go on!” he said.

Almayer seemed to struggle with himself. At last he spluttered out:

“The hardest is to tell yet. The most unheard-of thing! An outrage! A fiendish outrage!”

Chapter 3

“Well! Let’s know all about it. I can’t imagine . . .” began Lingard, after waiting for some time in silence.

“Can’t imagine! I should think you couldn’t,” interrupted Almayer. “Why! . . . You just listen. When Ali came back I felt a little easier in my mind. There was then some semblance of order in Sambir. I had the Jack up since the morning and began to feel safer. Some of my men turned up in the afternoon. I did not ask any questions; set them to work as if nothing had happened. Towards the evening — it might have been five or half-past — I was on our jetty with the child when I heard shouts at the far-off end of the settlement. At first I didn’t take much notice. By and by Ali came to me and says, ‘Master, give me the child, there is much trouble in the settlement.’ So I gave him Nina and went in, took my revolver, and passed through the house into the back courtyard. As I came down the steps I saw all the serving girls clear out from the cooking shed, and I heard a big crowd howling on the other side of the dry ditch which is the limit of our ground. Could not see them on account of the fringe of bushes along the ditch, but I knew that crowd was angry and after somebody. As I stood wondering, that Jim-Eng — you know the Chinaman who settled here a couple of years ago?”

“He was my passenger; I brought him here,” exclaimed Lingard. “A first-class Chinaman that.”

“Did you? I had forgotten. Well, that Jim-Eng, he burst through the bush and fell into my arms, so to speak. He told me, panting, that they were after him because he wouldn’t take off his hat to the flag. He was not so much scared, but he was very angry and indignant. Of course he had to run for it; there were some fifty men after him — Lakamba’s friends — but he was full of fight. Said he was an Englishman, and would not take off his hat to any flag but English. I tried to soothe him while the crowd was shouting on the other side of the ditch. I told him he must take one of my canoes and cross the river. Stop on the other side for a couple of days. He wouldn’t. Not he. He was English, and he would fight the whole lot. Says he: ‘They are only black fellows. We white men,’ meaning me and himself, ‘can fight everybody in Sambir.’ He was mad with passion. The crowd quieted a little, and I thought I could shelter Jim-Eng without much risk, when all of a sudden I heard Willems’ voice. He shouted to me in English: ‘Let four men enter your compound to get that Chinaman!’ I said nothing. Told Jim-Eng to keep quiet too. Then after a while Willems shouts again: ‘Don’t resist, Almayer. I give you good advice. I am keeping this crowd back. Don’t resist them!’ That beggar’s voice enraged me; I could not help it. I cried to him: ‘You are a liar!’ and just then Jim-Eng, who had flung off his jacket and had tucked up his trousers

ready for a fight; just then that fellow he snatches the revolver out of my hand and lets fly at them through the bush. There was a sharp cry — he must have hit somebody — and a great yell, and before I could wink twice they were over the ditch and through the bush and on top of us! Simply rolled over us! There wasn't the slightest chance to resist. I was trampled under foot, Jim-Eng got a dozen gashes about his body, and we were carried halfway up the yard in the first rush. My eyes and mouth were full of dust; I was on my back with three or four fellows sitting on me. I could hear Jim-Eng trying to shout not very far from me. Now and then they would throttle him and he would gurgle. I could hardly breathe myself with two heavy fellows on my chest. Willems came up running and ordered them to raise me up, but to keep good hold. They led me into the verandah. I looked round, but did not see either Ali or the child. Felt easier. Struggled a little. . . . Oh, my God!"

Almayer's face was distorted with a passing spasm of rage. Lingard moved in his chair slightly. Almayer went on after a short pause:

"They held me, shouting threats in my face. Willems took down my hammock and threw it to them. He pulled out the drawer of this table, and found there a palm and needle and some sail-twine. We were making awnings for your brig, as you had asked me last voyage before you left. He knew, of course, where to look for what he wanted. By his orders they laid me out on the floor, wrapped me in my hammock, and he started to stitch me in, as if I had been a corpse, beginning at the feet. While he worked he laughed wickedly. I called him all the names I could think of. He told them to put their dirty paws over my mouth and nose. I was nearly choked. Whenever I moved they punched me in the ribs. He went on taking fresh needlefuls as he wanted them, and working steadily. Sewed me up to my throat. Then he rose, saying, 'That will do; let go.' That woman had been standing by; they must have been reconciled. She clapped her hands. I lay on the floor like a bale of goods while he stared at me, and the woman shrieked with delight. Like a bale of goods! There was a grin on every face, and the verandah was full of them. I wished myself dead — 'pon my word, Captain Lingard, I did! I do now whenever I think of it!"

Lingard's face expressed sympathetic indignation. Almayer dropped his head upon his arms on the table, and spoke in that position in an indistinct and muffled voice, without looking up.

"Finally, by his directions, they flung me into the big rocking-chair. I was sewed in so tight that I was stiff like a piece of wood. He was giving orders in a very loud voice, and that man Babalatchi saw that they were executed. They obeyed him implicitly. Meantime I lay there in the chair like a log, and that woman capered before me and made faces; snapped her fingers before my nose. Women are bad! — ain't they? I never saw her before, as far as I know. Never done anything to her. Yet she was perfectly fiendish. Can you understand it? Now and then she would leave me alone to hang round his neck for awhile, and then she would return before my chair and begin her exercises again. He looked on, indulgent. The perspiration ran down my face, got into my eyes — my arms were sewn in. I was blinded half the time; at times I could see

better. She drags him before my chair. 'I am like white women,' she says, her arms round his neck. You should have seen the faces of the fellows in the verandah! They were scandalized and ashamed of themselves to see her behaviour. Suddenly she asks him, alluding to me: 'When are you going to kill him?' Imagine how I felt. I must have swooned; I don't remember exactly. I fancy there was a row; he was angry. When I got my wits again he was sitting close to me, and she was gone. I understood he sent her to my wife, who was hiding in the back room and never came out during this affair. Willems says to me — I fancy I can hear his voice, hoarse and dull — he says to me: 'Not a hair of your head shall be touched.' I made no sound. Then he goes on: 'Please remark that the flag you have hoisted — which, by the by, is not yours — has been respected. Tell Captain Lingard so when you do see him. But,' he says, 'you first fired at the crowd.' 'You are a liar, you blackguard!' I shouted. He winced, I am sure. It hurt him to see I was not frightened. 'Anyways,' he says, 'a shot had been fired out of your compound and a man was hit. Still, all your property shall be respected on account of the Union Jack. Moreover, I have no quarrel with Captain Lingard, who is the senior partner in this business. As to you,' he continued, 'you will not forget this day — not if you live to be a hundred years old — or I don't know your nature. You will keep the bitter taste of this humiliation to the last day of your life, and so your kindness to me shall be repaid. I shall remove all the powder you have. This coast is under the protection of the Netherlands, and you have no right to have any powder. There are the Governor's Orders in Council to that effect, and you know it. Tell me where the key of the small storehouse is?' I said not a word, and he waited a little, then rose, saying: 'It's your own fault if there is any damage done.' He ordered Babalatchi to have the lock of the office-room forced, and went in — rummaged amongst my drawers — could not find the key. Then that woman Aissa asked my wife, and she gave them the key. After awhile they tumbled every barrel into the river. Eighty-three hundredweight! He superintended himself, and saw every barrel roll into the water. There were mutterings. Babalatchi was angry and tried to expostulate, but he gave him a good shaking. I must say he was perfectly fearless with those fellows. Then he came back to the verandah, sat down by me again, and says: 'We found your man Ali with your little daughter hiding in the bushes up the river. We brought them in. They are perfectly safe, of course. Let me congratulate you, Almayer, upon the cleverness of your child. She recognized me at once, and cried "pig" as naturally as you would yourself. Circumstances alter feelings. You should have seen how frightened your man Ali was. Clapped his hands over her mouth. I think you spoil her, Almayer. But I am not angry. Really, you look so ridiculous in this chair that I can't feel angry.' I made a frantic effort to burst out of my hammock to get at that scoundrel's throat, but I only fell off and upset the chair over myself. He laughed and said only: 'I leave you half of your revolver cartridges and take half myself; they will fit mine. We are both white men, and should back each other up. I may want them.' I shouted at him from under the chair: 'You are a thief,' but he never looked, and went away, one hand round that woman's waist, the other on Babalatchi's shoulder, to whom he was talking —

laying down the law about something or other. In less than five minutes there was nobody inside our fences. After awhile Ali came to look for me and cut me free. I haven't seen Willems since — nor anybody else for that matter. I have been left alone. I offered sixty dollars to the man who had been wounded, which were accepted. They released Jim-Eng the next day, when the flag had been hauled down. He sent six cases of opium to me for safe keeping but has not left his house. I think he is safe enough now. Everything is very quiet."

Towards the end of his narrative Almayer lifted his head off the table, and now sat back in his chair and stared at the bamboo rafters of the roof above him. Lingard lolled in his seat with his legs stretched out. In the peaceful gloom of the verandah, with its lowered screens, they heard faint noises from the world outside in the blazing sunshine: a hail on the river, the answer from the shore, the creak of a pulley; sounds short, interrupted, as if lost suddenly in the brilliance of noonday. Lingard got up slowly, walked to the front rail, and holding one of the screens aside, looked out in silence. Over the water and the empty courtyard came a distinct voice from a small schooner anchored abreast of the Lingard jetty.

"Serang! Take a pull at the main peak halyards. This gaff is down on the boom."

There was a shrill pipe dying in long-drawn cadence, the song of the men swinging on the rope. The voice said sharply: "That will do!" Another voice — the serang's probably — shouted: "Ikat!" and as Lingard dropped the blind and turned away all was silent again, as if there had been nothing on the other side of the swaying screen; nothing but the light, brilliant, crude, heavy, lying on a dead land like a pall of fire. Lingard sat down again, facing Almayer, his elbow on the table, in a thoughtful attitude.

"Nice little schooner," muttered Almayer, wearily. "Did you buy her?"

"No," answered Lingard. "After I lost the Flash we got to Palembang in our boats. I chartered her there, for six months. From young Ford, you know. Belongs to him. He wanted a spell ashore, so I took charge myself. Of course all Ford's people on board. Strangers to me. I had to go to Singapore about the insurance; then I went to Macassar, of course. Had long passages. No wind. It was like a curse on me. I had lots of trouble with old Hudig. That delayed me much."

"Ah! Hudig! Why with Hudig?" asked Almayer, in a perfunctory manner.

"Oh! about a . . . a woman," mumbled Lingard.

Almayer looked at him with languid surprise. The old seaman had twisted his white beard into a point, and now was busy giving his moustaches a fierce curl. His little red eyes — those eyes that had smarted under the salt sprays of every sea, that had looked unwinking to windward in the gales of all latitudes — now glared at Almayer from behind the lowered eyebrows like a pair of frightened wild beasts crouching in a bush.

"Extraordinary! So like you! What can you have to do with Hudig's women? The old sinner!" said Almayer, negligently.

"What are you talking about! Wife of a friend of . . . I mean of a man I know . . ."

"Still, I don't see . . ." interjected Almayer carelessly.

“Of a man you know too. Well. Very well.”

“I knew so many men before you made me bury myself in this hole!” growled Almayer, unamiably. “If she had anything to do with Hudig — that wife — then she can’t be up to much. I would be sorry for the man,” added Almayer, brightening up with the recollection of the scandalous tittle-tattle of the past, when he was a young man in the second capital of the Islands — and so well informed, so well informed. He laughed. Lingard’s frown deepened.

“Don’t talk foolish! It’s Willems’ wife.”

Almayer grasped the sides of his seat, his eyes and mouth opened wide.

“What? Why!” he exclaimed, bewildered.

“Willems’ — wife,” repeated Lingard distinctly. “You ain’t deaf, are you? The wife of Willems. Just so. As to why! There was a promise. And I did not know what had happened here.”

“What is it. You’ve been giving her money, I bet,” cried Almayer.

“Well, no!” said Lingard, deliberately. “Although I suppose I shall have to . . .”

Almayer groaned.

“The fact is,” went on Lingard, speaking slowly and steadily, “the fact is that I have . . . I have brought her here. Here. To Sambir.”

“In heaven’s name! why?” shouted Almayer, jumping up. The chair tilted and fell slowly over. He raised his clasped hands above his head and brought them down jerkily, separating his fingers with an effort, as if tearing them apart. Lingard nodded, quickly, several times.

“I have. Awkward. Hey?” he said, with a puzzled look upwards.

“Upon my word,” said Almayer, tearfully. “I can’t understand you at all. What will you do next! Willems’ wife!”

“Wife and child. Small boy, you know. They are on board the schooner.”

Almayer looked at Lingard with sudden suspicion, then turning away busied himself in picking up the chair, sat down in it turning his back upon the old seaman, and tried to whistle, but gave it up directly. Lingard went on —

“Fact is, the fellow got into trouble with Hudig. Worked upon my feelings. I promised to arrange matters. I did. With much trouble. Hudig was angry with her for wishing to join her husband. Unprincipled old fellow. You know she is his daughter. Well, I said I would see her through it all right; help Willems to a fresh start and so on. I spoke to Craig in Palembang. He is getting on in years, and wanted a manager or partner. I promised to guarantee Willems’ good behaviour. We settled all that. Craig is an old crony of mine. Been shipmates in the forties. He’s waiting for him now. A pretty mess! What do you think?”

Almayer shrugged his shoulders.

“That woman broke with Hudig on my assurance that all would be well,” went on Lingard, with growing dismay. “She did. Proper thing, of course. Wife, husband . . . together . . . as it should be . . . Smart fellow . . . Impossible scoundrel . . . Jolly old go! Oh! damn!”

Almayer laughed spitefully.

"How delighted he will be," he said, softly. "You will make two people happy. Two at least!" He laughed again, while Lingard looked at his shaking shoulders in consternation.

"I am jammed on a lee shore this time, if ever I was," muttered Lingard.

"Send her back quick," suggested Almayer, stifling another laugh.

"What are you sniggering at?" growled Lingard, angrily. "I'll work it out all clear yet. Meantime you must receive her into this house."

"My house!" cried Almayer, turning round.

"It's mine too — a little isn't it?" said Lingard. "Don't argue," he shouted, as Almayer opened his mouth. "Obey orders and hold your tongue!"

"Oh! If you take it in that tone!" mumbled Almayer, sulkily, with a gesture of assent.

"You are so aggravating too, my boy," said the old seaman, with unexpected placidity. "You must give me time to turn round. I can't keep her on board all the time. I must tell her something. Say, for instance, that he is gone up the river. Expected back every day. That's it. D'ye hear? You must put her on that tack and dodge her along easy, while I take the kinks out of the situation. By God!" he exclaimed, mournfully, after a short pause, "life is foul! Foul like a lee forebrace on a dirty night. And yet. And yet. One must see it clear for running before going below — for good. Now you attend to what I said," he added, sharply, "if you don't want to quarrel with me, my boy."

"I don't want to quarrel with you," murmured Almayer with unwilling deference. "Only I wish I could understand you. I know you are my best friend, Captain Lingard; only, upon my word, I can't make you out sometimes! I wish I could . . ."

Lingard burst into a loud laugh which ended shortly in a deep sigh. He closed his eyes, tilting his head over the back of his armchair; and on his face, baked by the unclouded suns of many hard years, there appeared for a moment a weariness and a look of age which startled Almayer, like an unexpected disclosure of evil.

"I am done up," said Lingard, gently. "Perfectly done up. All night on deck getting that schooner up the river. Then talking with you. Seems to me I could go to sleep on a clothes-line. I should like to eat something though. Just see about that, Kaspar."

Almayer clapped his hands, and receiving no response was going to call, when in the central passage of the house, behind the red curtain of the doorway opening upon the verandah, they heard a child's imperious voice speaking shrilly.

"Take me up at once. I want to be carried into the verandah. I shall be very angry. Take me up."

A man's voice answered, subdued, in humble remonstrance. The faces of Almayer and Lingard brightened at once. The old seaman called out —

"Bring the child. Lekas!"

"You will see how she has grown," exclaimed Almayer, in a jubilant tone.

Through the curtained doorway Ali appeared with little Nina Almayer in his arms. The child had one arm round his neck, and with the other she hugged a ripe pumelo nearly as big as her own head. Her little pink, sleeveless robe had half slipped off her

shoulders, but the long black hair, that framed her olive face, in which the big black eyes looked out in childish solemnity, fell in luxuriant profusion over her shoulders, all round her and over Ali's arms, like a close-meshed and delicate net of silken threads. Lingard got up to meet Ali, and as soon as she caught sight of the old seaman she dropped the fruit and put out both her hands with a cry of delight. He took her from the Malay, and she laid hold of his moustaches with an affectionate goodwill that brought unaccustomed tears into his little red eyes.

"Not so hard, little one, not so hard," he murmured, pressing with an enormous hand, that covered it entirely, the child's head to his face.

"Pick up my pumelo, O Rajah of the sea!" she said, speaking in a high-pitched, clear voice with great volubility. "There, under the table. I want it quick! Quick! You have been away fighting with many men. Ali says so. You are a mighty fighter. Ali says so. On the great sea far away, away, away."

She waved her hand, staring with dreamy vacancy, while Lingard looked at her, and squatting down groped under the table after the pumelo.

"Where does she get those notions?" said Lingard, getting up cautiously, to Almayer, who had been giving orders to Ali.

"She is always with the men. Many a time I've found her with her fingers in their rice dish, of an evening. She does not care for her mother though — I am glad to say. How pretty she is — and so sharp. My very image!"

Lingard had put the child on the table, and both men stood looking at her with radiant faces.

"A perfect little woman," whispered Lingard. "Yes, my dear boy, we shall make her somebody. You'll see!"

"Very little chance of that now," remarked Almayer, sadly.

"You do not know!" exclaimed Lingard, taking up the child again, and beginning to walk up and down the verandah. "I have my plans. I have — listen."

And he began to explain to the interested Almayer his plans for the future. He would interview Abdulla and Lakamba. There must be some understanding with those fellows now they had the upper hand. Here he interrupted himself to swear freely, while the child, who had been diligently fumbling about his neck, had found his whistle and blew a loud blast now and then close to his ear — which made him wince and laugh as he put her hands down, scolding her lovingly. Yes — that would be easily settled. He was a man to be reckoned with yet. Nobody knew that better than Almayer. Very well. Then he must patiently try and keep some little trade together. It would be all right. But the great thing — and here Lingard spoke lower, bringing himself to a sudden standstill before the entranced Almayer — the great thing would be the gold hunt up the river. He — Lingard — would devote himself to it. He had been in the interior before. There were immense deposits of alluvial gold there. Fabulous. He felt sure. Had seen places. Dangerous work? Of course! But what a reward! He would explore — and find. Not a shadow of doubt. Hang the danger! They would first get as much as they could for themselves. Keep the thing quiet. Then after a time form a Company. In

Batavia or in England. Yes, in England. Much better. Splendid! Why, of course. And that baby would be the richest woman in the world. He — Lingard — would not, perhaps, see it — although he felt good for many years yet — but Almayer would. Here was something to live for yet! Hey?

But the richest woman in the world had been for the last five minutes shouting shrilly — "Rajah Laut! Rajah Laut! Hai! Give ear!" while the old seaman had been speaking louder, unconsciously, to make his deep bass heard above the impatient clamour. He stopped now and said tenderly —

"What is it, little woman?"

"I am not a little woman. I am a white child. Anak Putih. A white child; and the white men are my brothers. Father says so. And Ali says so too. Ali knows as much as father. Everything."

Almayer almost danced with paternal delight.

"I taught her. I taught her," he repeated, laughing with tears in his eyes. "Isn't she sharp?"

"I am the slave of the white child," said Lingard, with playful solemnity. "What is the order?"

"I want a house," she warbled, with great eagerness. "I want a house, and another house on the roof, and another on the roof — high. High! Like the places where they dwell — my brothers — in the land where the sun sleeps."

"To the westward," explained Almayer, under his breath. "She remembers everything. She wants you to build a house of cards. You did, last time you were here."

Lingard sat down with the child on his knees, and Almayer pulled out violently one drawer after another, looking for the cards, as if the fate of the world depended upon his haste. He produced a dirty double pack which was only used during Lingard's visit to Sambir, when he would sometimes play — of an evening — with Almayer, a game which he called Chinese bezique. It bored Almayer, but the old seaman delighted in it, considering it a remarkable product of Chinese genius — a race for which he had an unaccountable liking and admiration.

"Now we will get on, my little pearl," he said, putting together with extreme precaution two cards that looked absurdly flimsy between his big fingers. Little Nina watched him with intense seriousness as he went on erecting the ground floor, while he continued to speak to Almayer with his head over his shoulder so as not to endanger the structure with his breath.

"I know what I am talking about. . . . Been in California in forty-nine. . . . Not that I made much . . . then in Victoria in the early days I know all about it. Trust me. Moreover a blind man could . . . Be quiet, little sister, or you will knock this affair down. . . . My hand pretty steady yet! Hey, Kaspar? . . . Now, delight of my heart, we shall put a third house on the top of these two . . . keep very quiet. . . . As I was saying, you got only to stoop and gather handfuls of gold . . . dust . . . there. Now here we are. Three houses on top of one another. Grand!"

He leaned back in his chair, one hand on the child's head, which he smoothed mechanically, and gesticulated with the other, speaking to Almayer.

"Once on the spot, there would be only the trouble to pick up the stuff. Then we shall all go to Europe. The child must be educated. We shall be rich. Rich is no name for it. Down in Devonshire where I belong, there was a fellow who built a house near Teignmouth which had as many windows as a three-decker has ports. Made all his money somewhere out here in the good old days. People around said he had been a pirate. We boys — I was a boy in a Brixham trawler then — certainly believed that. He went about in a bath-chair in his grounds. Had a glass eye . . ."

"Higher, Higher!" called out Nina, pulling the old seaman's beard.

"You do worry me — don't you?" said Lingard, gently, giving her a tender kiss. "What? One more house on top of all these? Well! I will try."

The child watched him breathlessly. When the difficult feat was accomplished she clapped her hands, looked on steadily, and after a while gave a great sigh of content.

"Oh! Look out!" shouted Almayer.

The structure collapsed suddenly before the child's light breath. Lingard looked discomposed for a moment. Almayer laughed, but the little girl began to cry.

"Take her," said the old seaman, abruptly. Then, after Almayer went away with the crying child, he remained sitting by the table, looking gloomily at the heap of cards.

"Damn this Willems," he muttered to himself. "But I will do it yet!"

He got up, and with an angry push of his hand swept the cards off the table. Then he fell back in his chair.

"Tired as a dog," he sighed out, closing his eyes.

Chapter 4

Consciously or unconsciously, men are proud of their firmness, steadfastness of purpose, directness of aim. They go straight towards their desire, to the accomplishment of virtue — sometimes of crime — in an uplifting persuasion of their firmness. They walk the road of life, the road fenced in by their tastes, prejudices, disdains or enthusiasms, generally honest, invariably stupid, and are proud of never losing their way. If they do stop, it is to look for a moment over the hedges that make them safe, to look at the misty valleys, at the distant peaks, at cliffs and morasses, at the dark forests and the hazy plains where other human beings grope their days painfully away, stumbling over the bones of the wise, over the unburied remains of their predecessors who died alone, in gloom or in sunshine, halfway from anywhere. The man of purpose does not understand, and goes on, full of contempt. He never loses his way. He knows where he is going and what he wants. Travelling on, he achieves great length without any breadth, and battered, besmirched, and weary, he touches the goal at last; he grasps the reward of his perseverance, of his virtue, of his healthy optimism: an untruthful tombstone over a dark and soon forgotten grave.

Lingard had never hesitated in his life. Why should he? He had been a most successful trader, and a man lucky in his fights, skilful in navigation, undeniably first in seamanship in those seas. He knew it. Had he not heard the voice of common consent?

The voice of the world that respected him so much; the whole world to him — for to us the limits of the universe are strictly defined by those we know. There is nothing for us outside the babble of praise and blame on familiar lips, and beyond our last acquaintance there lies only a vast chaos; a chaos of laughter and tears which concerns us not; laughter and tears unpleasant, wicked, morbid, contemptible — because heard imperfectly by ears rebellious to strange sounds. To Lingard — simple himself — all things were simple. He seldom read. Books were not much in his way, and he had to work hard navigating, trading, and also, in obedience to his benevolent instincts, shaping stray lives he found here and there under his busy hand. He remembered the Sunday-school teachings of his native village and the discourses of the black-coated gentleman connected with the Mission to Fishermen and Seamen, whose yawl-rigged boat darting through rain-squalls amongst the coasters wind-bound in Falmouth Bay, was part of those precious pictures of his youthful days that lingered in his memory. “As clever a sky-pilot as you could wish to see,” he would say with conviction, “and the best man to handle a boat in any weather I ever did meet!” Such were the agencies that had roughly shaped his young soul before he went away to see the world in a southern-going ship — before he went, ignorant and happy, heavy of hand, pure in

heart, profane in speech, to give himself up to the great sea that took his life and gave him his fortune. When thinking of his rise in the world — commander of ships, then shipowner, then a man of much capital, respected wherever he went, Lingard in a word, the Rajah Laut — he was amazed and awed by his fate, that seemed to his ill-informed mind the most wondrous known in the annals of men. His experience appeared to him immense and conclusive, teaching him the lesson of the simplicity of life. In life — as in seamanship — there were only two ways of doing a thing: the right way and the wrong way. Common sense and experience taught a man the way that was right. The other was for lubbers and fools, and led, in seamanship, to loss of spars and sails or shipwreck; in life, to loss of money and consideration, or to an unlucky knock on the head. He did not consider it his duty to be angry with rascals. He was only angry with things he could not understand, but for the weaknesses of humanity he could find a contemptuous tolerance. It being manifest that he was wise and lucky — otherwise how could he have been as successful in life as he had been? — he had an inclination to set right the lives of other people, just as he could hardly refrain — in defiance of nautical etiquette — from interfering with his chief officer when the crew was sending up a new topmast, or generally when busy about, what he called, “a heavy job.” He was meddling with perfect modesty; if he knew a thing or two there was no merit in it. “Hard knocks taught me wisdom, my boy,” he used to say, “and you had better take the advice of a man who has been a fool in his time. Have another.” And “my boy” as a rule took the cool drink, the advice, and the consequent help which Lingard felt himself bound in honour to give, so as to back up his opinion like an honest man. Captain Tom went sailing from island to island, appearing unexpectedly in various localities, beaming, noisy, anecdotal, commendatory or comminatory, but always welcome.

It was only since his return to Sambir that the old seaman had for the first time known doubt and unhappiness. The loss of the Flash — planted firmly and for ever on a ledge of rock at the north end of Gaspar Straits in the uncertain light of a cloudy morning — shook him considerably; and the amazing news which he heard on his arrival in Sambir were not made to soothe his feelings. A good many years ago — prompted by his love of adventure — he, with infinite trouble, had found out and surveyed — for his own benefit only — the entrances to that river, where, he had heard through native report, a new settlement of Malays was forming. No doubt he thought at the time mostly of personal gain; but, received with hearty friendliness by Patalolo, he soon came to like the ruler and the people, offered his counsel and his help, and — knowing nothing of Arcadia — he dreamed of Arcadian happiness for that little corner of the world which he loved to think all his own. His deep-seated and immovable conviction that only he — he, Lingard — knew what was good for them was characteristic of him and, after all, not so very far wrong. He would make them happy whether or no, he said, and he meant it. His trade brought prosperity to the young state, and the fear of his heavy hand secured its internal peace for many years.

He looked proudly upon his work. With every passing year he loved more the land, the people, the muddy river that, if he could help it, would carry no other craft but

the Flash on its unclean and friendly surface. As he slowly warped his vessel upstream he would scan with knowing looks the riverside clearings, and pronounce solemn judgment upon the prospects of the season's rice-crop. He knew every settler on the banks between the sea and Sambir; he knew their wives, their children; he knew every individual of the multi-coloured groups that, standing on the flimsy platforms of tiny reed dwellings built over the water, waved their hands and shouted shrilly: "O! Kapal layer! Hai!" while the Flash swept slowly through the populated reach, to enter the lonely stretches of sparkling brown water bordered by the dense and silent forest, whose big trees nodded their outspread boughs gently in the faint, warm breeze — as if in sign of tender but melancholy welcome. He loved it all: the landscape of brown golds and brilliant emeralds under the dome of hot sapphire; the whispering big trees; the loquacious nipa-palms that rattled their leaves volubly in the night breeze, as if in haste to tell him all the secrets of the great forest behind them. He loved the heavy scents of blossoms and black earth, that breath of life and of death which lingered over his brig in the damp air of tepid and peaceful nights. He loved the narrow and sombre creeks, strangers to sunshine: black, smooth, tortuous — like byways of despair. He liked even the troops of sorrowful-faced monkeys that profaned the quiet spots with capricious gambols and insane gestures of inhuman madness. He loved everything there, animated or inanimated; the very mud of the riverside; the very alligators, enormous and stolid, basking on it with impertinent unconcern. Their size was a source of pride to him. "Immense fellows! Make two of them Palembang reptiles! I tell you, old man!" he would shout, poking some crony of his playfully in the ribs: "I tell you, big as you are, they could swallow you in one gulp, hat, boots and all! Magnificent beggars! Wouldn't you like to see them? Wouldn't you! Ha! ha! ha!" His thunderous laughter filled the verandah, rolled over the hotel garden, overflowed into the street, paralyzing for a short moment the noiseless traffic of bare brown feet; and its loud reverberations would even startle the landlord's tame bird — a shameless mynah — into a momentary propriety of behaviour under the nearest chair. In the big billiard-room perspiring men in thin cotton singlets would stop the game, listen, cue in hand, for a while through the open windows, then nod their moist faces at each other sagaciously and whisper: "The old fellow is talking about his river."

His river! The whispers of curious men, the mystery of the thing, were to Lingard a source of never-ending delight. The common talk of ignorance exaggerated the profits of his queer monopoly, and, although strictly truthful in general, he liked, on that matter, to mislead speculation still further by boasts full of cold raillery. His river! By it he was not only rich — he was interesting. This secret of his which made him different to the other traders of those seas gave intimate satisfaction to that desire for singularity which he shared with the rest of mankind, without being aware of its presence within his breast. It was the greater part of his happiness, but he only knew it after its loss, so unforeseen, so sudden and so cruel.

After his conversation with Almayer he went on board the schooner, sent Joanna on shore, and shut himself up in his cabin, feeling very unwell. He made the most of

his indisposition to Almayer, who came to visit him twice a day. It was an excuse for doing nothing just yet. He wanted to think. He was very angry. Angry with himself, with Willems. Angry at what Willems had done — and also angry at what he had left undone. The scoundrel was not complete. The conception was perfect, but the execution, unaccountably, fell short. Why? He ought to have cut Almayer's throat and burnt the place to ashes — then cleared out. Got out of his way; of him, Lingard! Yet he didn't. Was it impudence, contempt — or what? He felt hurt at the implied disrespect of his power, and the incomplete rascality of the proceeding disturbed him exceedingly. There was something short, something wanting, something that would have given him a free hand in the work of retribution. The obvious, the right thing to do, was to shoot Willems. Yet how could he? Had the fellow resisted, showed fight, or ran away; had he shown any consciousness of harm done, it would have been more possible, more natural. But no! The fellow actually had sent him a message. Wanted to see him. What for? The thing could not be explained. An unexampled, cold-blooded treachery, awful, incomprehensible. Why did he do it? Why? Why? The old seaman in the stuffy solitude of his little cabin on board the schooner groaned out many times that question, striking with an open palm his perplexed forehead.

During his four days of seclusion he had received two messages from the outer world; from that world of Sambir which had, so suddenly and so finally, slipped from his grasp. One, a few words from Willems written on a torn-out page of a small notebook; the other, a communication from Abdulla caligraphed carefully on a large sheet of flimsy paper and delivered to him in a green silk wrapper. The first he could not understand. It said: "Come and see me. I am not afraid. Are you? W." He tore it up angrily, but before the small bits of dirty paper had the time to flutter down and settle on the floor, the anger was gone and was replaced by a sentiment that induced him to go on his knees, pick up the fragments of the torn message, piece it together on the top of his chronometer box, and contemplate it long and thoughtfully, as if he had hoped to read the answer of the horrible riddle in the very form of the letters that went to make up that fresh insult. Abdulla's letter he read carefully and rammed it into his pocket, also with anger, but with anger that ended in a half-resigned, half-amused smile. He would never give in as long as there was a chance. "It's generally the safest way to stick to the ship as long as she will swim," was one of his favourite sayings: "The safest and the right way. To abandon a craft because it leaks is easy — but poor work. Poor work!" Yet he was intelligent enough to know when he was beaten, and to accept the situation like a man, without repining. When Almayer came on board that afternoon he handed him the letter without comment.

Almayer read it, returned it in silence, and leaning over the taffrail (the two men were on deck) looked down for some time at the play of the eddies round the schooner's rudder. At last he said without looking up —

"That's a decent enough letter. Abdulla gives him up to you. I told you they were getting sick of him. What are you going to do?"

Lingard cleared his throat, shuffled his feet, opened his mouth with great determination, but said nothing for a while. At last he murmured —

“I’ll be hanged if I know — just yet.”

“I wish you would do something soon . . .”

“What’s the hurry?” interrupted Lingard. “He can’t get away. As it stands he is at my mercy, as far as I can see.”

“Yes,” said Almayer, reflectively — “and very little mercy he deserves too. Abdulla’s meaning — as I can make it out amongst all those compliments — is: ‘Get rid for me of that white man — and we shall live in peace and share the trade.’”

“You believe that?” asked Lingard, contemptuously.

“Not altogether,” answered Almayer. “No doubt we will share the trade for a time — till he can grab the lot. Well, what are you going to do?”

He looked up as he spoke and was surprised to see Lingard’s discomposed face.

“You ain’t well. Pain anywhere?” he asked, with real solicitude.

“I have been queer — you know — these last few days, but no pain.” He struck his broad chest several times, cleared his throat with a powerful “Hem!” and repeated: “No. No pain. Good for a few years yet. But I am bothered with all this, I can tell you!”

“You must take care of yourself,” said Almayer. Then after a pause he added: “You will see Abdulla. Won’t you?”

“I don’t know. Not yet. There’s plenty of time,” said Lingard, impatiently.

“I wish you would do something,” urged Almayer, moodily. “You know, that woman is a perfect nuisance to me. She and her brat! Yelps all day. And the children don’t get on together. Yesterday the little devil wanted to fight with my Nina. Scratched her face, too. A perfect savage! Like his honourable papa. Yes, really. She worries about her husband, and whimpers from morning to night. When she isn’t weeping she is furious with me. Yesterday she tormented me to tell her when he would be back and cried because he was engaged in such dangerous work. I said something about it being all right — no necessity to make a fool of herself, when she turned upon me like a wild cat. Called me a brute, selfish, heartless; raved about her beloved Peter risking his life for my benefit, while I did not care. Said I took advantage of his generous good-nature to get him to do dangerous work — my work. That he was worth twenty of the likes of me. That she would tell you — open your eyes as to the kind of man I was, and so on. That’s what I’ve got to put up with for your sake. You really might consider me a little. I haven’t robbed anybody,” went on Almayer, with an attempt at bitter irony — “or sold my best friend, but still you ought to have some pity on me. It’s like living in a hot fever. She is out of her wits. You make my house a refuge for scoundrels and lunatics. It isn’t fair. ‘Pon my word it isn’t! When she is in her tantrums she is ridiculously ugly and screeches so — it sets my teeth on edge. Thank God! my wife got a fit of the sulks and cleared out of the house. Lives in a riverside hut since that affair — you know. But this Willems’ wife by herself is almost more than I can bear. And I ask myself why should I? You are exacting and no mistake. This morning I thought she was going to claw me. Only think! She wanted to go prancing about the

settlement. She might have heard something there, so I told her she mustn't. It wasn't safe outside our fences, I said. Thereupon she rushes at me with her ten nails up to my eyes. 'You miserable man,' she yells, 'even this place is not safe, and you've sent him up this awful river where he may lose his head. If he dies before forgiving me, Heaven will punish you for your crime . . .' My crime! I ask myself sometimes whether I am dreaming! It will make me ill, all this. I've lost my appetite already."

He flung his hat on deck and laid hold of his hair despairingly. Lingard looked at him with concern.

"What did she mean by it?" he muttered, thoughtfully.

"Mean! She is crazy, I tell you — and I will be, very soon, if this lasts!"

"Just a little patience, Kaspar," pleaded Lingard. "A day or so more."

Relieved or tired by his violent outburst, Almayer calmed down, picked up his hat and, leaning against the bulwark, commenced to fan himself with it.

"Days do pass," he said, resignedly — "but that kind of thing makes a man old before his time. What is there to think about? — I can't imagine! Abdulla says plainly that if you undertake to pilot his ship out and instruct the half-caste, he will drop Willems like a hot potato and be your friend ever after. I believe him perfectly, as to Willems. It's so natural. As to being your friend it's a lie of course, but we need not bother about that just yet. You just say yes to Abdulla, and then whatever happens to Willems will be nobody's business."

He interrupted himself and remained silent for a while, glaring about with set teeth and dilated nostrils.

"You leave it to me. I'll see to it that something happens to him," he said at last, with calm ferocity. Lingard smiled faintly.

"The fellow isn't worth a shot. Not the trouble of it," he whispered, as if to himself. Almayer fired up suddenly.

"That's what you think," he cried. "You haven't been sewn up in your hammock to be made a laughing-stock of before a parcel of savages. Why! I daren't look anybody here in the face while that scoundrel is alive. I will . . . I will settle him."

"I don't think you will," growled Lingard.

"Do you think I am afraid of him?"

"Bless you! no!" said Lingard with alacrity. "Afraid! Not you. I know you. I don't doubt your courage. It's your head, my boy, your head that I . . ."

"That's it," said the aggrieved Almayer. "Go on. Why don't you call me a fool at once?"

"Because I don't want to," burst out Lingard, with nervous irritability. "If I wanted to call you a fool, I would do so without asking your leave." He began to walk athwart the narrow quarter-deck, kicking ropes' ends out of his way and growling to himself: "Delicate gentleman . . . what next? . . . I've done man's work before you could toddle. Understand . . . say what I like."

"Well! well!" said Almayer, with affected resignation. "There's no talking to you these last few days." He put on his hat, strolled to the gangway and stopped, one foot

on the little inside ladder, as if hesitating, came back and planted himself in Lingard's way, compelling him to stand still and listen.

"Of course you will do what you like. You never take advice — I know that; but let me tell you that it wouldn't be honest to let that fellow get away from here. If you do nothing, that scoundrel will leave in Abdulla's ship for sure. Abdulla will make use of him to hurt you and others elsewhere. Willems knows too much about your affairs. He will cause you lots of trouble. You mark my words. Lots of trouble. To you — and to others perhaps. Think of that, Captain Lingard. That's all I've got to say. Now I must go back on shore. There's lots of work. We will begin loading this schooner to-morrow morning, first thing. All the bundles are ready. If you should want me for anything, hoist some kind of flag on the mainmast. At night two shots will fetch me." Then he added, in a friendly tone, "Won't you come and dine in the house to-night? It can't be good for you to stew on board like that, day after day."

Lingard did not answer. The image evoked by Almayer; the picture of Willems ranging over the islands and disturbing the harmony of the universe by robbery, treachery, and violence, held him silent, entranced — painfully spellbound. Almayer, after waiting for a little while, moved reluctantly towards the gangway, lingered there, then sighed and got over the side, going down step by step. His head disappeared slowly below the rail. Lingard, who had been staring at him absently, started suddenly, ran to the side, and looking over, called out —

"Hey! Kaspar! Hold on a bit!"

Almayer signed to his boatmen to cease paddling, and turned his head towards the schooner. The boat drifted back slowly abreast of Lingard, nearly alongside.

"Look here," said Lingard, looking down — "I want a good canoe with four men to-day."

"Do you want it now?" asked Almayer.

"No! Catch this rope. Oh, you clumsy devil! . . . No, Kaspar," went on Lingard, after the bow-man had got hold of the end of the brace he had thrown down into the canoe — "No, Kaspar. The sun is too much for me. And it would be better to keep my affairs quiet, too. Send the canoe — four good paddlers, mind, and your canvas chair for me to sit in. Send it about sunset. D'ye hear?"

"All right, father," said Almayer, cheerfully — "I will send Ali for a steersman, and the best men I've got. Anything else?"

"No, my lad. Only don't let them be late."

"I suppose it's no use asking you where you are going," said Almayer, tentatively. "Because if it is to see Abdulla, I . . ."

"I am not going to see Abdulla. Not to-day. Now be off with you."

He watched the canoe dart away shorewards, waved his hand in response to Almayer's nod, and walked to the taffrail smoothing out Abdulla's letter, which he had pulled out of his pocket. He read it over carefully, crumpled it up slowly, smiling the while and closing his fingers firmly over the crackling paper as though he had hold there of Abdulla's throat. Halfway to his pocket he changed his mind, and flinging the

ball overboard looked at it thoughtfully as it spun round in the eddies for a moment, before the current bore it away down-stream, towards the sea.

Part 4

Chapter 1

The night was very dark. For the first time in many months the East Coast slept unseen by the stars under a veil of motionless cloud that, driven before the first breath of the rainy monsoon, had drifted slowly from the eastward all the afternoon; pursuing the declining sun with its masses of black and grey that seemed to chase the light with wicked intent, and with an ominous and gloomy steadiness, as though conscious of the message of violence and turmoil they carried. At the sun's disappearance below the western horizon, the immense cloud, in quickened motion, grappled with the glow of retreating light, and rolling down to the clear and jagged outline of the distant mountains, hung arrested above the steaming forests; hanging low, silent and menacing over the unstirring tree-tops; withholding the blessing of rain, nursing the wrath of its thunder; undecided — as if brooding over its own power for good or for evil.

Babalatchi, coming out of the red and smoky light of his little bamboo house, glanced upwards, drew in a long breath of the warm and stagnant air, and stood for a moment with his good eye closed tightly, as if intimidated by the unwonted and deep silence of Lakamba's courtyard. When he opened his eye he had recovered his sight so far, that he could distinguish the various degrees of formless blackness which marked the places of trees, of abandoned houses, of riverside bushes, on the dark background of the night.

The careworn sage walked cautiously down the deserted courtyard to the waterside, and stood on the bank listening to the voice of the invisible river that flowed at his feet; listening to the soft whispers, to the deep murmurs, to the sudden gurgles and the short hisses of the swift current racing along the bank through the hot darkness.

He stood with his face turned to the river, and it seemed to him that he could breathe easier with the knowledge of the clear vast space before him; then, after a while he leaned heavily forward on his staff, his chin fell on his breast, and a deep sigh was his answer to the selfish discourse of the river that hurried on unceasing and fast, regardless of joy or sorrow, of suffering and of strife, of failures and triumphs that lived on its banks. The brown water was there, ready to carry friends or enemies, to nurse love or hate on its submissive and heartless bosom, to help or to hinder, to save life or give death; the great and rapid river: a deliverance, a prison, a refuge or a grave.

Perchance such thoughts as these caused Babalatchi to send another mournful sigh into the trailing mists of the unconcerned Pantai. The barbarous politician had forgotten the recent success of his plottings in the melancholy contemplation of a sorrow that made the night blacker, the clammy heat more oppressive, the still air more heavy, the dumb solitude more significant of torment than of peace. He had spent the night

before by the side of the dying Omar, and now, after twenty-four hours, his memory persisted in returning to that low and sombre reed hut from which the fierce spirit of the incomparably accomplished pirate took its flight, to learn too late, in a worse world, the error of its earthly ways. The mind of the savage statesman, chastened by bereavement, felt for a moment the weight of his loneliness with keen perception worthy even of a sensibility exasperated by all the refinements of tender sentiment that a glorious civilization brings in its train, among other blessings and virtues, into this excellent world. For the space of about thirty seconds, a half-naked, betel-chewing pessimist stood upon the bank of the tropical river, on the edge of the still and immense forests; a man angry, powerless, empty-handed, with a cry of bitter discontent ready on his lips; a cry that, had it come out, would have rung through the virgin solitudes of the woods, as true, as great, as profound, as any philosophical shriek that ever came from the depths of an easy-chair to disturb the impure wilderness of chimneys and roofs.

For half a minute and no more did Babalatchi face the gods in the sublime privilege of his revolt, and then the one-eyed puller of wires became himself again, full of care and wisdom and far-reaching plans, and a victim to the tormenting superstitions of his race. The night, no matter how quiet, is never perfectly silent to attentive ears, and now Babalatchi fancied he could detect in it other noises than those caused by the ripples and eddies of the river. He turned his head sharply to the right and to the left in succession, and then spun round quickly in a startled and watchful manner, as if he had expected to see the blind ghost of his departed leader wandering in the obscurity of the empty courtyard behind his back. Nothing there. Yet he had heard a noise; a strange noise! No doubt a ghostly voice of a complaining and angry spirit. He listened. Not a sound. Reassured, Babalatchi made a few paces towards his house, when a very human noise, that of hoarse coughing, reached him from the river. He stopped, listened attentively, but now without any sign of emotion, and moving briskly back to the waterside stood expectant with parted lips, trying to pierce with his eye the wavering curtain of mist that hung low over the water. He could see nothing, yet some people in a canoe must have been very near, for he heard words spoken in an ordinary tone.

“Do you think this is the place, Ali? I can see nothing.”

“It must be near here, Tuan,” answered another voice. “Shall we try the bank?”

“No! . . . Let drift a little. If you go poking into the bank in the dark you might stove the canoe on some log. We must be careful. . . . Let drift! Let drift! . . . This does seem to be a clearing of some sort. We may see a light by and by from some house or other. In Lakamba’s campong there are many houses? Hey?”

“A great number, Tuan . . . I do not see any light.”

“Nor I,” grumbled the first voice again, this time nearly abreast of the silent Babalatchi who looked uneasily towards his own house, the doorway of which glowed with the dim light of a torch burning within. The house stood end on to the river, and its doorway faced down-stream, so Babalatchi reasoned rapidly that the strangers on the river could not see the light from the position their boat was in at the moment. He

could not make up his mind to call out to them, and while he hesitated he heard the voices again, but now some way below the landing-place where he stood.

“Nothing. This cannot be it. Let them give way, Ali! Dayong there!”

That order was followed by the splash of paddles, then a sudden cry —

“I see a light. I see it! Now I know where to land, Tuan.”

There was more splashing as the canoe was paddled sharply round and came back up-stream close to the bank.

“Call out,” said very near a deep voice, which Babalatchi felt sure must belong to a white man. “Call out — and somebody may come with a torch. I can’t see anything.”

The loud hail that succeeded these words was emitted nearly under the silent listener’s nose. Babalatchi, to preserve appearances, ran with long but noiseless strides halfway up the courtyard, and only then shouted in answer and kept on shouting as he walked slowly back again towards the river bank. He saw there an indistinct shape of a boat, not quite alongside the landing-place.

“Who speaks on the river?” asked Babalatchi, throwing a tone of surprise into his question.

“A white man,” answered Lingard from the canoe. “Is there not one torch in rich Lakamba’s campong to light a guest on his landing?”

“There are no torches and no men. I am alone here,” said Babalatchi, with some hesitation.

“Alone!” exclaimed Lingard. “Who are you?”

“Only a servant of Lakamba. But land, Tuan Putih, and see my face. Here is my hand. No! Here! . . . By your mercy. . . . Ada! . . . Now you are safe.”

“And you are alone here?” said Lingard, moving with precaution a few steps into the courtyard. “How dark it is,” he muttered to himself — “one would think the world had been painted black.”

“Yes. Alone. What more did you say, Tuan? I did not understand your talk.”

“It is nothing. I expected to find here . . . But where are they all?”

“What matters where they are?” said Babalatchi, gloomily. “Have you come to see my people? The last departed on a long journey — and I am alone. Tomorrow I go too.”

“I came to see a white man,” said Lingard, walking on slowly. “He is not gone, is he?”

“No!” answered Babalatchi, at his elbow. “A man with a red skin and hard eyes,” he went on, musingly, “whose hand is strong, and whose heart is foolish and weak. A white man indeed . . . But still a man.”

They were now at the foot of the short ladder which led to the split-bamboo platform surrounding Babalatchi’s habitation. The faint light from the doorway fell down upon the two men’s faces as they stood looking at each other curiously.

“Is he there?” asked Lingard, in a low voice, with a wave of his hand upwards.

Babalatchi, staring hard at his long-expected visitor, did not answer at once. “No, not there,” he said at last, placing his foot on the lowest rung and looking back. “Not

there, Tuan — yet not very far. Will you sit down in my dwelling? There may be rice and fish and clear water — not from the river, but from a spring . . .”

“I am not hungry,” interrupted Lingard, curtly, “and I did not come here to sit in your dwelling. Lead me to the white man who expects me. I have no time to lose.”

“The night is long, Tuan,” went on Babalatchi, softly, “and there are other nights and other days. Long. Very long . . . How much time it takes for a man to die! O Rajah Laut!”

Lingard started.

“You know me!” he exclaimed.

“Ay — wa! I have seen your face and felt your hand before — many years ago,” said Babalatchi, holding on halfway up the ladder, and bending down from above to peer into Lingard’s upturned face. “You do not remember — but I have not forgotten. There are many men like me: there is only one Rajah Laut.”

He climbed with sudden agility the last few steps, and stood on the platform waving his hand invitingly to Lingard, who followed after a short moment of indecision.

The elastic bamboo floor of the hut bent under the heavy weight of the old seaman, who, standing within the threshold, tried to look into the smoky gloom of the low dwelling. Under the torch, thrust into the cleft of a stick, fastened at a right angle to the middle stay of the ridge pole, lay a red patch of light, showing a few shabby mats and a corner of a big wooden chest the rest of which was lost in shadow. In the obscurity of the more remote parts of the house a lance-head, a brass tray hung on the wall, the long barrel of a gun leaning against the chest, caught the stray rays of the smoky illumination in trembling gleams that wavered, disappeared, reappeared, went out, came back — as if engaged in a doubtful struggle with the darkness that, lying in wait in distant corners, seemed to dart out viciously towards its feeble enemy. The vast space under the high pitch of the roof was filled with a thick cloud of smoke, whose under-side — level like a ceiling — reflected the light of the swaying dull flame, while at the top it oozed out through the imperfect thatch of dried palm leaves. An indescribable and complicated smell, made up of the exhalation of damp earth below, of the taint of dried fish and of the effluvia of rotting vegetable matter, pervaded the place and caused Lingard to sniff strongly as he strode over, sat on the chest, and, leaning his elbows on his knees, took his head between his hands and stared at the doorway thoughtfully.

Babalatchi moved about in the shadows, whispering to an indistinct form or two that flitted about at the far end of the hut. Without stirring Lingard glanced sideways, and caught sight of muffled-up human shapes that hovered for a moment near the edge of light and retreated suddenly back into the darkness. Babalatchi approached, and sat at Lingard’s feet on a rolled-up bundle of mats.

“Will you eat rice and drink sagueir?” he said. “I have waked up my household.”

“My friend,” said Lingard, without looking at him, “when I come to see Lakamba, or any of Lakamba’s servants, I am never hungry and never thirsty. Tau! Savee! Never! Do you think I am devoid of reason? That there is nothing there?”

He sat up, and, fixing abruptly his eyes on Babalatchi, tapped his own forehead significantly.

“Tse! Tse! Tse! How can you talk like that, Tuan!” exclaimed Babalatchi, in a horrified tone.

“I talk as I think. I have lived many years,” said Lingard, stretching his arm negligently to take up the gun, which he began to examine knowingly, cocking it, and easing down the hammer several times. “This is good. Mataram make. Old, too,” he went on.

“Hai!” broke in Babalatchi, eagerly. “I got it when I was young. He was an Aru trader, a man with a big stomach and a loud voice, and brave — very brave. When we came up with his prau in the grey morning, he stood aft shouting to his men and fired this gun at us once. Only once!” . . . He paused, laughed softly, and went on in a low, dreamy voice. “In the grey morning we came up: forty silent men in a swift Sulu prau; and when the sun was so high” — here he held up his hands about three feet apart — “when the sun was only so high, Tuan, our work was done — and there was a feast ready for the fishes of the sea.”

“Aye! aye!” muttered Lingard, nodding his head slowly. “I see. You should not let it get rusty like this,” he added.

He let the gun fall between his knees, and moving back on his seat, leaned his head against the wall of the hut, crossing his arms on his breast.

“A good gun,” went on Babalatchi. “Carry far and true. Better than this — there.”

With the tips of his fingers he touched gently the butt of a revolver peeping out of the right pocket of Lingard’s white jacket.

“Take your hand off that,” said Lingard sharply, but in a good-humoured tone and without making the slightest movement.

Babalatchi smiled and hitched his seat a little further off.

For some time they sat in silence. Lingard, with his head tilted back, looked downwards with lowered eyelids at Babalatchi, who was tracing invisible lines with his finger on the mat between his feet. Outside, they could hear Ali and the other boatmen chattering and laughing round the fire they had lighted in the big and deserted courtyard.

“Well, what about that white man?” said Lingard, quietly.

It seemed as if Babalatchi had not heard the question. He went on tracing elaborate patterns on the floor for a good while. Lingard waited motionless. At last the Malay lifted his head.

“Hai! The white man. I know!” he murmured absently. “This white man or another. . . . Tuan,” he said aloud with unexpected animation, “you are a man of the sea?”

“You know me. Why ask?” said Lingard, in a low tone.

“Yes. A man of the sea — even as we are. A true Orang Laut,” went on Babalatchi, thoughtfully, “not like the rest of the white men.”

"I am like other whites, and do not wish to speak many words when the truth is short. I came here to see the white man that helped Lakamba against Patalolo, who is my friend. Show me where that white man lives; I want him to hear my talk."

"Talk only? Tuan! Why hurry? The night is long and death is swift — as you ought to know; you who have dealt it to so many of my people. Many years ago I have faced you, arms in hand. Do you not remember? It was in Carimata — far from here."

"I cannot remember every vagabond that came in my way," protested Lingard, seriously.

"Hai! Hai!" continued Babalatchi, unmoved and dreamy. "Many years ago. Then all this" — and looking up suddenly at Lingard's beard, he flourished his fingers below his own beardless chin — "then all this was like gold in sunlight, now it is like the foam of an angry sea."

"Maybe, maybe," said Lingard, patiently, paying the involuntary tribute of a faint sigh to the memories of the past evoked by Babalatchi's words.

He had been living with Malays so long and so close that the extreme deliberation and deviousness of their mental proceedings had ceased to irritate him much. To-night, perhaps, he was less prone to impatience than ever. He was disposed, if not to listen to Babalatchi, then to let him talk. It was evident to him that the man had something to say, and he hoped that from the talk a ray of light would shoot through the thick blackness of inexplicable treachery, to show him clearly — if only for a second — the man upon whom he would have to execute the verdict of justice. Justice only! Nothing was further from his thoughts than such an useless thing as revenge. Justice only. It was his duty that justice should be done — and by his own hand. He did not like to think how. To him, as to Babalatchi, it seemed that the night would be long enough for the work he had to do. But he did not define to himself the nature of the work, and he sat very still, and willingly dilatory, under the fearsome oppression of his call. What was the good to think about it? It was inevitable, and its time was near. Yet he could not command his memories that came crowding round him in that evil-smelling hut, while Babalatchi talked on in a flowing monotone, nothing of him moving but the lips, in the artificially inanimated face. Lingard, like an anchored ship that had broken her sheer, darted about here and there on the rapid tide of his recollections. The subdued sound of soft words rang around him, but his thoughts were lost, now in the contemplation of the past sweetness and strife of Carimata days, now in the uneasy wonder at the failure of his judgment; at the fatal blindness of accident that had caused him, many years ago, to rescue a half-starved runaway from a Dutch ship in Samarang roads. How he had liked the man: his assurance, his push, his desire to get on, his conceited good-humour and his selfish eloquence. He had liked his very faults — those faults that had so many, to him, sympathetic sides.

And he had always dealt fairly by him from the very beginning; and he would deal fairly by him now — to the very end. This last thought darkened Lingard's features with a responsive and menacing frown. The doer of justice sat with compressed lips and a heavy heart, while in the calm darkness outside the silent world seemed to be

waiting breathlessly for that justice he held in his hand — in his strong hand: — ready to strike — reluctant to move.

Chapter 2

Babalatchi ceased speaking. Lingard shifted his feet a little, uncrossed his arms, and shook his head slowly. The narrative of the events in Sambir, related from the point of view of the astute statesman, the sense of which had been caught here and there by his inattentive ears, had been yet like a thread to guide him out of the sombre labyrinth of his thoughts; and now he had come to the end of it, out of the tangled past into the pressing necessities of the present. With the palms of his hands on his knees, his elbows squared out, he looked down on Babalatchi who sat in a stiff attitude, inexpressive and mute as a talking doll the mechanism of which had at length run down.

“You people did all this,” said Lingard at last, “and you will be sorry for it before the dry wind begins to blow again. Abdulla’s voice will bring the Dutch rule here.”

Babalatchi waved his hand towards the dark doorway.

“There are forests there. Lakamba rules the land now. Tell me, Tuan, do you think the big trees know the name of the ruler? No. They are born, they grow, they live and they die — yet know not, feel not. It is their land.”

“Even a big tree may be killed by a small axe,” said Lingard, drily. “And, remember, my one-eyed friend, that axes are made by white hands. You will soon find that out, since you have hoisted the flag of the Dutch.”

“Ay — wa!” said Babalatchi, slowly. “It is written that the earth belongs to those who have fair skins and hard but foolish hearts. The farther away is the master, the easier it is for the slave, Tuan! You were too near. Your voice rang in our ears always. Now it is not going to be so. The great Rajah in Batavia is strong, but he may be deceived. He must speak very loud to be heard here. But if we have need to shout, then he must hear the many voices that call for protection. He is but a white man.”

“If I ever spoke to Patalolo, like an elder brother, it was for your good — for the good of all,” said Lingard with great earnestness.

“This is a white man’s talk,” exclaimed Babalatchi, with bitter exultation. “I know you. That is how you all talk while you load your guns and sharpen your swords; and when you are ready, then to those who are weak you say: ‘Obey me and be happy, or die! You are strange, you white men. You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true. You are stronger than the wild beasts, but not so wise. A black tiger knows when he is not hungry — you do not. He knows the difference between himself and those that can speak; you do not understand the difference between yourselves and us — who are men. You are wise and great — and you shall always be fools.’”

He threw up both his hands, stirring the sleeping cloud of smoke that hung above his head, and brought the open palms on the flimsy floor on each side of his outstretched legs. The whole hut shook. Lingard looked at the excited statesman curiously.

“Apa! Apa! What’s the matter?” he murmured, soothingly. “Whom did I kill here? Where are my guns? What have I done? What have I eaten up?”

Babalatchi calmed down, and spoke with studied courtesy.

“You, Tuan, are of the sea, and more like what we are. Therefore I speak to you all the words that are in my heart. . . . Only once has the sea been stronger than the Rajah of the sea.”

“You know it; do you?” said Lingard, with pained sharpness.

“Hai! We have heard about your ship — and some rejoiced. Not I. Amongst the whites, who are devils, you are a man.”

“Trima kassi! I give you thanks,” said Lingard, gravely.

Babalatchi looked down with a bashful smile, but his face became saddened directly, and when he spoke again it was in a mournful tone.

“Had you come a day sooner, Tuan, you would have seen an enemy die. You would have seen him die poor, blind, unhappy — with no son to dig his grave and speak of his wisdom and courage. Yes; you would have seen the man that fought you in Carimata many years ago, die alone — but for one friend. A great sight to you.”

“Not to me,” answered Lingard. “I did not even remember him till you spoke his name just now. You do not understand us. We fight, we vanquish — and we forget.”

“True, true,” said Babalatchi, with polite irony; “you whites are so great that you disdain to remember your enemies. No! No!” he went on, in the same tone, “you have so much mercy for us, that there is no room for any remembrance. Oh, you are great and good! But it is in my mind that amongst yourselves you know how to remember. Is it not so, Tuan?”

Lingard said nothing. His shoulders moved imperceptibly. He laid his gun across his knees and stared at the flint lock absently.

“Yes,” went on Babalatchi, falling again into a mournful mood, “yes, he died in darkness. I sat by his side and held his hand, but he could not see the face of him who watched the faint breath on his lips. She, whom he had cursed because of the white man, was there too, and wept with covered face. The white man walked about the courtyard making many noises. Now and then he would come to the doorway and glare at us who mourned. He stared with wicked eyes, and then I was glad that he who was dying was blind. This is true talk. I was glad; for a white man’s eyes are not good to see when the devil that lives within is looking out through them.”

“Devil! Hey?” said Lingard, half aloud to himself, as if struck with the obviousness of some novel idea. Babalatchi went on:

“At the first hour of the morning he sat up — he so weak — and said plainly some words that were not meant for human ears. I held his hand tightly, but it was time for the leader of brave men to go amongst the Faithful who are happy. They of my household brought a white sheet, and I began to dig a grave in the hut in which he

died. She mourned aloud. The white man came to the doorway and shouted. He was angry. Angry with her because she beat her breast, and tore her hair, and mourned with shrill cries as a woman should. Do you understand what I say, Tuan? That white man came inside the hut with great fury, and took her by the shoulder, and dragged her out. Yes, Tuan. I saw Omar dead, and I saw her at the feet of that white dog who has deceived me. I saw his face grey, like the cold mist of the morning; I saw his pale eyes looking down at Omar's daughter beating her head on the ground at his feet. At the feet of him who is Abdulla's slave. Yes, he lives by Abdulla's will. That is why I held my hand while I saw all this. I held my hand because we are now under the flag of the Orang Blanda, and Abdulla can speak into the ears of the great. We must not have any trouble with white men. Abdulla has spoken — and I must obey."

"That's it, is it?" growled Lingard in his moustache. Then in Malay, "It seems that you are angry, O Babalatchi!"

"No; I am not angry, Tuan," answered Babalatchi, descending from the insecure heights of his indignation into the insincere depths of safe humility. "I am not angry. What am I to be angry? I am only an Orang Laut, and I have fled before your people many times. Servant of this one — protected of another; I have given my counsel here and there for a handful of rice. What am I, to be angry with a white man? What is anger without the power to strike? But you whites have taken all: the land, the sea, and the power to strike! And there is nothing left for us in the islands but your white men's justice; your great justice that knows not anger."

He got up and stood for a moment in the doorway, sniffing the hot air of the courtyard, then turned back and leaned against the stay of the ridge pole, facing Lingard who kept his seat on the chest. The torch, consumed nearly to the end, burned noisily. Small explosions took place in the heart of the flame, driving through its smoky blaze strings of hard, round puffs of white smoke, no bigger than peas, which rolled out of doors in the faint draught that came from invisible cracks of the bamboo walls. The pungent taint of unclean things below and about the hut grew heavier, weighing down Lingard's resolution and his thoughts in an irresistible numbness of the brain. He thought drowsily of himself and of that man who wanted to see him — who waited to see him. Who waited! Night and day. Waited. . . . A spiteful but vaporous idea floated through his brain that such waiting could not be very pleasant to the fellow. Well, let him wait. He would see him soon enough. And for how long? Five seconds — five minutes — say nothing — say something. What? No! Just give him time to take one good look, and then . . .

Suddenly Babalatchi began to speak in a soft voice. Lingard blinked, cleared his throat — sat up straight.

"You know all now, Tuan. Lakamba dwells in the stockaded house of Patalolo; Abdulla has begun to build godowns of plank and stone; and now that Omar is dead, I myself shall depart from this place and live with Lakamba and speak in his ear. I have served many. The best of them all sleeps in the ground in a white sheet, with nothing to mark his grave but the ashes of the hut in which he died. Yes, Tuan! the white man

destroyed it himself. With a blazing brand in his hand he strode around, shouting to me to come out — shouting to me, who was throwing earth on the body of a great leader. Yes; swearing to me by the name of your God and ours that he would burn me and her in there if we did not make haste. . . . Hai! The white men are very masterful and wise. I dragged her out quickly!”

“Oh, damn it!” exclaimed Lingard — then went on in Malay, speaking earnestly. “Listen. That man is not like other white men. You know he is not. He is not a man at all. He is . . . I don’t know.”

Babalatchi lifted his hand deprecatingly. His eye twinkled, and his red-stained big lips, parted by an expressionless grin, uncovered a stumpy row of black teeth filed evenly to the gums.

“Hai! Hai! Not like you. Not like you,” he said, increasing the softness of his tones as he neared the object uppermost in his mind during that much-desired interview. “Not like you, Tuan, who are like ourselves, only wiser and stronger. Yet he, also, is full of great cunning, and speaks of you without any respect, after the manner of white men when they talk of one another.”

Lingard leaped in his seat as if he had been prodded.

“He speaks! What does he say?” he shouted.

“Nay, Tuan,” protested the composed Babalatchi; “what matters his talk if he is not a man? I am nothing before you — why should I repeat words of one white man about another? He did boast to Abdulla of having learned much from your wisdom in years past. Other words I have forgotten. Indeed, Tuan, I have . . .”

Lingard cut short Babalatchi’s protestations by a contemptuous wave of the hand and reseated himself with dignity.

“I shall go,” said Babalatchi, “and the white man will remain here, alone with the spirit of the dead and with her who has been the delight of his heart. He, being white, cannot hear the voice of those that died. . . . Tell me, Tuan,” he went on, looking at Lingard with curiosity — “tell me, Tuan, do you white people ever hear the voices of the invisible ones?”

“We do not,” answered Lingard, “because those that we cannot see do not speak.”

“Never speak! And never complain with sounds that are not words?” exclaimed Babalatchi, doubtingly. “It may be so — or your ears are dull. We Malays hear many sounds near the places where men are buried. To-night I heard . . . Yes, even I have heard. . . . I do not want to hear any more,” he added, nervously. “Perhaps I was wrong when I . . . There are things I regret. The trouble was heavy in his heart when he died. Sometimes I think I was wrong . . . but I do not want to hear the complaint of invisible lips. Therefore I go, Tuan. Let the unquiet spirit speak to his enemy the white man who knows not fear, or love, or mercy — knows nothing but contempt and violence. I have been wrong! I have! Hai! Hai!”

He stood for awhile with his elbow in the palm of his left hand, the fingers of the other over his lips as if to stifle the expression of inconvenient remorse; then, after glancing at the torch, burnt out nearly to its end, he moved towards the wall by the

chest, fumbled about there and suddenly flung open a large shutter of attaps woven in a light framework of sticks. Lingard swung his legs quickly round the corner of his seat.

"Hallo!" he said, surprised.

The cloud of smoke stirred, and a slow wisp curled out through the new opening. The torch flickered, hissed, and went out, the glowing end falling on the mat, whence Babalatchi snatched it up and tossed it outside through the open square. It described a vanishing curve of red light, and lay below, shining feebly in the vast darkness. Babalatchi remained with his arm stretched out into the empty night.

"There," he said, "you can see the white man's courtyard, Tuan, and his house."

"I can see nothing," answered Lingard, putting his head through the shutter-hole. "It's too dark."

"Wait, Tuan," urged Babalatchi. "You have been looking long at the burning torch. You will soon see. Mind the gun, Tuan. It is loaded."

"There is no flint in it. You could not find a fire-stone for a hundred miles round this spot," said Lingard, testily. "Foolish thing to load that gun."

"I have a stone. I had it from a man wise and pious that lives in Menang Kabau. A very pious man — very good fire. He spoke words over that stone that make its sparks good. And the gun is good — carries straight and far. Would carry from here to the door of the white man's house, I believe, Tuan."

"Tida apa. Never mind your gun," muttered Lingard, peering into the formless darkness. "Is that the house — that black thing over there?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Babalatchi; "that is his house. He lives there by the will of Abdulla, and shall live there till . . . From where you stand, Tuan, you can look over the fence and across the courtyard straight at the door — at the door from which he comes out every morning, looking like a man that had seen Jehannum in his sleep."

Lingard drew his head in. Babalatchi touched his shoulder with a groping hand.

"Wait a little, Tuan. Sit still. The morning is not far off now — a morning without sun after a night without stars. But there will be light enough to see the man who said not many days ago that he alone has made you less than a child in Sambir."

He felt a slight tremor under his hand, but took it off directly and began feeling all over the lid of the chest, behind Lingard's back, for the gun.

"What are you at?" said Lingard, impatiently. "You do worry about that rotten gun. You had better get a light."

"A light! I tell you, Tuan, that the light of heaven is very near," said Babalatchi, who had now obtained possession of the object of his solicitude, and grasping it strongly by its long barrel, grounded the stock at his feet.

"Perhaps it is near," said Lingard, leaning both his elbows on the lower cross-piece of the primitive window and looking out. "It is very black outside yet," he remarked carelessly.

Babalatchi fidgeted about.

"It is not good for you to sit where you may be seen," he muttered.

“Why not?” asked Lingard.

“The white man sleeps, it is true,” explained Babalatchi, softly; “yet he may come out early, and he has arms.”

“Ah! he has arms?” said Lingard.

“Yes; a short gun that fires many times — like yours here. Abdulla had to give it to him.”

Lingard heard Babalatchi’s words, but made no movement. To the old adventurer the idea that fire arms could be dangerous in other hands than his own did not occur readily, and certainly not in connection with Willems. He was so busy with the thoughts about what he considered his own sacred duty, that he could not give any consideration to the probable actions of the man of whom he thought — as one may think of an executed criminal — with wondering indignation tempered by scornful pity. While he sat staring into the darkness, that every minute grew thinner before his pensive eyes, like a dispersing mist, Willems appeared to him as a figure belonging already wholly to the past — a figure that could come in no way into his life again. He had made up his mind, and the thing was as well as done. In his weary thoughts he had closed this fatal, inexplicable, and horrible episode in his life. The worst had happened. The coming days would see the retribution.

He had removed an enemy once or twice before, out of his path; he had paid off some very heavy scores a good many times. Captain Tom had been a good friend to many: but it was generally understood, from Honolulu round about to Diego Suarez, that Captain Tom’s enmity was rather more than any man single-handed could easily manage. He would not, as he said often, hurt a fly as long as the fly left him alone; yet a man does not live for years beyond the pale of civilized laws without evolving for himself some queer notions of justice. Nobody of those he knew had ever cared to point out to him the errors of his conceptions.

It was not worth anybody’s while to run counter to Lingard’s ideas of the fitness of things — that fact was acquired to the floating wisdom of the South Seas, of the Eastern Archipelago, and was nowhere better understood than in out-of-the-way nooks of the world; in those nooks which he filled, unresisted and masterful, with the echoes of his noisy presence. There is not much use in arguing with a man who boasts of never having regretted a single action of his life, whose answer to a mild criticism is a good-natured shout — “You know nothing about it. I would do it again. Yes, sir!” His associates and his acquaintances accepted him, his opinions, his actions like things preordained and unchangeable; looked upon his many-sided manifestations with passive wonder not unmixed with that admiration which is only the rightful due of a successful man. But nobody had ever seen him in the mood he was in now. Nobody had seen Lingard doubtful and giving way to doubt, unable to make up his mind and unwilling to act; Lingard timid and hesitating one minute, angry yet inactive the next; Lingard puzzled in a word, because confronted with a situation that discomposed him by its unprovoked malevolence, by its ghastly injustice, that to his rough but unsophisticated palate tasted distinctly of sulphurous fumes from the deepest hell.

The smooth darkness filling the shutter-hole grew paler and became blotchy with ill-defined shapes, as if a new universe was being evolved out of sombre chaos. Then outlines came out, defining forms without any details, indicating here a tree, there a bush; a black belt of forest far off; the straight lines of a house, the ridge of a high roof near by. Inside the hut, Babalatchi, who lately had been only a persuasive voice, became a human shape leaning its chin imprudently on the muzzle of a gun and rolling an uneasy eye over the reappearing world. The day came rapidly, dismal and oppressed by the fog of the river and by the heavy vapours of the sky — a day without colour and without sunshine: incomplete, disappointing, and sad.

Babalatchi twitched gently Lingard's sleeve, and when the old seaman had lifted up his head interrogatively, he stretched out an arm and a pointing forefinger towards Willems' house, now plainly visible to the right and beyond the big tree of the courtyard.

"Look, Tuan!" he said. "He lives there. That is the door — his door. Through it he will appear soon, with his hair in disorder and his mouth full of curses. That is so. He is a white man, and never satisfied. It is in my mind he is angry even in his sleep. A dangerous man. As Tuan may observe," he went on, obsequiously, "his door faces this opening, where you condescend to sit, which is concealed from all eyes. Faces it — straight — and not far. Observe, Tuan, not at all far."

"Yes, yes; I can see. I shall see him when he wakes."

"No doubt, Tuan. When he wakes. . . . If you remain here he can not see you. I shall withdraw quickly and prepare my canoe myself. I am only a poor man, and must go to Sambir to greet Lakamba when he opens his eyes. I must bow before Abdulla who has strength — even more strength than you. Now if you remain here, you shall easily behold the man who boasted to Abdulla that he had been your friend, even while he prepared to fight those who called you protector. Yes, he plotted with Abdulla for that cursed flag. Lakamba was blind then, and I was deceived. But you, Tuan! Remember, he deceived you more. Of that he boasted before all men."

He leaned the gun quietly against the wall close to the window, and said softly: "Shall I go now, Tuan? Be careful of the gun. I have put the fire-stone in. The fire-stone of the wise man, which never fails."

Lingard's eyes were fastened on the distant doorway. Across his line of sight, in the grey emptiness of the courtyard, a big fruit-pigeon flapped languidly towards the forests with a loud booming cry, like the note of a deep gong: a brilliant bird looking in the gloom of threatening day as black as a crow. A serried flock of white rice birds rose above the trees with a faint scream, and hovered, swaying in a disordered mass that suddenly scattered in all directions, as if burst asunder by a silent explosion. Behind his back Lingard heard a shuffle of feet — women leaving the hut. In the other courtyard a voice was heard complaining of cold, and coming very feeble, but exceedingly distinct, out of the vast silence of the abandoned houses and clearings. Babalatchi coughed discreetly. From under the house the thumping of wooden pestles husking the rice started with unexpected abruptness. The weak but clear voice in the

yard again urged, "Blow up the embers, O brother!" Another voice answered, drawing in modulated, thin sing-song, "Do it yourself, O shivering pig!" and the drawl of the last words stopped short, as if the man had fallen into a deep hole. Babalatchi coughed again a little impatiently, and said in a confidential tone —

"Do you think it is time for me to go, Tuan? Will you take care of my gun, Tuan? I am a man that knows how to obey; even obey Abdulla, who has deceived me. Nevertheless this gun carries far and true — if you would want to know, Tuan. And I have put in a double measure of powder, and three slugs. Yes, Tuan. Now — perhaps — I go."

When Babalatchi commenced speaking, Lingard turned slowly round and gazed upon him with the dull and unwilling look of a sick man waking to another day of suffering. As the astute statesman proceeded, Lingard's eyebrows came close, his eyes became animated, and a big vein stood out on his forehead, accentuating a lowering frown. When speaking his last words Babalatchi faltered, then stopped, confused, before the steady gaze of the old seaman.

Lingard rose. His face cleared, and he looked down at the anxious Babalatchi with sudden benevolence.

"So! That's what you were after," he said, laying a heavy hand on Babalatchi's yielding shoulder. "You thought I came here to murder him. Hey? Speak! You faithful dog of an Arab trader!"

"And what else, Tuan?" shrieked Babalatchi, exasperated into sincerity. "What else, Tuan! Remember what he has done; he poisoned our ears with his talk about you. You are a man. If you did not come to kill, Tuan, then either I am a fool or . . ."

He paused, struck his naked breast with his open palm, and finished in a discouraged whisper — "or, Tuan, you are."

Lingard looked down at him with scornful serenity. After his long and painful gropings amongst the obscure abominations of Willems' conduct, the logical if tortuous evolutions of Babalatchi's diplomatic mind were to him welcome as daylight. There was something at last he could understand — the clear effect of a simple cause. He felt indulgent towards the disappointed sage.

"So you are angry with your friend, O one-eyed one!" he said slowly, nodding his fierce countenance close to Babalatchi's discomfited face. "It seems to me that you must have had much to do with what happened in Sambir lately. Hey? You son of a burnt father."

"May I perish under your hand, O Rajah of the sea, if my words are not true!" said Babalatchi, with reckless excitement. "You are here in the midst of your enemies. He the greatest. Abdulla would do nothing without him, and I could do nothing without Abdulla. Strike me — so that you strike all!"

"Who are you," exclaimed Lingard contemptuously — "who are you to dare call yourself my enemy! Dirt! Nothing! Go out first," he went on severely. "Lakas! quick. March out!"

He pushed Babalatchi through the doorway and followed him down the short ladder into the courtyard. The boatmen squatting over the fire turned their slow eyes with

apparent difficulty towards the two men; then, unconcerned, huddled close together again, stretching forlornly their hands over the embers. The women stopped in their work and with uplifted pestles flashed quick and curious glances from the gloom under the house.

“Is that the way?” asked Lingard with a nod towards the little wicket-gate of Willems’ enclosure.

“If you seek death, that is surely the way,” answered Babalatchi in a dispassionate voice, as if he had exhausted all the emotions. “He lives there: he who destroyed your friends; who hastened Omar’s death; who plotted with Abdulla first against you, then against me. I have been like a child. O shame! . . . But go, Tuan. Go there.”

“I go where I like,” said Lingard, emphatically, “and you may go to the devil; I do not want you any more. The islands of these seas shall sink before I, Rajah Laut, serve the will of any of your people. Tau? But I tell you this: I do not care what you do with him after to-day. And I say that because I am merciful.”

“Tida! I do nothing,” said Babalatchi, shaking his head with bitter apathy. “I am in Abdulla’s hand and care not, even as you do. No! no!” he added, turning away, “I have learned much wisdom this morning. There are no men anywhere. You whites are cruel to your friends and merciful to your enemies — which is the work of fools.”

He went away towards the riverside, and, without once looking back, disappeared in the low bank of mist that lay over the water and the shore. Lingard followed him with his eyes thoughtfully. After awhile he roused himself and called out to his boatmen —

“Hai — ya there! After you have eaten rice, wait for me with your paddles in your hands. You hear?”

“Ada, Tuan!” answered Ali through the smoke of the morning fire that was spreading itself, low and gentle, over the courtyard — “we hear!”

Lingard opened slowly the little wicket-gate, made a few steps into the empty enclosure, and stopped. He had felt about his head the short breath of a puff of wind that passed him, made every leaf of the big tree shiver — and died out in a hardly perceptible tremor of branches and twigs. Instinctively he glanced upwards with a seaman’s impulse. Above him, under the grey motionless waste of a stormy sky, drifted low black vapours, in stretching bars, in shapeless patches, in sinuous wisps and tormented spirals. Over the courtyard and the house floated a round, sombre, and lingering cloud, dragging behind a tail of tangled and filmy streamers — like the dishevelled hair of a mourning woman.

Chapter 3

“Beware!”

The tremulous effort and the broken, inadequate tone of the faint cry, surprised Lingard more than the unexpected suddenness of the warning conveyed, he did not know by whom and to whom. Besides himself there was no one in the courtyard as far as he could see.

The cry was not renewed, and his watchful eyes, scanning warily the misty solitude of Willems' enclosure, were met everywhere only by the stolid impassiveness of inanimate things: the big sombre-looking tree, the shut-up, sightless house, the glistening bamboo fences, the damp and drooping bushes further off — all these things, that condemned to look for ever at the incomprehensible afflictions or joys of mankind, assert in their aspect of cold unconcern the high dignity of lifeless matter that surrounds, incurious and unmoved, the restless mysteries of the ever-changing, of the never-ending life.

Lingard, stepping aside, put the trunk of the tree between himself and the house, then, moving cautiously round one of the projecting buttresses, had to tread short in order to avoid scattering a small heap of black embers upon which he came unexpectedly on the other side. A thin, wizened, little old woman, who, standing behind the tree, had been looking at the house, turned towards him with a start, gazed with faded, expressionless eyes at the intruder, then made a limping attempt to get away. She seemed, however, to realize directly the hopelessness or the difficulty of the undertaking, stopped, hesitated, tottered back slowly; then, after blinking dully, fell suddenly on her knees amongst the white ashes, and, bending over the heap of smouldering coals, distended her sunken cheeks in a steady effort to blow up the hidden sparks into a useful blaze. Lingard looked down on her, but she seemed to have made up her mind that there was not enough life left in her lean body for anything else than the discharge of the simple domestic duty, and, apparently, she begrudged him the least moment of attention.

After waiting for awhile, Lingard asked —

“Why did you call, O daughter?”

“I saw you enter,” she croaked feebly, still grovelling with her face near the ashes and without looking up, “and I called — the cry of warning. It was her order. Her order,” she repeated, with a moaning sigh.

“And did she hear?” pursued Lingard, with gentle composure.

Her projecting shoulder-blades moved uneasily under the thin stuff of the tight body jacket. She scrambled up with difficulty to her feet, and hobbled away, muttering peevishly to herself, towards a pile of dry brushwood heaped up against the fence.

Lingard, looking idly after her, heard the rattle of loose planks that led from the ground to the door of the house. He moved his head beyond the shelter of the tree and saw Aissa coming down the inclined way into the courtyard. After making a few hurried paces towards the tree, she stopped with one foot advanced in an appearance of sudden terror, and her eyes glanced wildly right and left. Her head was uncovered. A blue cloth wrapped her from her head to foot in close slanting folds, with one end thrown over her shoulder. A tress of her black hair strayed across her bosom. Her bare arms pressed down close to her body, with hands open and outstretched fingers; her slightly elevated shoulders and the backward inclination of her torso gave her the aspect of one defiant yet shrinking from a coming blow. She had closed the door of the house behind her; and as she stood solitary in the unnatural and threatening twilight of the murky day, with everything unchanged around her, she appeared to Lingard as if she had been made there, on the spot, out of the black vapours of the sky and of the sinister gleams of feeble sunshine that struggled, through the thickening clouds, into the colourless desolation of the world.

After a short but attentive glance towards the shut-up house, Lingard stepped out from behind the tree and advanced slowly towards her. The sudden fixity of her — till then — restless eyes and a slight twitch of her hands were the only signs she gave at first of having seen him. She made a long stride forward, and putting herself right in his path, stretched her arms across; her black eyes opened wide, her lips parted as if in an uncertain attempt to speak — but no sound came out to break the significant silence of their meeting. Lingard stopped and looked at her with stern curiosity. After a while he said composedly —

“Let me pass. I came here to talk to a man. Does he hide? Has he sent you?”

She made a step nearer, her arms fell by her side, then she put them straight out nearly touching Lingard’s breast.

“He knows not fear,” she said, speaking low, with a forward throw of her head, in a voice trembling but distinct. “It is my own fear that has sent me here. He sleeps.”

“He has slept long enough,” said Lingard, in measured tones. “I am come — and now is the time of his waking. Go and tell him this — or else my own voice will call him up. A voice he knows well.”

He put her hands down firmly and again made as if to pass by her.

“Do not!” she exclaimed, and fell at his feet as if she had been cut down by a scythe. The unexpected suddenness of her movement startled Lingard, who stepped back.

“What’s this?” he exclaimed in a wondering whisper — then added in a tone of sharp command: “Stand up!”

She rose at once and stood looking at him, timorous and fearless; yet with a fire of recklessness burning in her eyes that made clear her resolve to pursue her purpose even to the death. Lingard went on in a severe voice —

“Go out of my path. You are Omar’s daughter, and you ought to know that when men meet in daylight women must be silent and abide their fate.”

“Women!” she retorted, with subdued vehemence. “Yes, I am a woman! Your eyes see that, O Rajah Laut, but can you see my life? I also have heard — O man of many fights — I also have heard the voice of fire-arms; I also have felt the rain of young twigs and of leaves cut up by bullets fall down about my head; I also know how to look in silence at angry faces and at strong hands raised high grasping sharp steel. I also saw men fall dead around me without a cry of fear and of mourning; and I have watched the sleep of weary fugitives, and looked at night shadows full of menace and death with eyes that knew nothing but watchfulness. And,” she went on, with a mournful drop in her voice, “I have faced the heartless sea, held on my lap the heads of those who died raving from thirst, and from their cold hands took the paddle and worked so that those with me did not know that one man more was dead. I did all this. What more have you done? That was my life. What has been yours?”

The matter and the manner of her speech held Lingard motionless, attentive and approving against his will. She ceased speaking, and from her staring black eyes with a narrow border of white above and below, a double ray of her very soul streamed out in a fierce desire to light up the most obscure designs of his heart. After a long silence, which served to emphasize the meaning of her words, she added in the whisper of bitter regret —

“And I have knelt at your feet! And I am afraid!”

“You,” said Lingard deliberately, and returning her look with an interested gaze, “you are a woman whose heart, I believe, is great enough to fill a man’s breast: but still you are a woman, and to you, I, Rajah Laut, have nothing to say.”

She listened bending her head in a movement of forced attention; and his voice sounded to her unexpected, far off, with the distant and unearthly ring of voices that we hear in dreams, saying faintly things startling, cruel or absurd, to which there is no possible reply. To her he had nothing to say! She wrung her hands, glanced over the courtyard with that eager and distracted look that sees nothing, then looked up at the hopeless sky of livid grey and drifting black; at the unquiet mourning of the hot and brilliant heaven that had seen the beginning of her love, that had heard his entreaties and her answers, that had seen his desire and her fear; that had seen her joy, her surrender — and his defeat. Lingard moved a little, and this slight stir near her precipitated her disordered and shapeless thoughts into hurried words.

“Wait!” she exclaimed in a stifled voice, and went on disconnectedly and rapidly — “Stay. I have heard. Men often spoke by the fires . . . men of my people. And they said of you — the first on the sea — they said that to men’s cries you were deaf in battle, but after . . . No! even while you fought, your ears were open to the voice of children and women. They said . . . that. Now I, a woman, I . . .”

She broke off suddenly and stood before him with dropped eyelids and parted lips, so still now that she seemed to have been changed into a breathless, an unhearing, an unseeing figure, without knowledge of fear or hope, of anger or despair. In the astounding repose that came on her face, nothing moved but the delicate nostrils that

expanded and collapsed quickly, flutteringly, in interrupted beats, like the wings of a snared bird.

“I am white,” said Lingard, proudly, looking at her with a steady gaze where simple curiosity was giving way to a pitying annoyance, “and men you have heard, spoke only what is true over the evening fires. My ears are open to your prayer. But listen to me before you speak. For yourself you need not be afraid. You can come even now with me and you shall find refuge in the household of Syed Abdulla — who is of your own faith. And this also you must know: nothing that you may say will change my purpose towards the man who is sleeping — or hiding — in that house.”

Again she gave him the look that was like a stab, not of anger but of desire; of the intense, over-powering desire to see in, to see through, to understand everything: every thought, emotion, purpose; every impulse, every hesitation inside that man; inside that white-clad foreign being who looked at her, who spoke to her, who breathed before her like any other man, but bigger, red-faced, white-haired and mysterious. It was the future clothed in flesh; the to-morrow; the day after; all the days, all the years of her life standing there before her alive and secret, with all their good or evil shut up within the breast of that man; of that man who could be persuaded, cajoled, entreated, perhaps touched, worried; frightened — who knows? — if only first he could be understood! She had seen a long time ago whither events were tending. She had noted the contemptuous yet menacing coldness of Abdulla; she had heard — alarmed yet unbelieving — Babalatchi’s gloomy hints, covert allusions and veiled suggestions to abandon the useless white man whose fate would be the price of the peace secured by the wise and good who had no need of him any more. And he — himself! She clung to him. There was nobody else. Nothing else. She would try to cling to him always — all the life! And yet he was far from her. Further every day. Every day he seemed more distant, and she followed him patiently, hopefully, blindly, but steadily, through all the devious wanderings of his mind. She followed as well as she could. Yet at times — very often lately — she had felt lost like one strayed in the thickets of tangled undergrowth of a great forest. To her the ex-clerk of old Hudig appeared as remote, as brilliant, as terrible, as necessary, as the sun that gives life to these lands: the sun of unclouded skies that dazzles and withers; the sun beneficent and wicked — the giver of light, perfume, and pestilence. She had watched him — watched him close; fascinated by love, fascinated by danger. He was alone now — but for her; and she saw — she thought she saw — that he was like a man afraid of something. Was it possible? He afraid? Of what? Was it of that old white man who was coming — who had come? Possibly. She had heard of that man ever since she could remember. The bravest were afraid of him! And now what was in the mind of this old, old man who looked so strong? What was he going to do with the light of her life? Put it out? Take it away? Take it away for ever! — for ever! — and leave her in darkness: — not in the stirring, whispering, expectant night in which the hushed world awaits the return of sunshine; but in the night without end, the night of the grave, where nothing breathes,

nothing moves, nothing thinks — the last darkness of cold and silence without hope of another sunrise.

She cried — "Your purpose! You know nothing. I must . . ."

He interrupted — unreasonably excited, as if she had, by her look, inoculated him with some of her own distress.

"I know enough."

She approached, and stood facing him at arm's length, with both her hands on his shoulders; and he, surprised by that audacity, closed and opened his eyes two or three times, aware of some emotion arising within him, from her words, her tone, her contact; an emotion unknown, singular, penetrating and sad — at the close sight of that strange woman, of that being savage and tender, strong and delicate, fearful and resolute, that had got entangled so fatally between their two lives — his own and that other white man's, the abominable scoundrel.

"How can you know?" she went on, in a persuasive tone that seemed to flow out of her very heart — "how can you know? I live with him all the days. All the nights. I look at him; I see his every breath, every glance of his eye, every movement of his lips. I see nothing else! What else is there? And even I do not understand. I do not understand him! — Him! — My life! Him who to me is so great that his presence hides the earth and the water from my sight!"

Lingard stood straight, with his hands deep in the pockets of his jacket. His eyes winked quickly, because she spoke very close to his face. She disturbed him and he had a sense of the efforts he was making to get hold of her meaning, while all the time he could not help telling himself that all this was of no use.

She added after a pause — "There has been a time when I could understand him. When I knew what was in his mind better than he knew it himself. When I felt him. When I held him. . . . And now he has escaped."

"Escaped? What? Gone away!" shouted Lingard.

"Escaped from me," she said; "left me alone. Alone. And I am ever near him. Yet alone."

Her hands slipped slowly off Lingard's shoulders and her arms fell by her side, listless, discouraged, as if to her — to her, the savage, violent, and ignorant creature — had been revealed clearly in that moment the tremendous fact of our isolation, of the loneliness impenetrable and transparent, elusive and everlasting; of the indestructible loneliness that surrounds, envelopes, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave, and, perhaps, beyond.

"Aye! Very well! I understand. His face is turned away from you," said Lingard. "Now, what do you want?"

"I want . . . I have looked — for help . . . everywhere . . . against men. . . . All men . . . I do not know. First they came, the invisible whites, and dealt death from afar . . . then he came. He came to me who was alone and sad. He came; angry with his brothers; great amongst his own people; angry with those I have not seen: with the

people where men have no mercy and women have no shame. He was of them, and great amongst them. For he was great?"

Lingard shook his head slightly. She frowned at him, and went on in disordered haste —

"Listen. I saw him. I have lived by the side of brave men . . . of chiefs. When he came I was the daughter of a beggar — of a blind man without strength and hope. He spoke to me as if I had been brighter than the sunshine — more delightful than the cool water of the brook by which we met — more . . ." Her anxious eyes saw some shade of expression pass on her listener's face that made her hold her breath for a second, and then explode into pained fury so violent that it drove Lingard back a pace, like an unexpected blast of wind. He lifted both his hands, incongruously paternal in his venerable aspect, bewildered and soothing, while she stretched her neck forward and shouted at him.

"I tell you I was all that to him. I know it! I saw it! . . . There are times when even you white men speak the truth. I saw his eyes. I felt his eyes, I tell you! I saw him tremble when I came near — when I spoke — when I touched him. Look at me! You have been young. Look at me. Look, Rajah Laut!"

She stared at Lingard with provoking fixity, then, turning her head quickly, she sent over her shoulder a glance, full of humble fear, at the house that stood high behind her back — dark, closed, rickety and silent on its crooked posts.

Lingard's eyes followed her look, and remained gazing expectantly at the house. After a minute or so he muttered, glancing at her suspiciously —

"If he has not heard your voice now, then he must be far away — or dead."

"He is there," she whispered, a little calmed but still anxious — "he is there. For three days he waited. Waited for you night and day. And I waited with him. I waited, watching his face, his eyes, his lips; listening to his words. — To the words I could not understand. — To the words he spoke in daylight; to the words he spoke at night in his short sleep. I listened. He spoke to himself walking up and down here — by the river; by the bushes. And I followed. I wanted to know — and I could not! He was tormented by things that made him speak in the words of his own people. Speak to himself — not to me. Not to me! What was he saying? What was he going to do? Was he afraid of you? — Of death? What was in his heart? . . . Fear? . . . Or anger? . . . what desire? . . . what sadness? He spoke; spoke; many words. All the time! And I could not know! I wanted to speak to him. He was deaf to me. I followed him everywhere, watching for some word I could understand; but his mind was in the land of his people — away from me. When I touched him he was angry — so!"

She imitated the movement of some one shaking off roughly an importunate hand, and looked at Lingard with tearful and unsteady eyes.

After a short interval of laboured panting, as if she had been out of breath with running or fighting, she looked down and went on —

"Day after day, night after night, I lived watching him — seeing nothing. And my heart was heavy — heavy with the presence of death that dwelt amongst us. I could

not believe. I thought he was afraid. Afraid of you! Then I, myself, knew fear. . . . Tell me, Rajah Laut, do you know the fear without voice — the fear of silence — the fear that comes when there is no one near — when there is no battle, no cries, no angry faces or armed hands anywhere? . . . The fear from which there is no escape!”

She paused, fastened her eyes again on the puzzled Lingard, and hurried on in a tone of despair —

“And I knew then he would not fight you! Before — many days ago — I went away twice to make him obey my desire; to make him strike at his own people so that he could be mine — mine! O calamity! His hand was false as your white hearts. It struck forward, pushed by my desire — by his desire of me. . . . It struck that strong hand, and — O shame! — it killed nobody! Its fierce and lying blow woke up hate without any fear. Round me all was lies. His strength was a lie. My own people lied to me and to him. And to meet you — you, the great! — he had no one but me? But me with my rage, my pain, my weakness. Only me! And to me he would not even speak. The fool!”

She came up close to Lingard, with the wild and stealthy aspect of a lunatic longing to whisper out an insane secret — one of those misshapen, heart-rending, and ludicrous secrets; one of those thoughts that, like monsters — cruel, fantastic, and mournful, wander about terrible and unceasing in the night of madness. Lingard looked at her, astounded but unflinching. She spoke in his face, very low.

“He is all! Everything. He is my breath, my light, my heart. . . . Go away. . . . Forget him. . . . He has no courage and no wisdom any more . . . and I have lost my power. . . . Go away and forget. There are other enemies. . . . Leave him to me. He had been a man once. . . . You are too great. Nobody can withstand you. . . . I tried. . . . I know now I cry for mercy. Leave him to me and go away.”

The fragments of her supplicating sentences were as if tossed on the crest of her sobs. Lingard, outwardly impassive, with his eyes fixed on the house, experienced that feeling of condemnation, deep-seated, persuasive, and masterful; that illogical impulse of disapproval which is half disgust, half vague fear, and that wakes up in our hearts in the presence of anything new or unusual, of anything that is not run into the mould of our own conscience; the accursed feeling made up of disdain, of anger, and of the sense of superior virtue that leaves us deaf, blind, contemptuous and stupid before anything which is not like ourselves.

He answered, not looking at her at first, but speaking towards the house that fascinated him —

“I go away! He wanted me to come — he himself did! . . . You must go away. You do not know what you are asking for. Listen. Go to your own people. Leave him. He is”

He paused, looked down at her with his steady eyes; hesitated, as if seeking an adequate expression; then snapped his fingers, and said —

“Finish.”

She stepped back, her eyes on the ground, and pressed her temples with both her hands, which she raised to her head in a slow and ample movement full of unconscious tragedy. The tone of her words was gentle and vibrating, like a loud meditation. She said —

“Tell the brook not to run to the river; tell the river not to run to the sea. Speak loud. Speak angrily. Maybe they will obey you. But it is in my mind that the brook will not care. The brook that springs out of the hillside and runs to the great river. He would not care for your words: he that cares not for the very mountain that gave him life; he that tears the earth from which he springs. Tears it, eats it, destroys it — to hurry faster to the river — to the river in which he is lost for ever. . . . O Rajah Laut! I do not care.”

She drew close again to Lingard, approaching slowly, reluctantly, as if pushed by an invisible hand, and added in words that seemed to be torn out of her —

“I cared not for my own father. For him that died. I would have rather . . . You do not know what I have done . . . I . . .”

“You shall have his life,” said Lingard, hastily.

They stood together, crossing their glances; she suddenly appeased, and Lingard thoughtful and uneasy under a vague sense of defeat. And yet there was no defeat. He never intended to kill the fellow — not after the first moment of anger, a long time ago. The days of bitter wonder had killed anger; had left only a bitter indignation and a bitter wish for complete justice. He felt discontented and surprised. Unexpectedly he had come upon a human being — a woman at that — who had made him disclose his will before its time. She should have his life. But she must be told, she must know, that for such men as Willems there was no favour and no grace.

“Understand,” he said slowly, “that I leave him his life not in mercy but in punishment.”

She started, watched every word on his lips, and after he finished speaking she remained still and mute in astonished immobility. A single big drop of rain, a drop enormous, pellucid and heavy — like a super-human tear coming straight and rapid from above, tearing its way through the sombre sky — struck loudly the dry ground between them in a starred splash. She wrung her hands in the bewilderment of the new and incomprehensible fear. The anguish of her whisper was more piercing than the shrillest cry.

“What punishment! Will you take him away then? Away from me? Listen to what I have done. . . . It is I who . . .”

“Ah!” exclaimed Lingard, who had been looking at the house.

“Don’t you believe her, Captain Lingard,” shouted Willems from the doorway, where he appeared with swollen eyelids and bared breast. He stood for a while, his hands grasping the lintels on each side of the door, and writhed about, glaring wildly, as if he had been crucified there. Then he made a sudden rush head foremost down the plankway that responded with hollow, short noises to every footstep.

She heard him. A slight thrill passed on her face and the words that were on her lips fell back unspoken into her benighted heart; fell back amongst the mud, the stones — and the flowers, that are at the bottom of every heart.

Chapter 4

When he felt the solid ground of the courtyard under his feet, Willems pulled himself up in his headlong rush and moved forward with a moderate gait. He paced stiffly, looking with extreme exactitude at Lingard's face; looking neither to the right nor to the left but at the face only, as if there was nothing in the world but those features familiar and dreaded; that white-haired, rough and severe head upon which he gazed in a fixed effort of his eyes, like a man trying to read small print at the full range of human vision. As soon as Willems' feet had left the planks, the silence which had been lifted up by the jerky rattle of his footsteps fell down again upon the courtyard; the silence of the cloudy sky and of the windless air, the sullen silence of the earth oppressed by the aspect of coming turmoil, the silence of the world collecting its faculties to withstand the storm. Through this silence Willems pushed his way, and stopped about six feet from Lingard. He stopped simply because he could go no further. He had started from the door with the reckless purpose of clapping the old fellow on the shoulder. He had no idea that the man would turn out to be so tall, so big and so unapproachable. It seemed to him that he had never, never in his life, seen Lingard.

He tried to say —

“Do not believe . . .”

A fit of coughing checked his sentence in a faint splutter. Directly afterwards he swallowed — as it were — a couple of pebbles, throwing his chin up in the act; and Lingard, who looked at him narrowly, saw a bone, sharp and triangular like the head of a snake, dart up and down twice under the skin of his throat. Then that, too, did not move. Nothing moved.

“Well,” said Lingard, and with that word he came unexpectedly to the end of his speech. His hand in his pocket closed firmly round the butt of his revolver bulging his jacket on the hip, and he thought how soon and how quickly he could terminate his quarrel with that man who had been so anxious to deliver himself into his hands — and how inadequate would be that ending! He could not bear the idea of that man escaping from him by going out of life; escaping from fear, from doubt, from remorse into the peaceful certitude of death. He held him now. And he was not going to let him go — to let him disappear for ever in the faint blue smoke of a pistol shot. His anger grew within him. He felt a touch as of a burning hand on his heart. Not on the flesh of his breast, but a touch on his heart itself, on the palpitating and untiring particle of matter that responds to every emotion of the soul; that leaps with joy, with terror, or with anger.

He drew a long breath. He could see before him the bare chest of the man expanding and collapsing under the wide-open jacket. He glanced aside, and saw the bosom of the woman near him rise and fall in quick respirations that moved slightly up and down her hand, which was pressed to her breast with all the fingers spread out and a little curved, as if grasping something too big for its span. And nearly a minute passed. One of those minutes when the voice is silenced, while the thoughts flutter in the head, like captive birds inside a cage, in rushes desperate, exhausting and vain.

During that minute of silence Lingard's anger kept rising, immense and towering, such as a crested wave running over the troubled shallows of the sands. Its roar filled his ears; a roar so powerful and distracting that, it seemed to him, his head must burst directly with the expanding volume of that sound. He looked at that man. That infamous figure upright on its feet, still, rigid, with stony eyes, as if its rotten soul had departed that moment and the carcass hadn't had the time yet to topple over. For the fraction of a second he had the illusion and the fear of the scoundrel having died there before the enraged glance of his eyes. Willems' eyelids fluttered, and the unconscious and passing tremor in that stiffly erect body exasperated Lingard like a fresh outrage. The fellow dared to stir! Dared to wink, to breathe, to exist; here, right before his eyes! His grip on the revolver relaxed gradually. As the transport of his rage increased, so also his contempt for the instruments that pierce or stab, that interpose themselves between the hand and the object of hate. He wanted another kind of satisfaction. Naked hands, by heaven! No firearms. Hands that could take him by the throat, beat down his defence, batter his face into shapeless flesh; hands that could feel all the desperation of his resistance and overpower it in the violent delight of a contact lingering and furious, intimate and brutal.

He let go the revolver altogether, stood hesitating, then throwing his hands out, strode forward — and everything passed from his sight. He could not see the man, the woman, the earth, the sky — saw nothing, as if in that one stride he had left the visible world behind to step into a black and deserted space. He heard screams round him in that obscurity, screams like the melancholy and pitiful cries of sea-birds that dwell on the lonely reefs of great oceans. Then suddenly a face appeared within a few inches of his own. His face. He felt something in his left hand. His throat . . . Ah! the thing like a snake's head that darts up and down . . . He squeezed hard. He was back in the world. He could see the quick beating of eyelids over a pair of eyes that were all whites, the grin of a drawn-up lip, a row of teeth gleaming through the drooping hair of a moustache . . . Strong white teeth. Knock them down his lying throat . . . He drew back his right hand, the fist up to the shoulder, knuckles out. From under his feet rose the screams of sea-birds. Thousands of them. Something held his legs . . . What the devil . . . He delivered his blow straight from the shoulder, felt the jar right up his arm, and realized suddenly that he was striking something passive and unresisting. His heart sank within him with disappointment, with rage, with mortification. He pushed with his left arm, opening the hand with haste, as if he had just perceived that he got hold by accident of something repulsive — and he watched with stupefied eyes Willems

tottering backwards in groping strides, the white sleeve of his jacket across his face. He watched his distance from that man increase, while he remained motionless, without being able to account to himself for the fact that so much empty space had come in between them. It should have been the other way. They ought to have been very close, and . . . Ah! He wouldn't fight, he wouldn't resist, he wouldn't defend himself! A cur! Evidently a cur! . . . He was amazed and aggrieved — profoundly, bitterly — with the immense and blank desolation of a small child robbed of a toy. He shouted — unbelieving:

“Will you be a cheat to the end?”

He waited for some answer. He waited anxiously with an impatience that seemed to lift him off his feet. He waited for some word, some sign; for some threatening stir. Nothing! Only two unwinking eyes glittered intently at him above the white sleeve. He saw the raised arm detach itself from the face and sink along the body. A white clad arm, with a big stain on the white sleeve. A red stain. There was a cut on the cheek. It bled. The nose bled too. The blood ran down, made one moustache look like a dark rag stuck over the lip, and went on in a wet streak down the clipped beard on one side of the chin. A drop of blood hung on the end of some hairs that were glued together; it hung for a while and took a leap down on the ground. Many more followed, leaping one after another in close file. One alighted on the breast and glided down instantly with devious vivacity, like a small insect running away; it left a narrow dark track on the white skin. He looked at it, looked at the tiny and active drops, looked at what he had done, with obscure satisfaction, with anger, with regret. This wasn't much like an act of justice. He had a desire to go up nearer to the man, to hear him speak, to hear him say something atrocious and wicked that would justify the violence of the blow. He made an attempt to move, and became aware of a close embrace round both his legs, just above the ankles. Instinctively, he kicked out with his foot, broke through the close bond and felt at once the clasp transferred to his other leg; the clasp warm, desperate and soft, of human arms. He looked down bewildered. He saw the body of the woman stretched at length, flattened on the ground like a dark blue rag. She trailed face downwards, clinging to his leg with both arms in a tenacious hug. He saw the top of her head, the long black hair streaming over his foot, all over the beaten earth, around his boot. He couldn't see his foot for it. He heard the short and repeated moaning of her breath. He imagined the invisible face close to his heel. With one kick into that face he could free himself. He dared not stir, and shouted down —

“Let go! Let go! Let go!”

The only result of his shouting was a tightening of the pressure of her arms. With a tremendous effort he tried to bring his right foot up to his left, and succeeded partly. He heard distinctly the rub of her body on the ground as he jerked her along. He tried to disengage himself by drawing up his foot. He stamped. He heard a voice saying sharply —

“Steady, Captain Lingard, steady!”

His eyes flew back to Willems at the sound of that voice, and, in the quick awakening of sleeping memories, Lingard stood suddenly still, appeased by the clear ring of familiar words. Appeased as in days of old, when they were trading together, when Willems was his trusted and helpful companion in out-of-the-way and dangerous places; when that fellow, who could keep his temper so much better than he could himself, had spared him many a difficulty, had saved him from many an act of hasty violence by the timely and good-humoured warning, whispered or shouted, "Steady, Captain Lingard, steady." A smart fellow. He had brought him up. The smartest fellow in the islands. If he had only stayed with him, then all this . . . He called out to Willems —

"Tell her to let me go or . . ."

He heard Willems shouting something, waited for awhile, then glanced vaguely down and saw the woman still stretched out perfectly mute and unresponsive, with her head at his feet. He felt a nervous impatience that, somehow, resembled fear.

"Tell her to let go, to go away, Willems, I tell you. I've had enough of this," he cried.

"All right, Captain Lingard," answered the calm voice of Willems, "she has let go. Take your foot off her hair; she can't get up."

Lingard leaped aside, clean away, and spun round quickly. He saw her sit up and cover her face with both hands, then he turned slowly on his heel and looked at the man. Willems held himself very straight, but was unsteady on his feet, and moved about nearly on the same spot, like a tipsy man attempting to preserve his balance. After gazing at him for a while, Lingard called, rancorous and irritable —

"What have you got to say for yourself?"

Willems began to walk towards him. He walked slowly, reeling a little before he took each step, and Lingard saw him put his hand to his face, then look at it holding it up to his eyes, as if he had there, concealed in the hollow of the palm, some small object which he wanted to examine secretly. Suddenly he drew it, with a brusque movement, down the front of his jacket and left a long smudge.

"That's a fine thing to do," said Willems.

He stood in front of Lingard, one of his eyes sunk deep in the increasing swelling of his cheek, still repeating mechanically the movement of feeling his damaged face; and every time he did this he pressed the palm to some clean spot on his jacket, covering the white cotton with bloody imprints as of some deformed and monstrous hand. Lingard said nothing, looking on. At last Willems left off staunching the blood and stood, his arms hanging by his side, with his face stiff and distorted under the patches of coagulated blood; and he seemed as though he had been set up there for a warning: an incomprehensible figure marked all over with some awful and symbolic signs of deadly import. Speaking with difficulty, he repeated in a reproachful tone —

"That was a fine thing to do."

"After all," answered Lingard, bitterly, "I had too good an opinion of you."

"And I of you. Don't you see that I could have had that fool over there killed and the whole thing burnt to the ground, swept off the face of the earth. You wouldn't

have found as much as a heap of ashes had I liked. I could have done all that. And I wouldn't."

"You — could — not. You dared not. You scoundrel!" cried Lingard.

"What's the use of calling me names?"

"True," retorted Lingard — "there's no name bad enough for you."

There was a short interval of silence. At the sound of their rapidly exchanged words, Aissa had got up from the ground where she had been sitting, in a sorrowful and dejected pose, and approached the two men. She stood on one side and looked on eagerly, in a desperate effort of her brain, with the quick and distracted eyes of a person trying for her life to penetrate the meaning of sentences uttered in a foreign tongue: the meaning portentous and fateful that lurks in the sounds of mysterious words; in the sounds surprising, unknown and strange.

Willems let the last speech of Lingard pass by; seemed by a slight movement of his hand to help it on its way to join the other shadows of the past. Then he said —

"You have struck me; you have insulted me . . ."

"Insulted you!" interrupted Lingard, passionately. "Who — what can insult you . . . you . . ."

He choked, advanced a step.

"Steady! steady!" said Willems calmly. "I tell you I sha'n't fight. Is it clear enough to you that I sha'n't? I — shall — not — lift — a — finger."

As he spoke, slowly punctuating each word with a slight jerk of his head, he stared at Lingard, his right eye open and big, the left small and nearly closed by the swelling of one half of his face, that appeared all drawn out on one side like faces seen in a concave glass. And they stood exactly opposite each other: one tall, slight and disfigured; the other tall, heavy and severe.

Willems went on —

"If I had wanted to hurt you — if I had wanted to destroy you, it was easy. I stood in the doorway long enough to pull a trigger — and you know I shoot straight."

"You would have missed," said Lingard, with assurance. "There is, under heaven, such a thing as justice."

The sound of that word on his own lips made him pause, confused, like an unexpected and unanswerable rebuke. The anger of his outraged pride, the anger of his outraged heart, had gone out in the blow; and there remained nothing but the sense of some immense infamy — of something vague, disgusting and terrible, which seemed to surround him on all sides, hover about him with shadowy and stealthy movements, like a band of assassins in the darkness of vast and unsafe places. Was there, under heaven, such a thing as justice? He looked at the man before him with such an intensity of prolonged glance that he seemed to see right through him, that at last he saw but a floating and unsteady mist in human shape. Would it blow away before the first breath of the breeze and leave nothing behind?

The sound of Willems' voice made him start violently. Willems was saying —

“I have always led a virtuous life; you know I have. You always praised me for my steadiness; you know you have. You know also I never stole — if that’s what you’re thinking of. I borrowed. You know how much I repaid. It was an error of judgment. But then consider my position there. I had been a little unlucky in my private affairs, and had debts. Could I let myself go under before the eyes of all those men who envied me? But that’s all over. It was an error of judgment. I’ve paid for it. An error of judgment.”

Lingard, astounded into perfect stillness, looked down. He looked down at Willems’ bare feet. Then, as the other had paused, he repeated in a blank tone —

“An error of judgment . . .”

“Yes,” drawled out Willems, thoughtfully, and went on with increasing animation: “As I said, I have always led a virtuous life. More so than Hudig — than you. Yes, than you. I drank a little, I played cards a little. Who doesn’t? But I had principles from a boy. Yes, principles. Business is business, and I never was an ass. I never respected fools. They had to suffer for their folly when they dealt with me. The evil was in them, not in me. But as to principles, it’s another matter. I kept clear of women. It’s forbidden — I had no time — and I despised them. Now I hate them!”

He put his tongue out a little; a tongue whose pink and moist end ran here and there, like something independently alive, under his swollen and blackened lip; he touched with the tips of his fingers the cut on his cheek, felt all round it with precaution: and the unharmed side of his face appeared for a moment to be preoccupied and uneasy about the state of that other side which was so very sore and stiff.

He recommenced speaking, and his voice vibrated as though with repressed emotion of some kind.

“You ask my wife, when you see her in Macassar, whether I have no reason to hate her. She was nobody, and I made her Mrs. Willems. A half-caste girl! You ask her how she showed her gratitude to me. You ask . . . Never mind that. Well, you came and dumped me here like a load of rubbish; dumped me here and left me with nothing to do — nothing good to remember — and damn little to hope for. You left me here at the mercy of that fool, Almayer, who suspected me of something. Of what? Devil only knows. But he suspected and hated me from the first; I suppose because you befriended me. Oh! I could read him like a book. He isn’t very deep, your Sambir partner, Captain Lingard, but he knows how to be disagreeable. Months passed. I thought I would die of sheer weariness, of my thoughts, of my regrets And then . . .”

He made a quick step nearer to Lingard, and as if moved by the same thought, by the same instinct, by the impulse of his will, Aissa also stepped nearer to them. They stood in a close group, and the two men could feel the calm air between their faces stirred by the light breath of the anxious woman who enveloped them both in the uncomprehending, in the despairing and wondering glances of her wild and mournful eyes.

Chapter 5

Willems turned a little from her and spoke lower.

“Look at that,” he said, with an almost imperceptible movement of his head towards the woman to whom he was presenting his shoulder. “Look at that! Don’t believe her! What has she been saying to you? What? I have been asleep. Had to sleep at last. I’ve been waiting for you three days and nights. I had to sleep some time. Hadn’t I? I told her to remain awake and watch for you, and call me at once. She did watch. You can’t believe her. You can’t believe any woman. Who can tell what’s inside their heads? No one. You can know nothing. The only thing you can know is that it isn’t anything like what comes through their lips. They live by the side of you. They seem to hate you, or they seem to love you; they caress or torment you; they throw you over or stick to you closer than your skin for some inscrutable and awful reason of their own — which you can never know! Look at her — and look at me. At me! — her infernal work. What has she been saying?”

His voice had sunk to a whisper. Lingard listened with great attention, holding his chin in his hand, which grasped a great handful of his white beard. His elbow was in the palm of his other hand, and his eyes were still fixed on the ground. He murmured, without looking up —

“She begged me for your life — if you want to know — as if the thing were worth giving or taking!”

“And for three days she begged me to take yours,” said Willems quickly. “For three days she wouldn’t give me any peace. She was never still. She planned ambushes. She has been looking for places all over here where I could hide and drop you with a safe shot as you walked up. It’s true. I give you my word.”

“Your word,” muttered Lingard, contemptuously.

Willems took no notice.

“Ah! She is a ferocious creature,” he went on. “You don’t know . . . I wanted to pass the time — to do something — to have something to think about — to forget my troubles till you came back. And . . . look at her . . . she took me as if I did not belong to myself. She did. I did not know there was something in me she could get hold of. She, a savage. I, a civilized European, and clever! She that knew no more than a wild animal! Well, she found out something in me. She found it out, and I was lost. I knew it. She tormented me. I was ready to do anything. I resisted — but I was ready. I knew that too. That frightened me more than anything; more than my own sufferings; and that was frightful enough, I assure you.”

Lingard listened, fascinated and amazed like a child listening to a fairy tale, and, when Willems stopped for breath, he shuffled his feet a little.

“What does he say?” cried out Aissa, suddenly.

The two men looked at her quickly, and then looked at one another.

Willems began again, speaking hurriedly —

“I tried to do something. Take her away from those people. I went to Almayer; the biggest blind fool that you ever . . . Then Abdulla came — and she went away. She took away with her something of me which I had to get back. I had to do it. As far as you are concerned, the change here had to happen sooner or later; you couldn’t be master here for ever. It isn’t what I have done that torments me. It is the why. It’s the madness that drove me to it. It’s that thing that came over me. That may come again, some day.”

“It will do no harm to anybody then, I promise you,” said Lingard, significantly.

Willems looked at him for a second with a blank stare, then went on —

“I fought against her. She goaded me to violence and to murder. Nobody knows why. She pushed me to it persistently, desperately, all the time. Fortunately Abdulla had sense. I don’t know what I wouldn’t have done. She held me then. Held me like a nightmare that is terrible and sweet. By and by it was another life. I woke up. I found myself beside an animal as full of harm as a wild cat. You don’t know through what I have passed. Her father tried to kill me — and she very nearly killed him. I believe she would have stuck at nothing. I don’t know which was more terrible! She would have stuck at nothing to defend her own. And when I think that it was me — me — Willems . . . I hate her. To-morrow she may want my life. How can I know what’s in her? She may want to kill me next!”

He paused in great trepidation, then added in a scared tone —

“I don’t want to die here.”

“Don’t you?” said Lingard, thoughtfully.

Willems turned towards Aissa and pointed at her with a bony forefinger.

“Look at her! Always there. Always near. Always watching, watching . . . for something. Look at her eyes. Ain’t they big? Don’t they stare? You wouldn’t think she can shut them like human beings do. I don’t believe she ever does. I go to sleep, if I can, under their stare, and when I wake up I see them fixed on me and moving no more than the eyes of a corpse. While I am still they are still. By God — she can’t move them till I stir, and then they follow me like a pair of jailers. They watch me; when I stop they seem to wait patient and glistening till I am off my guard — for to do something. To do something horrible. Look at them! You can see nothing in them. They are big, menacing — and empty. The eyes of a savage; of a damned mongrel, half-Arab, half-Malay. They hurt me! I am white! I swear to you I can’t stand this! Take me away. I am white! All white!”

He shouted towards the sombre heaven, proclaiming desperately under the frown of thickening clouds the fact of his pure and superior descent. He shouted, his head thrown up, his arms swinging about wildly; lean, ragged, disfigured; a tall madman making a

great disturbance about something invisible; a being absurd, repulsive, pathetic, and droll. Lingard, who was looking down as if absorbed in deep thought, gave him a quick glance from under his eyebrows: Aissa stood with clasped hands. At the other end of the courtyard the old woman, like a vague and decrepit apparition, rose noiselessly to look, then sank down again with a stealthy movement and crouched low over the small glow of the fire. Willems' voice filled the enclosure, rising louder with every word, and then, suddenly, at its very loudest, stopped short — like water stops running from an over-turned vessel. As soon as it had ceased the thunder seemed to take up the burden in a low growl coming from the inland hills. The noise approached in confused mutterings which kept on increasing, swelling into a roar that came nearer, rushed down the river, passed close in a tearing crash — and instantly sounded faint, dying away in monotonous and dull repetitions amongst the endless sinuosities of the lower reaches. Over the great forests, over all the innumerable people of unstimulating trees — over all that living people immense, motionless, and mute — the silence, that had rushed in on the track of the passing tumult, remained suspended as deep and complete as if it had never been disturbed from the beginning of remote ages. Then, through it, after a time, came to Lingard's ears the voice of the running river: a voice low, discreet, and sad, like the persistent and gentle voices that speak of the past in the silence of dreams.

He felt a great emptiness in his heart. It seemed to him that there was within his breast a great space without any light, where his thoughts wandered forlornly, unable to escape, unable to rest, unable to die, to vanish — and to relieve him from the fearful oppression of their existence. Speech, action, anger, forgiveness, all appeared to him alike useless and vain, appeared to him unsatisfactory, not worth the effort of hand or brain that was needed to give them effect. He could not see why he should not remain standing there, without ever doing anything, to the end of time. He felt something, something like a heavy chain, that held him there. This wouldn't do. He backed away a little from Willems and Aissa, leaving them close together, then stopped and looked at both. The man and the woman appeared to him much further than they really were. He had made only about three steps backward, but he believed for a moment that another step would take him out of earshot for ever. They appeared to him slightly under life size, and with a great cleanness of outlines, like figures carved with great precision of detail and highly finished by a skilful hand. He pulled himself together. The strong consciousness of his own personality came back to him. He had a notion of surveying them from a great and inaccessible height.

He said slowly: "You have been possessed of a devil."

"Yes," answered Willems gloomily, and looking at Aissa. "Isn't it pretty?"

"I've heard this kind of talk before," said Lingard, in a scornful tone; then paused, and went on steadily after a while: "I regret nothing. I picked you up by the waterside, like a starving cat — by God. I regret nothing; nothing that I have done. Abdulla — twenty others — no doubt Hudig himself, were after me. That's business — for them.

But that you should . . . Money belongs to him who picks it up and is strong enough to keep it — but this thing was different. It was part of my life. . . . I am an old fool.”

He was. The breath of his words, of the very words he spoke, fanned the spark of divine folly in his breast, the spark that made him — the hard-headed, heavy-handed adventurer — stand out from the crowd, from the sordid, from the joyous, unscrupulous, and noisy crowd of men that were so much like himself.

Willems said hurriedly: “It wasn’t me. The evil was not in me, Captain Lingard.”

“And where else confound you! Where else?” interrupted Lingard, raising his voice. “Did you ever see me cheat and lie and steal? Tell me that. Did you? Hey? I wonder where in perdition you came from when I found you under my feet. . . . No matter. You will do no more harm.”

Willems moved nearer, gazing upon him anxiously. Lingard went on with distinct deliberation —

“What did you expect when you asked me to see you? What? You know me. I am Lingard. You lived with me. You’ve heard men speak. You knew what you had done. Well! What did you expect?”

“How can I know?” groaned Willems, wringing his hands; “I was alone in that infernal savage crowd. I was delivered into their hands. After the thing was done, I felt so lost and weak that I would have called the devil himself to my aid if it had been any good — if he hadn’t put in all his work already. In the whole world there was only one man that had ever cared for me. Only one white man. You! Hate is better than being alone! Death is better! I expected . . . anything. Something to expect. Something to take me out of this. Out of her sight!”

He laughed. His laugh seemed to be torn out from him against his will, seemed to be brought violently on the surface from under his bitterness, his self-contempt, from under his despairing wonder at his own nature.

“When I think that when I first knew her it seemed to me that my whole life wouldn’t be enough to . . . And now when I look at her! She did it all. I must have been mad. I was mad. Every time I look at her I remember my madness. It frightens me. . . . And when I think that of all my life, of all my past, of all my future, of my intelligence, of my work, there is nothing left but she, the cause of my ruin, and you whom I have mortally offended . . .”

He hid his face for a moment in his hands, and when he took them away he had lost the appearance of comparative calm and gave way to a wild distress.

“Captain Lingard . . . anything . . . a deserted island . . . anywhere . . . I promise . . .”

“Shut up!” shouted Lingard, roughly.

He became dumb, suddenly, completely.

The wan light of the clouded morning retired slowly from the courtyard, from the clearings, from the river, as if it had gone unwillingly to hide in the enigmatical solitudes of the gloomy and silent forests. The clouds over their heads thickened into a low vault of uniform blackness. The air was still and inexpressibly oppressive. Lingard

unbuttoned his jacket, flung it wide open and, inclining his body sideways a little, wiped his forehead with his hand, which he jerked sharply afterwards. Then he looked at Willems and said —

“No promise of yours is any good to me. I am going to take your conduct into my own hands. Pay attention to what I am going to say. You are my prisoner.”

Willems’ head moved imperceptibly; then he became rigid and still. He seemed not to breathe.

“You shall stay here,” continued Lingard, with sombre deliberation. “You are not fit to go amongst people. Who could suspect, who could guess, who could imagine what’s in you? I couldn’t! You are my mistake. I shall hide you here. If I let you out you would go amongst unsuspecting men, and lie, and steal, and cheat for a little money or for some woman. I don’t care about shooting you. It would be the safest way though. But I won’t. Do not expect me to forgive you. To forgive one must have been angry and become contemptuous, and there is nothing in me now — no anger, no contempt, no disappointment. To me you are not Willems, the man I befriended and helped through thick and thin, and thought much of . . . You are not a human being that may be destroyed or forgiven. You are a bitter thought, a something without a body and that must be hidden . . . You are my shame.”

He ceased and looked slowly round. How dark it was! It seemed to him that the light was dying prematurely out of the world and that the air was already dead.

“Of course,” he went on, “I shall see to it that you don’t starve.”

“You don’t mean to say that I must live here, Captain Lingard?” said Willems, in a kind of mechanical voice without any inflections.

“Did you ever hear me say something I did not mean?” asked Lingard. “You said you didn’t want to die here — well, you must live . . . Unless you change your mind,” he added, as if in involuntary afterthought.

He looked at Willems narrowly, then shook his head.

“You are alone,” he went on. “Nothing can help you. Nobody will. You are neither white nor brown. You have no colour as you have no heart. Your accomplices have abandoned you to me because I am still somebody to be reckoned with. You are alone but for that woman there. You say you did this for her. Well, you have her.”

Willems mumbled something, and then suddenly caught his hair with both his hands and remained standing so. Aissa, who had been looking at him, turned to Lingard.

“What did you say, Rajah Laut?” she cried.

There was a slight stir amongst the filmy threads of her disordered hair, the bushes by the river sides trembled, the big tree nodded precipitately over them with an abrupt rustle, as if waking with a start from a troubled sleep — and the breath of hot breeze passed, light, rapid, and scorching, under the clouds that whirled round, unbroken but undulating, like a restless phantom of a sombre sea.

Lingard looked at her pityingly before he said —

“I have told him that he must live here all his life . . . and with you.”

The sun seemed to have gone out at last like a flickering light away up beyond the clouds, and in the stifling gloom of the courtyard the three figures stood colourless and shadowy, as if surrounded by a black and superheated mist. Aissa looked at Willems, who remained still, as though he had been changed into stone in the very act of tearing his hair. Then she turned her head towards Lingard and shouted —

“You lie! You lie! . . . White man. Like you all do. You . . . whom Abdulla made small. You lie!”

Her words rang out shrill and venomous with her secret scorn, with her overpowering desire to wound regardless of consequences; in her woman’s reckless desire to cause suffering at any cost, to cause it by the sound of her own voice — by her own voice, that would carry the poison of her thought into the hated heart.

Willems let his hands fall, and began to mumble again. Lingard turned his ear towards him instinctively, caught something that sounded like “Very well” — then some more mumbling — then a sigh.

“As far as the rest of the world is concerned,” said Lingard, after waiting for awhile in an attentive attitude, “your life is finished. Nobody will be able to throw any of your villainies in my teeth; nobody will be able to point at you and say, ‘Here goes a scoundrel of Lingard’s up-bringing.’ You are buried here.”

“And you think that I will stay . . . that I will submit?” exclaimed Willems, as if he had suddenly recovered the power of speech.

“You needn’t stay here — on this spot,” said Lingard, drily. “There are the forests — and here is the river. You may swim. Fifteen miles up, or forty down. At one end you will meet Almayer, at the other the sea. Take your choice.”

He burst into a short, joyless laugh, then added with severe gravity —

“There is also another way.”

“If you want to drive my soul into damnation by trying to drive me to suicide you will not succeed,” said Willems in wild excitement. “I will live. I shall repent. I may escape. . . . Take that woman away — she is sin.”

A hooked dart of fire tore in two the darkness of the distant horizon and lit up the gloom of the earth with a dazzling and ghastly flame. Then the thunder was heard far away, like an incredibly enormous voice muttering menaces.

Lingard said —

“I don’t care what happens, but I may tell you that without that woman your life is not worth much — not twopence. There is a fellow here who . . . and Abdulla himself wouldn’t stand on any ceremony. Think of that! And then she won’t go.”

He began, even while he spoke, to walk slowly down towards the little gate. He didn’t look, but he felt as sure that Willems was following him as if he had been leading him by a string. Directly he had passed through the wicket-gate into the big courtyard he heard a voice, behind his back, saying —

“I think she was right. I ought to have shot you. I couldn’t have been worse off.”

“Time yet,” answered Lingard, without stopping or looking back. “But, you see, you can’t. There is not even that in you.”

“Don’t provoke me, Captain Lingard,” cried Willems.

Lingard turned round sharply. Willems and Aissa stopped. Another forked flash of lightning split up the clouds overhead, and threw upon their faces a sudden burst of light — a blaze violent, sinister and fleeting; and in the same instant they were deafened by a near, single crash of thunder, which was followed by a rushing noise, like a frightened sigh of the startled earth.

“Provoke you!” said the old adventurer, as soon as he could make himself heard. “Provoke you! Hey! What’s there in you to provoke? What do I care?”

“It is easy to speak like that when you know that in the whole world — in the whole world — I have no friend,” said Willems.

“Whose fault?” said Lingard, sharply.

Their voices, after the deep and tremendous noise, sounded to them very unsatisfactory — thin and frail, like the voices of pigmies — and they became suddenly silent, as if on that account. From up the courtyard Lingard’s boatmen came down and passed them, keeping step in a single file, their paddles on shoulder, and holding their heads straight with their eyes fixed on the river. Ali, who was walking last, stopped before Lingard, very stiff and upright. He said —

“That one-eyed Babalatchi is gone, with all his women. He took everything. All the pots and boxes. Big. Heavy. Three boxes.”

He grinned as if the thing had been amusing, then added with an appearance of anxious concern, “Rain coming.”

“We return,” said Lingard. “Make ready.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” ejaculated Ali with precision, and moved on. He had been quartermaster with Lingard before making up his mind to stay in Sambir as Almayer’s head man. He strutted towards the landing-place thinking proudly that he was not like those other ignorant boatmen, and knew how to answer properly the very greatest of white captains.

“You have misunderstood me from the first, Captain Lingard,” said Willems.

“Have I? It’s all right, as long as there is no mistake about my meaning,” answered Lingard, strolling slowly to the landing-place. Willems followed him, and Aissa followed Willems.

Two hands were extended to help Lingard in embarking. He stepped cautiously and heavily into the long and narrow canoe, and sat in the canvas folding-chair that had been placed in the middle. He leaned back and turned his head to the two figures that stood on the bank a little above him. Aissa’s eyes were fastened on his face in a visible impatience to see him gone. Willems’ look went straight above the canoe, straight at the forest on the other side of the river.

“All right, Ali,” said Lingard, in a low voice.

A slight stir animated the faces, and a faint murmur ran along the line of paddlers. The foremost man pushed with the point of his paddle, canted the fore end out of the dead water into the current; and the canoe fell rapidly off before the rush of brown water, the stern rubbing gently against the low bank.

“We shall meet again, Captain Lingard!” cried Willems, in an unsteady voice.

“Never!” said Lingard, turning half round in his chair to look at Willems. His fierce red eyes glittered remorselessly over the high back of his seat.

“Must cross the river. Water less quick over there,” said Ali.

He pushed in his turn now with all his strength, throwing his body recklessly right out over the stern. Then he recovered himself just in time into the squatting attitude of a monkey perched on a high shelf, and shouted: “Dayong!”

The paddles struck the water together. The canoe darted forward and went on steadily crossing the river with a sideways motion made up of its own speed and the downward drift of the current.

Lingard watched the shore astern. The woman shook her hand at him, and then squatted at the feet of the man who stood motionless. After a while she got up and stood beside him, reaching up to his head — and Lingard saw then that she had wetted some part of her covering and was trying to wash the dried blood off the man’s immovable face, which did not seem to know anything about it. Lingard turned away and threw himself back in his chair, stretching his legs out with a sigh of fatigue. His head fell forward; and under his red face the white beard lay fan-like on his breast, the ends of fine long hairs all astir in the faint draught made by the rapid motion of the craft that carried him away from his prisoner — from the only thing in his life he wished to hide.

In its course across the river the canoe came into the line of Willems’ sight and his eyes caught the image, followed it eagerly as it glided, small but distinct, on the dark background of the forest. He could see plainly the figure of the man sitting in the middle. All his life he had felt that man behind his back, a reassuring presence ready with help, with commendation, with advice; friendly in reproof, enthusiastic in approbation; a man inspiring confidence by his strength, by his fearlessness, by the very weakness of his simple heart. And now that man was going away. He must call him back.

He shouted, and his words, which he wanted to throw across the river, seemed to fall helplessly at his feet. Aissa put her hand on his arm in a restraining attempt, but he shook it off. He wanted to call back his very life that was going away from him. He shouted again — and this time he did not even hear himself. No use. He would never return. And he stood in sullen silence looking at the white figure over there, lying back in the chair in the middle of the boat; a figure that struck him suddenly as very terrible, heartless and astonishing, with its unnatural appearance of running over the water in an attitude of languid repose.

For a time nothing on earth stirred, seemingly, but the canoe, which glided upstream with a motion so even and smooth that it did not convey any sense of movement. Overhead, the massed clouds appeared solid and steady as if held there in a powerful grip, but on their uneven surface there was a continuous and trembling glimmer, a faint reflection of the distant lightning from the thunderstorm that had broken already on the coast and was working its way up the river with low and angry growls. Willems

looked on, as motionless as everything round him and above him. Only his eyes seemed to live, as they followed the canoe on its course that carried it away from him, steadily, unhesitatingly, finally, as if it were going, not up the great river into the momentous excitement of Sambir, but straight into the past, into the past crowded yet empty, like an old cemetery full of neglected graves, where lie dead hopes that never return.

From time to time he felt on his face the passing, warm touch of an immense breath coming from beyond the forest, like the short panting of an oppressed world. Then the heavy air round him was pierced by a sharp gust of wind, bringing with it the fresh, damp feel of the falling rain; and all the innumerable tree-tops of the forests swayed to the left and sprang back again in a tumultuous balancing of nodding branches and shuddering leaves. A light frown ran over the river, the clouds stirred slowly, changing their aspect but not their place, as if they had turned ponderously over; and when the sudden movement had died out in a quickened tremor of the slenderest twigs, there was a short period of formidable immobility above and below, during which the voice of the thunder was heard, speaking in a sustained, emphatic and vibrating roll, with violent louder bursts of crashing sound, like a wrathful and threatening discourse of an angry god. For a moment it died out, and then another gust of wind passed, driving before it a white mist which filled the space with a cloud of waterdust that hid suddenly from Willems the canoe, the forests, the river itself; that woke him up from his numbness in a forlorn shiver, that made him look round despairingly to see nothing but the whirling drift of rain spray before the freshening breeze, while through it the heavy big drops fell about him with sonorous and rapid beats upon the dry earth. He made a few hurried steps up the courtyard and was arrested by an immense sheet of water that fell all at once on him, fell sudden and overwhelming from the clouds, cutting his respiration, streaming over his head, clinging to him, running down his body, off his arms, off his legs. He stood gasping while the water beat him in a vertical downpour, drove on him slanting in squalls, and he felt the drops striking him from above, from everywhere; drops thick, pressed and dashing at him as if flung from all sides by a mob of infuriated hands. From under his feet a great vapour of broken water floated up, he felt the ground become soft — melt under him — and saw the water spring out from the dry earth to meet the water that fell from the sombre heaven. An insane dread took possession of him, the dread of all that water around him, of the water that ran down the courtyard towards him, of the water that pressed him on every side, of the slanting water that drove across his face in wavering sheets which gleamed pale red with the flicker of lightning streaming through them, as if fire and water were falling together, monstrously mixed, upon the stunned earth.

He wanted to run away, but when he moved it was to slide about painfully and slowly upon that earth which had become mud so suddenly under his feet. He fought his way up the courtyard like a man pushing through a crowd, his head down, one shoulder forward, stopping often, and sometimes carried back a pace or two in the rush of water which his heart was not stout enough to face. Aissa followed him step by step, stopping when he stopped, recoiling with him, moving forward with him in his

toilsome way up the slippery declivity of the courtyard, of that courtyard, from which everything seemed to have been swept away by the first rush of the mighty downpour. They could see nothing. The tree, the bushes, the house, and the fences — all had disappeared in the thickness of the falling rain. Their hair stuck, streaming, to their heads; their clothing clung to them, beaten close to their bodies; water ran off them, off their heads over their shoulders. They moved, patient, upright, slow and dark, in the gleam clear or fiery of the falling drops, under the roll of unceasing thunder, like two wandering ghosts of the drowned that, condemned to haunt the water for ever, had come up from the river to look at the world under a deluge.

On the left the tree seemed to step out to meet them, appearing vaguely, high, motionless and patient; with a rustling plaint of its innumerable leaves through which every drop of water tore its separate way with cruel haste. And then, to the right, the house surged up in the mist, very black, and clamorous with the quick patter of rain on its high-pitched roof above the steady splash of the water running off the eaves. Down the plankway leading to the door flowed a thin and pellucid stream, and when Willems began his ascent it broke over his foot as if he were going up a steep ravine in the bed of a rapid and shallow torrent. Behind his heels two streaming smudges of mud stained for an instant the purity of the rushing water, and then he splashed his way up with a spurt and stood on the bamboo platform before the open door under the shelter of the overhanging eaves — under shelter at last!

A low moan ending in a broken and plaintive mutter arrested Willems on the threshold. He peered round in the half-light under the roof and saw the old woman crouching close to the wall in a shapeless heap, and while he looked he felt a touch of two arms on his shoulders. Aissa! He had forgotten her. He turned, and she clasped him round the neck instantly, pressing close to him as if afraid of violence or escape. He stiffened himself in repulsion, in horror, in the mysterious revolt of his heart; while she clung to him — clung to him as if he were a refuge from misery, from storm, from weariness, from fear, from despair; and it was on the part of that being an embrace terrible, enraged and mournful, in which all her strength went out to make him captive, to hold him for ever.

He said nothing. He looked into her eyes while he struggled with her fingers about the nape of his neck, and suddenly he tore her hands apart, holding her arms up in a strong grip of her wrists, and bending his swollen face close over hers, he said —

“It is all your doing. You . . .”

She did not understand him — not a word. He spoke in the language of his people — of his people that know no mercy and no shame. And he was angry. Alas! he was always angry now, and always speaking words that she could not understand. She stood in silence, looking at him through her patient eyes, while he shook her arms a little and then flung them down.

“Don’t follow me!” he shouted. “I want to be alone — I mean to be left alone!”

He went in, leaving the door open.

She did not move. What need to understand the words when they are spoken in such a voice? In that voice which did not seem to be his voice — his voice when he spoke by the brook, when he was never angry and always smiling! Her eyes were fixed upon the dark doorway, but her hands strayed mechanically upwards; she took up all her hair, and, inclining her head slightly over her shoulder, wrung out the long black tresses, twisting them persistently, while she stood, sad and absorbed, like one listening to an inward voice — the voice of bitter, of unavailing regret. The thunder had ceased, the wind had died out, and the rain fell perpendicular and steady through a great pale clearness — the light of remote sun coming victorious from amongst the dissolving blackness of the clouds. She stood near the doorway. He was there — alone in the gloom of the dwelling. He was there. He spoke not. What was in his mind now? What fear? What desire? Not the desire of her as in the days when he used to smile . . . How could she know? . . .

A sigh coming from the bottom of her heart, flew out into the world through her parted lips. A sigh faint, profound, and broken; a sigh full of pain and fear, like the sigh of those who are about to face the unknown: to face it in loneliness, in doubt, and without hope. She let go her hair, that fell scattered over her shoulders like a funeral veil, and she sank down suddenly by the door. Her hands clasped her ankles; she rested her head on her drawn-up knees, and remained still, very still, under the streaming mourning of her hair. She was thinking of him; of the days by the brook; she was thinking of all that had been their love — and she sat in the abandoned posture of those who sit weeping by the dead, of those who watch and mourn over a corpse.

Part 5

Chapter 1

Almayer propped, alone on the verandah of his house, with both his elbows on the table, and holding his head between his hands, stared before him, away over the stretch of sprouting young grass in his courtyard, and over the short jetty with its cluster of small canoes, amongst which his big whale-boat floated high, like a white mother of all that dark and aquatic brood. He stared on the river, past the schooner anchored in mid-stream, past the forests of the left bank; he stared through and past the illusion of the material world.

The sun was sinking. Under the sky was stretched a network of white threads, a network fine and close-meshed, where here and there were caught thicker white vapours of globular shape; and to the eastward, above the ragged barrier of the forests, surged the summits of a chain of great clouds, growing bigger slowly, in imperceptible motion, as if careful not to disturb the glowing stillness of the earth and of the sky. Abreast of the house the river was empty but for the motionless schooner. Higher up, a solitary log came out from the bend above and went on drifting slowly down the straight reach: a dead and wandering tree going out to its grave in the sea, between two ranks of trees motionless and living.

And Almayer sat, his face in his hands, looking on and hating all this: the muddy river; the faded blue of the sky; the black log passing by on its first and last voyage; the green sea of leaves — the sea that glowed shimmered, and stirred above the uniform and impenetrable gloom of the forests — the joyous sea of living green powdered with the brilliant dust of oblique sunrays.

He hated all this; he begrudged every day — every minute — of his life spent amongst all these things; he begrudged it bitterly, angrily, with enraged and immense regret, like a miser compelled to give up some of his treasure to a near relation. And yet all this was very precious to him. It was the present sign of a splendid future.

He pushed the table away impatiently, got up, made a few steps aimlessly, then stood by the balustrade and again looked at the river — at that river which would have been the instrument for the making of his fortune if . . . if . . .

“What an abominable brute!” he said.

He was alone, but he spoke aloud, as one is apt to do under the impulse of a strong, of an overmastering thought.

“What a brute!” he muttered again.

The river was dark now, and the schooner lay on it, a black, a lonely, and a graceful form, with the slender masts darting upwards from it in two frail and raking lines. The shadows of the evening crept up the trees, crept up from bough to bough, till at last the

long sunbeams coursing from the western horizon skimmed lightly over the topmost branches, then flew upwards amongst the piled-up clouds, giving them a sombre and fiery aspect in the last flush of light. And suddenly the light disappeared as if lost in the immensity of the great, blue, and empty hollow overhead. The sun had set: and the forests became a straight wall of formless blackness. Above them, on the edge of lingering clouds, a single star glimmered fitfully, obscured now and then by the rapid flight of high and invisible vapours.

Almayer fought with the uneasiness within his breast. He heard Ali, who moved behind him preparing his evening meal, and he listened with strange attention to the sounds the man made — to the short, dry bang of the plate put upon the table, to the clink of glass and the metallic rattle of knife and fork. The man went away. Now he was coming back. He would speak directly; and Almayer, notwithstanding the absorbing gravity of his thoughts, listened for the sound of expected words. He heard them, spoken in English with painstaking distinctness.

“Ready, sir!”

“All right,” said Almayer, curtly. He did not move. He remained pensive, with his back to the table upon which stood the lighted lamp brought by Ali. He was thinking: “Where was Lingard now? Halfway down the river probably, in Abdulla’s ship. He would be back in about three days — perhaps less. And then? Then the schooner would have to be got out of the river, and when that craft was gone they — he and Lingard — would remain here; alone with the constant thought of that other man, that other man living near them! What an extraordinary idea to keep him there for ever. For ever! What did that mean — for ever? Perhaps a year, perhaps ten years. Preposterous! Keep him there ten years — or may be twenty! The fellow was capable of living more than twenty years. And for all that time he would have to be watched, fed, looked after. There was nobody but Lingard to have such notions. Twenty years! Why, no! In less than ten years their fortune would be made and they would leave this place, first for Batavia — yes, Batavia — and then for Europe. England, no doubt. Lingard would want to go to England. And would they leave that man here? How would that fellow look in ten years? Very old probably. Well, devil take him. Nina would be fifteen. She would be rich and very pretty and he himself would not be so old then. . . .”

Almayer smiled into the night.

. . . Yes, rich! Why! Of course! Captain Lingard was a resourceful man, and he had plenty of money even now. They were rich already; but not enough. Decidedly not enough. Money brings money. That gold business was good. Famous! Captain Lingard was a remarkable man. He said the gold was there — and it was there. Lingard knew what he was talking about. But he had queer ideas. For instance, about Willems. Now what did he want to keep him alive for? Why?

“That scoundrel,” muttered Almayer again.

“Makan Tuan!” ejaculated Ali suddenly, very loud in a pressing tone.

Almayer walked to the table, sat down, and his anxious visage dropped from above into the light thrown down by the lamp-shade. He helped himself absently, and began to eat in great mouthfuls.

. . . Undoubtedly, Lingard was the man to stick to! The man undismayed, masterful and ready. How quickly he had planned a new future when Willems' treachery destroyed their established position in Sambir! And the position even now was not so bad. What an immense prestige that Lingard had with all those people — Arabs, Malays and all. Ah, it was good to be able to call a man like that father. Fine! Wonder how much money really the old fellow had. People talked — they exaggerated surely, but if he had only half of what they said . . .

He drank, throwing his head up, and fell to again.

. . . Now, if that Willems had known how to play his cards well, had he stuck to the old fellow he would have been in his position, he would be now married to Lingard's adopted daughter with his future assured — splendid . . .

"The beast!" growled Almayer, between two mouthfuls.

Ali stood rigidly straight with an uninterested face, his gaze lost in the night which pressed round the small circle of light that shone on the table, on the glass, on the bottle, and on Almayer's head as he leaned over his plate moving his jaws.

. . . A famous man Lingard — yet you never knew what he would do next. It was notorious that he had shot a white man once for less than Willems had done. For less? . . . Why, for nothing, so to speak! It was not even his own quarrel. It was about some Malay returning from pilgrimage with wife and children. Kidnapped, or robbed, or something. A stupid story — an old story. And now he goes to see that Willems and — nothing. Comes back talking big about his prisoner; but after all he said very little. What did that Willems tell him? What passed between them? The old fellow must have had something in his mind when he let that scoundrel off. And Joanna! She would get round the old fellow. Sure. Then he would forgive perhaps. Impossible. But at any rate he would waste a lot of money on them. The old man was tenacious in his hates, but also in his affections. He had known that beast Willems from a boy. They would make it up in a year or so. Everything is possible: why did he not rush off at first and kill the brute? That would have been more like Lingard. . . .

Almayer laid down his spoon suddenly, and pushing his plate away, threw himself back in the chair.

. . . Unsafe. Decidedly unsafe. He had no mind to share Lingard's money with anybody. Lingard's money was Nina's money in a sense. And if Willems managed to become friendly with the old man it would be dangerous for him — Almayer. Such an unscrupulous scoundrel! He would oust him from his position. He would lie and slander. Everything would be lost. Lost. Poor Nina. What would become of her? Poor child. For her sake he must remove that Willems. Must. But how? Lingard wanted to be obeyed. Impossible to kill Willems. Lingard might be angry. Incredible, but so it was. He might . . .

A wave of heat passed through Almayer's body, flushed his face, and broke out of him in copious perspiration. He wriggled in his chair, and pressed his hands together under the table. What an awful prospect! He fancied he could see Lingard and Willems reconciled and going away arm-in-arm, leaving him alone in this God-forsaken hole — in Sambir — in this deadly swamp! And all his sacrifices, the sacrifice of his independence, of his best years, his surrender to Lingard's fancies and caprices, would go for nothing! Horrible! Then he thought of his little daughter — his daughter! — and the ghastliness of his supposition overpowered him. He had a deep emotion, a sudden emotion that made him feel quite faint at the idea of that young life spoiled before it had fairly begun. His dear child's life! Lying back in his chair he covered his face with both his hands.

Ali glanced down at him and said, unconcernedly — "Master finish?"

Almayer was lost in the immensity of his commiseration for himself, for his daughter, who was — perhaps — not going to be the richest woman in the world — notwithstanding Lingard's promises. He did not understand the other's question, and muttered through his fingers in a doleful tone —

"What did you say? What? Finish what?"

"Clear up meza," explained Ali.

"Clear up!" burst out Almayer, with incomprehensible exasperation. "Devil take you and the table. Stupid! Chatterer! Chelakka! Get out!"

He leaned forward, glaring at his head man, then sank back in his seat with his arms hanging straight down on each side of the chair. And he sat motionless in a meditation so concentrated and so absorbing, with all his power of thought so deep within himself, that all expression disappeared from his face in an aspect of staring vacancy.

Ali was clearing the table. He dropped negligently the tumbler into the greasy dish, flung there the spoon and fork, then slipped in the plate with a push amongst the remnants of food. He took up the dish, tucked up the bottle under his armpit, and went off.

"My hammock!" shouted Almayer after him.

"Ada! I come soon," answered Ali from the doorway in an offended tone, looking back over his shoulder. . . . How could he clear the table and hang the hammock at the same time. Ya-wa! Those white men were all alike. Wanted everything done at once. Like children . . .

The indistinct murmur of his criticism went away, faded and died out together with the soft footfall of his bare feet in the dark passage.

For some time Almayer did not move. His thoughts were busy at work shaping a momentous resolution, and in the perfect silence of the house he believed that he could hear the noise of the operation as if the work had been done with a hammer. He certainly felt a thumping of strokes, faint, profound, and startling, somewhere low down in his breast; and he was aware of a sound of dull knocking, abrupt and rapid, in his ears. Now and then he held his breath, unconsciously, too long, and had to relieve himself by a deep expiration that whistled dully through his pursed lips. The lamp

standing on the far side of the table threw a section of a lighted circle on the floor, where his out-stretched legs stuck out from under the table with feet rigid and turned up like the feet of a corpse; and his set face with fixed eyes would have been also like the face of the dead, but for its vacant yet conscious aspect; the hard, the stupid, the stony aspect of one not dead, but only buried under the dust, ashes, and corruption of personal thoughts, of base fears, of selfish desires.

“I will do it!”

Not till he heard his own voice did he know that he had spoken. It startled him. He stood up. The knuckles of his hand, somewhat behind him, were resting on the edge of the table as he remained still with one foot advanced, his lips a little open, and thought: It would not do to fool about with Lingard. But I must risk it. It's the only way I can see. I must tell her. She has some little sense. I wish they were a thousand miles off already. A hundred thousand miles. I do. And if it fails. And she blabs out then to Lingard? She seemed a fool. No; probably they will get away. And if they did, would Lingard believe me? Yes. I never lied to him. He would believe. I don't know . . . Perhaps he won't. . . . “I must do it. Must!” he argued aloud to himself.

For a long time he stood still, looking before him with an intense gaze, a gaze rapt and immobile, that seemed to watch the minute quivering of a delicate balance, coming to a rest.

To the left of him, in the whitewashed wall of the house that formed the back of the verandah, there was a closed door. Black letters were painted on it proclaiming the fact that behind that door there was the office of Lingard & Co. The interior had been furnished by Lingard when he had built the house for his adopted daughter and her husband, and it had been furnished with reckless prodigality. There was an office desk, a revolving chair, bookshelves, a safe: all to humour the weakness of Almayer, who thought all those paraphernalia necessary to successful trading. Lingard had laughed, but had taken immense trouble to get the things. It pleased him to make his protege, his adopted son-in-law, happy. It had been the sensation of Sambir some five years ago. While the things were being landed, the whole settlement literally lived on the river bank in front of the Rajah Laut's house, to look, to wonder, to admire. . . . What a big meza, with many boxes fitted all over it and under it! What did the white man do with such a table? And look, look, O Brothers! There is a green square box, with a gold plate on it, a box so heavy that those twenty men cannot drag it up the bank. Let us go, brothers, and help pull at the ropes, and perchance we may see what's inside. Treasure, no doubt. Gold is heavy and hard to hold, O Brothers! Let us go and earn a recompense from the fierce Rajah of the Sea who shouts over there, with a red face. See! There is a man carrying a pile of books from the boat! What a number of books. What were they for? . . . And an old invalided jurumudi, who had travelled over many seas and had heard holy men speak in far-off countries, explained to a small knot of unsophisticated citizens of Sambir that those books were books of magic — of magic that guides the white men's ships over the seas, that gives them their wicked wisdom and their strength; of magic that makes them great, powerful, and irresistible while

they live, and — praise be to Allah! — the victims of Satan, the slaves of Jehannum when they die.

And when he saw the room furnished, Almayer had felt proud. In his exultation of an empty-headed quill-driver, he thought himself, by the virtue of that furniture, at the head of a serious business. He had sold himself to Lingard for these things — married the Malay girl of his adoption for the reward of these things and of the great wealth that must necessarily follow upon conscientious book-keeping. He found out very soon that trade in Sambir meant something entirely different. He could not guide Patalolo, control the irrepressible old Sahamin, or restrain the youthful vagaries of the fierce Bahassoen with pen, ink, and paper. He found no successful magic in the blank pages of his ledgers; and gradually he lost his old point of view in the saner appreciation of his situation. The room known as the office became neglected then like a temple of an exploded superstition. At first, when his wife reverted to her original savagery, Almayer, now and again, had sought refuge from her there; but after their child began to speak, to know him, he became braver, for he found courage and consolation in his unreasoning and fierce affection for his daughter — in the impenetrable mantle of selfishness he wrapped round both their lives: round himself, and that young life that was also his.

When Lingard ordered him to receive Joanna into his house, he had a truckle bed put into the office — the only room he could spare. The big office desk was pushed on one side, and Joanna came with her little shabby trunk and with her child and took possession in her dreamy, slack, half-asleep way; took possession of the dust, dirt, and squalor, where she appeared naturally at home, where she dragged a melancholy and dull existence; an existence made up of sad remorse and frightened hope, amongst the hopeless disorder — the senseless and vain decay of all these emblems of civilized commerce. Bits of white stuff; rags yellow, pink, blue: rags limp, brilliant and soiled, trailed on the floor, lay on the desk amongst the sombre covers of books soiled, grimy, but stiff-backed, in virtue, perhaps, of their European origin. The biggest set of bookshelves was partly hidden by a petticoat, the waistband of which was caught upon the back of a slender book pulled a little out of the row so as to make an improvised clothespeg. The folding canvas bedstead stood nearly in the middle of the room, stood anyhow, parallel to no wall, as if it had been, in the process of transportation to some remote place, dropped casually there by tired bearers. And on the tumbled blankets that lay in a disordered heap on its edge, Joanna sat almost all day with her stock-inged feet upon one of the bed pillows that were somehow always kicking about the floor. She sat there, vaguely tormented at times by the thought of her absent husband, but most of the time thinking tearfully of nothing at all, looking with swimming eyes at her little son — at the big-headed, pasty-faced, and sickly Louis Willems — who rolled a glass inkstand, solid with dried ink, about the floor, and tottered after it with the portentous gravity of demeanour and absolute absorption by the business in hand that characterize the pursuits of early childhood. Through the half-open shutter a ray of sunlight, a ray merciless and crude, came into the room, beat in the early morning

upon the safe in the far-off corner, then, travelling against the sun, cut at midday the big desk in two with its solid and clean-edged brilliance; with its hot brilliance in which a swarm of flies hovered in dancing flight over some dirty plate forgotten there amongst yellow papers for many a day. And towards the evening the cynical ray seemed to cling to the ragged petticoat, lingered on it with wicked enjoyment of that misery it had exposed all day; lingered on the corner of the dusty bookshelf, in a red glow intense and mocking, till it was suddenly snatched by the setting sun out of the way of the coming night. And the night entered the room. The night abrupt, impenetrable and all-filling with its flood of darkness; the night cool and merciful; the blind night that saw nothing, but could hear the fretful whimpering of the child, the creak of the bedstead, Joanna's deep sighs as she turned over, sleepless, in the confused conviction of her wickedness, thinking of that man masterful, fair-headed, and strong — a man hard perhaps, but her husband; her clever and handsome husband to whom she had acted so cruelly on the advice of bad people, if her own people; and of her poor, dear, deceived mother.

To Almayer, Joanna's presence was a constant worry, a worry unobtrusive yet intolerable; a constant, but mostly mute, warning of possible danger. In view of the absurd softness of Lingard's heart, every one in whom Lingard manifested the slightest interest was to Almayer a natural enemy. He was quite alive to that feeling, and in the intimacy of the secret intercourse with his inner self had often congratulated himself upon his own wide-awake comprehension of his position. In that way, and impelled by that motive, Almayer had hated many and various persons at various times. But he never had hated and feared anybody so much as he did hate and fear Willems. Even after Willems' treachery, which seemed to remove him beyond the pale of all human sympathy, Almayer mistrusted the situation and groaned in spirit every time he caught sight of Joanna.

He saw her very seldom in the daytime. But in the short and opal-tinted twilights, or in the azure dusk of starry evenings, he often saw, before he slept, the slender and tall figure trailing to and fro the ragged tail of its white gown over the dried mud of the riverside in front of the house. Once or twice when he sat late on the verandah, with his feet upon the deal table on a level with the lamp, reading the seven months' old copy of the North China Herald, brought by Lingard, he heard the stairs creak, and, looking round the paper, he saw her frail and meagre form rise step by step and toil across the verandah, carrying with difficulty the big, fat child, whose head, lying on the mother's bony shoulder, seemed of the same size as Joanna's own. Several times she had assailed him with tearful clamour or mad entreaties: asking about her husband, wanting to know where he was, when he would be back; and ending every such outburst with despairing and incoherent self-reproaches that were absolutely incomprehensible to Almayer. On one or two occasions she had overwhelmed her host with vituperative abuse, making him responsible for her husband's absence. Those scenes, begun without any warning, ended abruptly in a sobbing flight and a bang of the door; stirred the house with a sudden, a fierce, and an evanescent disturbance; like those inexplicable

whirlwinds that rise, run, and vanish without apparent cause upon the sun-scorched dead level of arid and lamentable plains.

But to-night the house was quiet, deadly quiet, while Almayer stood still, watching that delicate balance where he was weighing all his chances: Joanna's intelligence, Lingard's credulity, Willems' reckless audacity, desire to escape, readiness to seize an unexpected opportunity. He weighed, anxious and attentive, his fears and his desires against the tremendous risk of a quarrel with Lingard. . . . Yes. Lingard would be angry. Lingard might suspect him of some connivance in his prisoner's escape — but surely he would not quarrel with him — Almayer — about those people once they were gone — gone to the devil in their own way. And then he had hold of Lingard through the little girl. Good. What an annoyance! A prisoner! As if one could keep him in there. He was bound to get away some time or other. Of course. A situation like that can't last. Anybody could see that. Lingard's eccentricity passed all bounds. You may kill a man, but you mustn't torture him. It was almost criminal. It caused worry, trouble, and unpleasantness. . . . Almayer for a moment felt very angry with Lingard. He made him responsible for the anguish he suffered from, for the anguish of doubt and fear; for compelling him — the practical and innocent Almayer — to such painful efforts of mind in order to find out some issue for absurd situations created by the unreasonable sentimentality of Lingard's unpractical impulses.

"Now if the fellow were dead it would be all right," said Almayer to the verandah.

He stirred a little, and scratching his nose thoughtfully, revelled in a short flight of fancy, showing him his own image crouching in a big boat, that floated arrested — say fifty yards off — abreast of Willems' landing-place. In the bottom of the boat there was a gun. A loaded gun. One of the boatmen would shout, and Willems would answer — from the bushes. The rascal would be suspicious. Of course. Then the man would wave a piece of paper urging Willems to come to the landing-place and receive an important message. "From the Rajah Laut" the man would yell as the boat edged in-shore, and that would fetch Willems out. Wouldn't it? Rather! And Almayer saw himself jumping up at the right moment, taking aim, pulling the trigger — and Willems tumbling over, his head in the water — the swine!

He seemed to hear the report of the shot. It made him thrill from head to foot where he stood. . . . How simple! . . . Unfortunate . . . Lingard . . . He sighed, shook his head. Pity. Couldn't be done. And couldn't leave him there either! Suppose the Arabs were to get hold of him again — for instance to lead an expedition up the river! Goodness only knows what harm would come of it. . . .

The balance was at rest now and inclining to the side of immediate action. Almayer walked to the door, walked up very close to it, knocked loudly, and turned his head away, looking frightened for a moment at what he had done. After waiting for a while he put his ear against the panel and listened. Nothing. He composed his features into an agreeable expression while he stood listening and thinking to himself: I hear her. Crying. Eh? I believe she has lost the little wits she had and is crying night and day since I began to prepare her for the news of her husband's death — as Lingard told

me. I wonder what she thinks. It's just like father to make me invent all these stories for nothing at all. Out of kindness. Kindness! Damn! . . . She isn't deaf, surely.

He knocked again, then said in a friendly tone, grinning benevolently at the closed door —

"It's me, Mrs. Willems. I want to speak to you. I have . . . have . . . important news. . . ."

"What is it?"

"News," repeated Almayer, distinctly. "News about your husband. Your husband! . . . Damn him!" he added, under his breath.

He heard a stumbling rush inside. Things were overturned. Joanna's agitated voice cried —

"News! What? What? I am coming out."

"No," shouted Almayer. "Put on some clothes, Mrs. Willems, and let me in. It's . . . very confidential. You have a candle, haven't you?"

She was knocking herself about blindly amongst the furniture in that room. The candlestick was upset. Matches were struck ineffectually. The matchbox fell. He heard her drop on her knees and grope over the floor while she kept on moaning in maddened distraction.

"Oh, my God! News! Yes . . . yes. . . . Ah! where . . . where . . . candle. Oh, my God! . . . I can't find . . . Don't go away, for the love of Heaven . . ."

"I don't want to go away," said Almayer, impatiently, through the keyhole; "but look sharp. It's con . . . it's pressing."

He stamped his foot lightly, waiting with his hand on the door-handle. He thought anxiously: The woman's a perfect idiot. Why should I go away? She will be off her head. She will never catch my meaning. She's too stupid.

She was moving now inside the room hurriedly and in silence. He waited. There was a moment of perfect stillness in there, and then she spoke in an exhausted voice, in words that were shaped out of an expiring sigh — out of a sigh light and profound, like words breathed out by a woman before going off into a dead faint —

"Come in."

He pushed the door. Ali, coming through the passage with an armful of pillows and blankets pressed to his breast high up under his chin, caught sight of his master before the door closed behind him. He was so astonished that he dropped his bundle and stood staring at the door for a long time. He heard the voice of his master talking. Talking to that Sirani woman! Who was she? He had never thought about that really. He speculated for a while hazily upon things in general. She was a Sirani woman — and ugly. He made a disdainful grimace, picked up the bedding, and went about his work, slinging the hammock between two uprights of the verandah. . . . Those things did not concern him. She was ugly, and brought here by the Rajah Laut, and his master spoke to her in the night. Very well. He, Ali, had his work to do. Sling the hammock — go round and see that the watchmen were awake — take a look at the moorings of the boats, at the padlock of the big storehouse — then go to sleep. To sleep! He shivered

pleasantly. He leaned with both arms over his master's hammock and fell into a light doze.

A scream, unexpected, piercing — a scream beginning at once in the highest pitch of a woman's voice and then cut short, so short that it suggested the swift work of death — caused Ali to jump on one side away from the hammock, and the silence that succeeded seemed to him as startling as the awful shriek. He was thunderstruck with surprise. Almayer came out of the office, leaving the door ajar, passed close to his servant without taking any notice, and made straight for the water-chatty hung on a nail in a draughty place. He took it down and came back, missing the petrified Ali by an inch. He moved with long strides, yet, notwithstanding his haste, stopped short before the door, and, throwing his head back, poured a thin stream of water down his throat. While he came and went, while he stopped to drink, while he did all this, there came steadily from the dark room the sound of feeble and persistent crying, the crying of a sleepy and frightened child. After he had drunk, Almayer went in, closing the door carefully.

Ali did not budge. That Sirani woman shrieked! He felt an immense curiosity very unusual to his stolid disposition. He could not take his eyes off the door. Was she dead in there? How interesting and funny! He stood with open mouth till he heard again the rattle of the door-handle. Master coming out. He pivoted on his heels with great rapidity and made believe to be absorbed in the contemplation of the night outside. He heard Almayer moving about behind his back. Chairs were displaced. His master sat down.

“Ali,” said Almayer.

His face was gloomy and thoughtful. He looked at his head man, who had approached the table, then he pulled out his watch. It was going. Whenever Lingard was in Sambir Almayer's watch was going. He would set it by the cabin clock, telling himself every time that he must really keep that watch going for the future. And every time, when Lingard went away, he would let it run down and would measure his weariness by sunrises and sunsets in an apathetic indifference to mere hours; to hours only; to hours that had no importance in Sambir life, in the tired stagnation of empty days; when nothing mattered to him but the quality of guttah and the size of rattans; where there were no small hopes to be watched for; where to him there was nothing interesting, nothing supportable, nothing desirable to expect; nothing bitter but the slowness of the passing days; nothing sweet but the hope, the distant and glorious hope — the hope wearying, aching and precious, of getting away.

He looked at the watch. Half-past eight. Ali waited stolidly.

“Go to the settlement,” said Almayer, “and tell Mahmat Banjer to come and speak to me to-night.”

Ali went off muttering. He did not like his errand. Banjer and his two brothers were Bajow vagabonds who had appeared lately in Sambir and had been allowed to take possession of a tumbledown abandoned hut, on three posts, belonging to Lingard & Co., and standing just outside their fence. Ali disapproved of the favour shown to those

strangers. Any kind of dwelling was valuable in Sambir at that time, and if master did not want that old rotten house he might have given it to him, Ali, who was his servant, instead of bestowing it upon those bad men. Everybody knew they were bad. It was well known that they had stolen a boat from Hinopari, who was very aged and feeble and had no sons; and that afterwards, by the truculent recklessness of their demeanour, they had frightened the poor old man into holding his tongue about it. Yet everybody knew of it. It was one of the tolerated scandals of Sambir, disapproved and accepted, a manifestation of that base acquiescence in success, of that inexpressed and cowardly toleration of strength, that exists, infamous and irremediable, at the bottom of all hearts, in all societies; whenever men congregate; in bigger and more virtuous places than Sambir, and in Sambir also, where, as in other places, one man could steal a boat with impunity while another would have no right to look at a paddle.

Almayer, leaning back in his chair, meditated. The more he thought, the more he felt convinced that Banjer and his brothers were exactly the men he wanted. Those fellows were sea gipsies, and could disappear without attracting notice; and if they returned, nobody — and Lingard least of all — would dream of seeking information from them. Moreover, they had no personal interest of any kind in Sambir affairs — had taken no sides — would know nothing anyway.

He called in a strong voice: “Mrs. Willems!”

She came out quickly, almost startling him, so much did she appear as though she had surged up through the floor, on the other side of the table. The lamp was between them, and Almayer moved it aside, looking up at her from his chair. She was crying. She was crying gently, silently, in a ceaseless welling up of tears that did not fall in drops, but seemed to overflow in a clear sheet from under her eyelids — seemed to flow at once all over her face, her cheeks, and over her chin that glistened with moisture in the light. Her breast and her shoulders were shaken repeatedly by a convulsive and noiseless catching in her breath, and after every spasmodic sob her sorrowful little head, tied up in a red kerchief, trembled on her long neck, round which her bony hand gathered and clasped the disarranged dress.

“Compose yourself, Mrs. Willems,” said Almayer.

She emitted an inarticulate sound that seemed to be a faint, a very far off, a hardly audible cry of mortal distress. Then the tears went on flowing in profound stillness.

“You must understand that I have told you all this because I am your friend — real friend,” said Almayer, after looking at her for some time with visible dissatisfaction. “You, his wife, ought to know the danger he is in. Captain Lingard is a terrible man, you know.”

She blubbered out, sniffing and sobbing together.

“Do you . . . you . . . speak . . . the . . . the truth now?”

“Upon my word of honour. On the head of my child,” protested Almayer. “I had to deceive you till now because of Captain Lingard. But I couldn’t bear it. Think only what a risk I run in telling you — if ever Lingard was to know! Why should I do it? Pure friendship. Dear Peter was my colleague in Macassar for years, you know.”

“What shall I do . . . what shall I do!” she exclaimed, faintly, looking around on every side as if she could not make up her mind which way to rush off.

“You must help him to clear out, now Lingard is away. He offended Lingard, and that’s no joke. Lingard said he would kill him. He will do it, too,” said Almayer, earnestly.

She wrung her hands. “Oh! the wicked man. The wicked, wicked man!” she moaned, swaying her body from side to side.

“Yes. Yes! He is terrible,” assented Almayer. “You must not lose any time. I say! Do you understand me, Mrs. Willems? Think of your husband. Of your poor husband. How happy he will be. You will bring him his life — actually his life. Think of him.”

She ceased her swaying movement, and now, with her head sunk between her shoulders, she hugged herself with both her arms; and she stared at Almayer with wild eyes, while her teeth chattered, rattling violently and uninterruptedly, with a very loud sound, in the deep peace of the house.

“Oh! Mother of God!” she wailed. “I am a miserable woman. Will he forgive me? The poor, innocent man. Will he forgive me? Oh, Mr. Almayer, he is so severe. Oh! help me. . . . I dare not. . . . You don’t know what I’ve done to him. . . . I daren’t! . . . I can’t! . . . God help me!”

The last words came in a despairing cry. Had she been flayed alive she could not have sent to heaven a more terrible, a more heartrending and anguished plaint.

“Sh! Sh!” hissed Almayer, jumping up. “You will wake up everybody with your shouting.”

She kept on sobbing then without any noise, and Almayer stared at her in boundless astonishment. The idea that, maybe, he had done wrong by confiding in her, upset him so much that for a moment he could not find a connected thought in his head.

At last he said: “I swear to you that your husband is in such a position that he would welcome the devil . . . listen well to me . . . the devil himself if the devil came to him in a canoe. Unless I am much mistaken,” he added, under his breath. Then again, loudly: “If you have any little difference to make up with him, I assure you — I swear to you — this is your time!”

The ardently persuasive tone of his words — he thought — would have carried irresistible conviction to a graven image. He noticed with satisfaction that Joanna seemed to have got some inkling of his meaning. He continued, speaking slowly —

“Look here, Mrs. Willems. I can’t do anything. Daren’t. But I will tell you what I will do. There will come here in about ten minutes a Bugis man — you know the language; you are from Macassar. He has a large canoe; he can take you there. To the new Rajah’s clearing, tell him. They are three brothers, ready for anything if you pay them . . . you have some money. Haven’t you?”

She stood — perhaps listening — but giving no sign of intelligence, and stared at the floor in sudden immobility, as if the horror of the situation, the overwhelming sense of her own wickedness and of her husband’s great danger, had stunned her brain, her heart, her will — had left her no faculty but that of breathing and of keeping on her

feet. Almayer swore to himself with much mental profanity that he had never seen a more useless, a more stupid being.

“D’ye hear me?” he said, raising his voice. “Do try to understand. Have you any money? Money. Dollars. Guilders. Money! What’s the matter with you?”

Without raising her eyes she said, in a voice that sounded weak and undecided as if she had been making a desperate effort of memory —

“The house has been sold. Mr. Hudig was angry.”

Almayer gripped the edge of the table with all his strength. He resisted manfully an almost uncontrollable impulse to fly at her and box her ears.

“It was sold for money, I suppose,” he said with studied and incisive calmness. “Have you got it? Who has got it?”

She looked up at him, raising her swollen eyelids with a great effort, in a sorrowful expression of her drooping mouth, of her whole besmudged and tear-stained face. She whispered resignedly —

“Leonard had some. He wanted to get married. And uncle Antonio; he sat at the door and would not go away. And Aghostina — she is so poor . . . and so many, many children — little children. And Luiz the engineer. He never said a word against my husband. Also our cousin Maria. She came and shouted, and my head was so bad, and my heart was worse. Then cousin Salvator and old Daniel da Souza, who . . .”

Almayer had listened to her speechless with rage. He thought: I must give money now to that idiot. Must! Must get her out of the way now before Lingard is back. He made two attempts to speak before he managed to burst out —

“I don’t want to know their blasted names! Tell me, did all those infernal people leave you anything? To you! That’s what I want to know!”

“I have two hundred and fifteen dollars,” said Joanna, in a frightened tone.

Almayer breathed freely. He spoke with great friendliness —

“That will do. It isn’t much, but it will do. Now when the man comes I will be out of the way. You speak to him. Give him some money; only a little, mind! And promise more. Then when you get there you will be guided by your husband, of course. And don’t forget to tell him that Captain Lingard is at the mouth of the river — the northern entrance. You will remember. Won’t you? The northern branch. Lingard is — death.”

Joanna shivered. Almayer went on rapidly —

“I would have given you money if you had wanted it. ‘Pon my word! Tell your husband I’ve sent you to him. And tell him not to lose any time. And also say to him from me that we shall meet — some day. That I could not die happy unless I met him once more. Only once. I love him, you know. I prove it. Tremendous risk to me — this business is!”

Joanna snatched his hand and before he knew what she would be at, pressed it to her lips.

“Mrs. Willems! Don’t. What are you . . .” cried the abashed Almayer, tearing his hand away.

“Oh, you are good!” she cried, with sudden exaltation, “You are noble . . . I shall pray every day . . . to all the saints . . . I shall . . .”

“Never mind . . . never mind!” stammered out Almayer, confusedly, without knowing very well what he was saying. “Only look out for Lingard. . . . I am happy to be able . . . in your sad situation . . . believe me. . . .”

They stood with the table between them, Joanna looking down, and her face, in the half-light above the lamp, appeared like a soiled carving of old ivory — a carving, with accentuated anxious hollows, of old, very old ivory. Almayer looked at her, mistrustful, hopeful. He was saying to himself: How frail she is! I could upset her by blowing at her. She seems to have got some idea of what must be done, but will she have the strength to carry it through? I must trust to luck now!

Somewhere far in the back courtyard Ali’s voice rang suddenly in angry remonstrance —

“Why did you shut the gate, O father of all mischief? You a watchman! You are only a wild man. Did I not tell you I was coming back? You . . .”

“I am off, Mrs. Willems,” exclaimed Almayer. “That man is here — with my servant. Be calm. Try to . . .”

He heard the footsteps of the two men in the passage, and without finishing his sentence ran rapidly down the steps towards the riverside.

Chapter 2

For the next half-hour Almayer, who wanted to give Joanna plenty of time, stumbled amongst the lumber in distant parts of his enclosure, sneaked along the fences; or held his breath, flattened against grass walls behind various outhouses: all this to escape Ali's inconveniently zealous search for his master. He heard him talk with the head watchman — sometimes quite close to him in the darkness — then moving off, coming back, wondering, and, as the time passed, growing uneasy.

“He did not fall into the river? — say, thou blind watcher!” Ali was growling in a bullying tone, to the other man. “He told me to fetch Mahmat, and when I came back swiftly I found him not in the house. There is that Sirani woman there, so that Mahmat cannot steal anything, but it is in my mind, the night will be half gone before I rest.”

He shouted —

“Master! O master! O mast . . .”

“What are you making that noise for?” said Almayer, with severity, stepping out close to them.

The two Malays leaped away from each other in their surprise.

“You may go. I don't want you any more tonight, Ali,” went on Almayer. “Is Mahmat there?”

“Unless the ill-behaved savage got tired of waiting. Those men know not politeness. They should not be spoken to by white men,” said Ali, resentfully.

Almayer went towards the house, leaving his servants to wonder where he had sprung from so unexpectedly. The watchman hinted obscurely at powers of invisibility possessed by the master, who often at night . . . Ali interrupted him with great scorn. Not every white man has the power. Now, the Rajah Laut could make himself invisible. Also, he could be in two places at once, as everybody knew; except he — the useless watchman — who knew no more about white men than a wild pig! Ya-wa!

And Ali strolled towards his hut, yawning loudly.

As Almayer ascended the steps he heard the noise of a door flung to, and when he entered the verandah he saw only Mahmat there, close to the doorway of the passage. Mahmat seemed to be caught in the very act of slinking away, and Almayer noticed that with satisfaction. Seeing the white man, the Malay gave up his attempt and leaned against the wall. He was a short, thick, broad-shouldered man with very dark skin and a wide, stained, bright-red mouth that uncovered, when he spoke, a close row of black and glistening teeth. His eyes were big, prominent, dreamy and restless. He said sulkily, looking all over the place from under his eyebrows —

“White Tuan, you are great and strong — and I a poor man. Tell me what is your will, and let me go in the name of God. It is late.”

Almayer examined the man thoughtfully. How could he find out whether . . . He had it! Lately he had employed that man and his two brothers as extra boatmen to carry stores, provisions, and new axes to a camp of rattan cutters some distance up the river. A three days' expedition. He would test him now in that way. He said negligently —

“I want you to start at once for the camp, with surat for the Kavitan. One dollar a day.”

The man appeared plunged in dull hesitation, but Almayer, who knew his Malays, felt pretty sure from his aspect that nothing would induce the fellow to go. He urged —

“It is important — and if you are swift I shall give two dollars for the last day.”

“No, Tuan. We do not go,” said the man, in a hoarse whisper.

“Why?”

“We start on another journey.”

“Where?”

“To a place we know of,” said Mahmat, a little louder, in a stubborn manner, and looking at the floor.

Almayer experienced a feeling of immense joy. He said, with affected annoyance —

“You men live in my house and it is as if it were your own. I may want my house soon.”

Mahmat looked up.

“We are men of the sea and care not for a roof when we have a canoe that will hold three, and a paddle apiece. The sea is our house. Peace be with you, Tuan.”

He turned and went away rapidly, and Almayer heard him directly afterwards in the courtyard calling to the watchman to open the gate. Mahmat passed through the gate in silence, but before the bar had been put up behind him he had made up his mind that if the white man ever wanted to eject him from his hut, he would burn it and also as many of the white man's other buildings as he could safely get at. And he began to call his brothers before he was inside the dilapidated dwelling.

“All's well!” muttered Almayer to himself, taking some loose Java tobacco from a drawer in the table. “Now if anything comes out I am clear. I asked the man to go up the river. I urged him. He will say so himself. Good.”

He began to charge the china bowl of his pipe, a pipe with a long cherry stem and a curved mouthpiece, pressing the tobacco down with his thumb and thinking: No. I sha'n't see her again. Don't want to. I will give her a good start, then go in chase — and send an express boat after father. Yes! that's it.

He approached the door of the office and said, holding his pipe away from his lips —

“Good luck to you, Mrs. Willems. Don't lose any time. You may get along by the bushes; the fence there is out of repair. Don't lose time. Don't forget that it is a matter of . . . life and death. And don't forget that I know nothing. I trust you.”

He heard inside a noise as of a chest-lid falling down. She made a few steps. Then a sigh, profound and long, and some faint words which he did not catch. He moved away from the door on tiptoe, kicked off his slippers in a corner of the verandah, then entered the passage puffing at his pipe; entered cautiously in a gentle creaking of planks and turned into a curtained entrance to the left. There was a big room. On the floor a small binnacle lamp — that had found its way to the house years ago from the lumber-room of the Flash — did duty for a night-light. It glimmered very small and dull in the great darkness. Almayer walked to it, and picking it up revived the flame by pulling the wick with his fingers, which he shook directly after with a grimace of pain. Sleeping shapes, covered — head and all — with white sheets, lay about on the mats on the floor. In the middle of the room a small cot, under a square white mosquito net, stood — the only piece of furniture between the four walls — looking like an altar of transparent marble in a gloomy temple. A woman, half-lying on the floor with her head dropped on her arms, which were crossed on the foot of the cot, woke up as Almayer strode over her outstretched legs. She sat up without a word, leaning forward, and, clasping her knees, stared down with sad eyes, full of sleep.

Almayer, the smoky light in one hand, his pipe in the other, stood before the curtained cot looking at his daughter — at his little Nina — at that part of himself, at that small and unconscious particle of humanity that seemed to him to contain all his soul. And it was as if he had been bathed in a bright and warm wave of tenderness, in a tenderness greater than the world, more precious than life; the only thing real, living, sweet, tangible, beautiful and safe amongst the elusive, the distorted and menacing shadows of existence. On his face, lit up indistinctly by the short yellow flame of the lamp, came a look of rapt attention while he looked into her future. And he could see things there! Things charming and splendid passing before him in a magic unrolling of resplendent pictures; pictures of events brilliant, happy, inexpressibly glorious, that would make up her life. He would do it! He would do it. He would! He would — for that child! And as he stood in the still night, lost in his enchanting and gorgeous dreams, while the ascending, thin thread of tobacco smoke spread into a faint bluish cloud above his head, he appeared strangely impressive and ecstatic: like a devout and mystic worshipper, adoring, transported and mute; burning incense before a shrine, a diaphanous shrine of a child-idol with closed eyes; before a pure and vaporous shrine of a small god — fragile, powerless, unconscious and sleeping.

When Ali, roused by loud and repeated shouting of his name, stumbled outside the door of his hut, he saw a narrow streak of trembling gold above the forests and a pale sky with faded stars overhead: signs of the coming day. His master stood before the door waving a piece of paper in his hand and shouting excitedly — "Quick, Ali! Quick!" When he saw his servant he rushed forward, and pressing the paper on him objurgated him, in tones which induced Ali to think that something awful had happened, to hurry up and get the whale-boat ready to go immediately — at once, at once — after Captain Lingard. Ali remonstrated, agitated also, having caught the infection of distracted haste.

"If must go quick, better canoe. Whale-boat no can catch, same as small canoe."

"No, no! Whale-boat! whale-boat! You dolt! you wretch!" howled Almayer, with all the appearance of having gone mad. "Call the men! Get along with it. Fly!"

And Ali rushed about the courtyard kicking the doors of huts open to put his head in and yell frightfully inside; and as he dashed from hovel to hovel, men shivering and sleepy were coming out, looking after him stupidly, while they scratched their ribs with bewildered apathy. It was hard work to put them in motion. They wanted time to stretch themselves and to shiver a little. Some wanted food. One said he was sick. Nobody knew where the rudder was. Ali darted here and there, ordering, abusing, pushing one, then another, and stopping in his exertions at times to wring his hands hastily and groan, because the whale-boat was much slower than the worst canoe and his master would not listen to his protestations.

Almayer saw the boat go off at last, pulled anyhow by men that were cold, hungry, and sulky; and he remained on the jetty watching it down the reach. It was broad day then, and the sky was perfectly cloudless. Almayer went up to the house for a moment. His household was all astir and wondering at the strange disappearance of the Sirani woman, who had taken her child and had left her luggage. Almayer spoke to no one, got his revolver, and went down to the river again. He jumped into a small canoe and paddled himself towards the schooner. He worked very leisurely, but as soon as he was nearly alongside he began to hail the silent craft with the tone and appearance of a man in a tremendous hurry.

"Schooner ahoy! schooner ahoy!" he shouted.

A row of blank faces popped up above the bulwark. After a while a man with a woolly head of hair said —

"Sir!"

"The mate! the mate! Call him, steward!" said Almayer, excitedly, making a frantic grab at a rope thrown down to him by somebody.

In less than a minute the mate put his head over. He asked, surprised —

"What can I do for you, Mr. Almayer?"

"Let me have the gig at once, Mr. Swan — at once. I ask in Captain Lingard's name. I must have it. Matter of life and death."

The mate was impressed by Almayer's agitation

"You shall have it, sir. . . . Man the gig there! Bear a hand, serang! . . . It's hanging astern, Mr. Almayer," he said, looking down again. "Get into it, sir. The men are coming down by the painter."

By the time Almayer had clambered over into the stern sheets, four calashes were in the boat and the oars were being passed over the taffrail. The mate was looking on. Suddenly he said —

"Is it dangerous work? Do you want any help? I would come . . ."

"Yes, yes!" cried Almayer. "Come along. Don't lose a moment. Go and get your revolver. Hurry up! hurry up!"

Yet, notwithstanding his feverish anxiety to be off, he lolled back very quiet and unconcerned till the mate got in and, passing over the thwarts, sat down by his side. Then he seemed to wake up, and called out —

“Let go — let go the painter!”

“Let go the painter — the painter!” yelled the bowman, jerking at it.

People on board also shouted “Let go!” to one another, till it occurred at last to somebody to cast off the rope; and the boat drifted rapidly away from the schooner in the sudden silencing of all voices.

Almayer steered. The mate sat by his side, pushing the cartridges into the chambers of his revolver. When the weapon was loaded he asked —

“What is it? Are you after somebody?”

“Yes,” said Almayer, curtly, with his eyes fixed ahead on the river. “We must catch a dangerous man.”

“I like a bit of a chase myself,” declared the mate, and then, discouraged by Almayer’s aspect of severe thoughtfulness, said nothing more.

Nearly an hour passed. The calashes stretched forward head first and lay back with their faces to the sky, alternately, in a regular swing that sent the boat flying through the water; and the two sitters, very upright in the stern sheets, swayed rhythmically a little at every stroke of the long oars plied vigorously.

The mate observed: “The tide is with us.”

“The current always runs down in this river,” said Almayer.

“Yes — I know,” retorted the other; “but it runs faster on the ebb. Look by the land at the way we get over the ground! A five-knot current here, I should say.”

“H’m!” growled Almayer. Then suddenly: “There is a passage between two islands that will save us four miles. But at low water the two islands, in the dry season, are like one with only a mud ditch between them. Still, it’s worth trying.”

“Ticklish job that, on a falling tide,” said the mate, coolly. “You know best whether there’s time to get through.”

“I will try,” said Almayer, watching the shore intently. “Look out now!”

He tugged hard at the starboard yoke-line.

“Lay in your oars!” shouted the mate.

The boat swept round and shot through the narrow opening of a creek that broadened out before the craft had time to lose its way.

“Out oars! . . . Just room enough,” muttered the mate.

It was a sombre creek of black water speckled with the gold of scattered sunlight falling through the boughs that met overhead in a soaring, restless arc full of gentle whispers passing, tremulous, aloft amongst the thick leaves. The creepers climbed up the trunks of serried trees that leaned over, looking insecure and undermined by floods which had eaten away the earth from under their roots. And the pungent, acrid smell of rotting leaves, of flowers, of blossoms and plants dying in that poisonous and cruel gloom, where they pined for sunshine in vain, seemed to lay heavy, to press upon

the shiny and stagnant water in its tortuous windings amongst the everlasting and invincible shadows.

Almayer looked anxious. He steered badly. Several times the blades of the oars got foul of the bushes on one side or the other, checking the way of the gig. During one of those occurrences, while they were getting clear, one of the calashes said something to the others in a rapid whisper. They looked down at the water. So did the mate.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Eh, Mr. Almayer! Look! The water is running out. See there! We will be caught."

"Back! back! We must go back!" cried Almayer.

"Perhaps better go on."

"No; back! back!"

He pulled at the steering line, and ran the nose of the boat into the bank. Time was lost again in getting clear.

"Give way, men! give way!" urged the mate, anxiously.

The men pulled with set lips and dilated nostrils, breathing hard.

"Too late," said the mate, suddenly. "The oars touch the bottom already. We are done."

The boat stuck. The men laid in the oars, and sat, panting, with crossed arms.

"Yes, we are caught," said Almayer, composedly. "That is unlucky!"

The water was falling round the boat. The mate watched the patches of mud coming to the surface. Then in a moment he laughed, and pointing his finger at the creek —

"Look!" he said; "the blamed river is running away from us. Here's the last drop of water clearing out round that bend."

Almayer lifted his head. The water was gone, and he looked only at a curved track of mud — of mud soft and black, hiding fever, rottenness, and evil under its level and glazed surface.

"We are in for it till the evening," he said, with cheerful resignation. "I did my best. Couldn't help it."

"We must sleep the day away," said the mate. "There's nothing to eat," he added, gloomily.

Almayer stretched himself in the stern sheets. The Malays curled down between thwarts.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said the mate, starting up after a long pause. "I was in a devil of a hurry to go and pass the day stuck in the mud. Here's a holiday for you! Well! well!"

They slept or sat unmoving and patient. As the sun mounted higher the breeze died out, and perfect stillness reigned in the empty creek. A troop of long-nosed monkeys appeared, and crowding on the outer boughs, contemplated the boat and the motionless men in it with grave and sorrowful intensity, disturbed now and then by irrational outbreaks of mad gesticulation. A little bird with sapphire breast balanced a slender twig across a slanting beam of light, and flashed in it to and fro like a gem dropped from the sky. His minute round eye stared at the strange and tranquil creatures in

the boat. After a while he sent out a thin twitter that sounded impertinent and funny in the solemn silence of the great wilderness; in the great silence full of struggle and death.

Chapter 3

On Lingard's departure solitude and silence closed round Willems; the cruel solitude of one abandoned by men; the reproachful silence which surrounds an outcast ejected by his kind, the silence unbroken by the slightest whisper of hope; an immense and impenetrable silence that swallows up without echo the murmur of regret and the cry of revolt. The bitter peace of the abandoned clearings entered his heart, in which nothing could live now but the memory and hate of his past. Not remorse. In the breast of a man possessed by the masterful consciousness of his individuality with its desires and its rights; by the immovable conviction of his own importance, of an importance so indisputable and final that it clothes all his wishes, endeavours, and mistakes with the dignity of unavoidable fate, there could be no place for such a feeling as that of remorse.

The days passed. They passed unnoticed, unseen, in the rapid blaze of glaring sunrises, in the short glow of tender sunsets, in the crushing oppression of high noons without a cloud. How many days? Two — three — or more? He did not know. To him, since Lingard had gone, the time seemed to roll on in profound darkness. All was night within him. All was gone from his sight. He walked about blindly in the deserted courtyards, amongst the empty houses that, perched high on their posts, looked down inimically on him, a white stranger, a man from other lands; seemed to look hostile and mute out of all the memories of native life that lingered between their decaying walls. His wandering feet stumbled against the blackened brands of extinct fires, kicking up a light black dust of cold ashes that flew in drifting clouds and settled to leeward on the fresh grass sprouting from the hard ground, between the shade trees. He moved on, and on; ceaseless, unresting, in widening circles, in zigzagging paths that led to no issue; he struggled on wearily with a set, distressed face behind which, in his tired brain, seethed his thoughts: restless, sombre, tangled, chilling, horrible and venomous, like a nestful of snakes.

From afar, the bleared eyes of the old serving woman, the sombre gaze of Aissa followed the gaunt and tottering figure in its unceasing prowling along the fences, between the houses, amongst the wild luxuriance of riverside thickets. Those three human beings abandoned by all were like shipwrecked people left on an insecure and slippery ledge by the retiring tide of an angry sea — listening to its distant roar, living anguished between the menace of its return and the hopeless horror of their solitude — in the midst of a tempest of passion, of regret, of disgust, of despair. The breath of the storm had cast two of them there, robbed of everything — even of resignation. The third, the decrepit witness of their struggle and their torture, accepted her own dull conception of

facts; of strength and youth gone; of her useless old age; of her last servitude; of being thrown away by her chief, by her nearest, to use up the last and worthless remnant of flickering life between those two incomprehensible and sombre outcasts: a shrivelled, an unmoved, a passive companion of their disaster.

To the river Willems turned his eyes like a captive that looks fixedly at the door of his cell. If there was any hope in the world it would come from the river, by the river. For hours together he would stand in sunlight while the sea breeze sweeping over the lonely reach fluttered his ragged garments; the keen salt breeze that made him shiver now and then under the flood of intense heat. He looked at the brown and sparkling solitude of the flowing water, of the water flowing ceaseless and free in a soft, cool murmur of ripples at his feet. The world seemed to end there. The forests of the other bank appeared unattainable, enigmatical, for ever beyond reach like the stars of heaven — and as indifferent. Above and below, the forests on his side of the river came down to the water in a serried multitude of tall, immense trees towering in a great spread of twisted boughs above the thick undergrowth; great, solid trees, looking sombre, severe, and malevolently stolid, like a giant crowd of pitiless enemies pressing round silently to witness his slow agony. He was alone, small, crushed. He thought of escape — of something to be done. What? A raft! He imagined himself working at it, feverishly, desperately; cutting down trees, fastening the logs together and then drifting down with the current, down to the sea into the straits. There were ships there — ships, help, white men. Men like himself. Good men who would rescue him, take him away, take him far away where there was trade, and houses, and other men that could understand him exactly, appreciate his capabilities; where there was proper food, and money; where there were beds, knives, forks, carriages, brass bands, cool drinks, churches with well-dressed people praying in them. He would pray also. The superior land of refined delights where he could sit on a chair, eat his tiffin off a white tablecloth, nod to fellows — good fellows; he would be popular; always was — where he could be virtuous, correct, do business, draw a salary, smoke cigars, buy things in shops — have boots . . . be happy, free, become rich. O God! What was wanted? Cut down a few trees. No! One would do. They used to make canoes by burning out a tree trunk, he had heard. Yes! One would do. One tree to cut down . . . He rushed forward, and suddenly stood still as if rooted in the ground. He had a pocket-knife.

And he would throw himself down on the ground by the riverside. He was tired, exhausted; as if that raft had been made, the voyage accomplished, the fortune attained. A glaze came over his staring eyes, over his eyes that gazed hopelessly at the rising river where big logs and uprooted trees drifted in the shine of mid-stream: a long procession of black and ragged specks. He could swim out and drift away on one of these trees. Anything to escape! Anything! Any risk! He could fasten himself up between the dead branches. He was torn by desire, by fear; his heart was wrung by the faltering of his courage. He turned over, face downwards, his head on his arms. He had a terrible vision of shadowless horizons where the blue sky and the blue sea met; or a circular and blazing emptiness where a dead tree and a dead man drifted together, endlessly,

up and down, upon the brilliant undulations of the straits. No ships there. Only death. And the river led to it.

He sat up with a profound groan.

Yes, death. Why should he die? No! Better solitude, better hopeless waiting, alone. Alone. No! he was not alone, he saw death looking at him from everywhere; from the bushes, from the clouds — he heard her speaking to him in the murmur of the river, filling the space, touching his heart, his brain with a cold hand. He could see and think of nothing else. He saw it — the sure death — everywhere. He saw it so close that he was always on the point of throwing out his arms to keep it off. It poisoned all he saw, all he did; the miserable food he ate, the muddy water he drank; it gave a frightful aspect to sunrises and sunsets, to the brightness of hot noon, to the cooling shadows of the evenings. He saw the horrible form among the big trees, in the network of creepers in the fantastic outlines of leaves, of the great indented leaves that seemed to be so many enormous hands with big broad palms, with stiff fingers outspread to lay hold of him; hands gently stirring, or hands arrested in a frightful immobility, with a stillness attentive and watching for the opportunity to take him, to enlace him, to strangle him, to hold him till he died; hands that would hold him dead, that would never let go, that would cling to his body for ever till it perished — disappeared in their frantic and tenacious grasp.

And yet the world was full of life. All the things, all the men he knew, existed, moved, breathed; and he saw them in a long perspective, far off, diminished, distinct, desirable, unattainable, precious . . . lost for ever. Round him, ceaselessly, there went on without a sound the mad turmoil of tropical life. After he had died all this would remain! He wanted to clasp, to embrace solid things; he had an immense craving for sensations; for touching, pressing, seeing, handling, holding on, to all these things. All this would remain — remain for years, for ages, for ever. After he had miserably died there, all this would remain, would live, would exist in joyous sunlight, would breathe in the coolness of serene nights. What for, then? He would be dead. He would be stretched upon the warm moisture of the ground, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, knowing nothing; he would lie stiff, passive, rotting slowly; while over him, under him, through him — unopposed, busy, hurried — the endless and minute throngs of insects, little shining monsters of repulsive shapes, with horns, with claws, with pincers, would swarm in streams, in rushes, in eager struggle for his body; would swarm countless, persistent, ferocious and greedy — till there would remain nothing but the white gleam of bleaching bones in the long grass; in the long grass that would shoot its feathery heads between the bare and polished ribs. There would be that only left of him; nobody would miss him; no one would remember him.

Nonsense! It could not be. There were ways out of this. Somebody would turn up. Some human beings would come. He would speak, entreat — use force to extort help from them. He felt strong; he was very strong. He would . . . The discouragement, the conviction of the futility of his hopes would return in an acute sensation of pain in his heart. He would begin again his aimless wanderings. He tramped till he was ready to

drop, without being able to calm by bodily fatigue the trouble of his soul. There was no rest, no peace within the cleared grounds of his prison. There was no relief but in the black release of sleep, of sleep without memory and without dreams; in the sleep coming brutal and heavy, like the lead that kills. To forget in annihilating sleep; to tumble headlong, as if stunned, out of daylight into the night of oblivion, was for him the only, the rare respite from this existence which he lacked the courage to endure — or to end.

He lived, he struggled with the inarticulate delirium of his thoughts under the eyes of the silent Aissa. She shared his torment in the poignant wonder, in the acute longing, in the despairing inability to understand the cause of his anger and of his repulsion; the hate of his looks; the mystery of his silence; the menace of his rare words — of those words in the speech of white people that were thrown at her with rage, with contempt, with the evident desire to hurt her; to hurt her who had given herself, her life — all she had to give — to that white man; to hurt her who had wanted to show him the way to true greatness, who had tried to help him, in her woman's dream of everlasting, enduring, unchangeable affection. From the short contact with the whites in the crashing collapse of her old life, there remained with her the imposing idea of irresistible power and of ruthless strength. She had found a man of their race — and with all their qualities. All whites are alike. But this man's heart was full of anger against his own people, full of anger existing there by the side of his desire of her. And to her it had been an intoxication of hope for great things born in the proud and tender consciousness of her influence. She had heard the passing whisper of wonder and fear in the presence of his hesitation, of his resistance, of his compromises; and yet with a woman's belief in the durable steadfastness of hearts, in the irresistible charm of her own personality, she had pushed him forward, trusting the future, blindly, hopefully; sure to attain by his side the ardent desire of her life, if she could only push him far beyond the possibility of retreat. She did not know, and could not conceive, anything of his — so exalted — ideals. She thought the man a warrior and a chief, ready for battle, violence, and treachery to his own people — for her. What more natural? Was he not a great, strong man? Those two, surrounded each by the impenetrable wall of their aspirations, were hopelessly alone, out of sight, out of earshot of each other; each the centre of dissimilar and distant horizons; standing each on a different earth, under a different sky. She remembered his words, his eyes, his trembling lips, his outstretched hands; she remembered the great, the immeasurable sweetness of her surrender, that beginning of her power which was to last until death. He remembered the quaysides and the warehouses; the excitement of a life in a whirl of silver coins; the glorious uncertainty of a money hunt; his numerous successes, the lost possibilities of wealth and consequent glory. She, a woman, was the victim of her heart, of her woman's belief that there is nothing in the world but love — the everlasting thing. He was the victim of his strange principles, of his continence, of his blind belief in himself, of his solemn veneration for the voice of his boundless ignorance.

In a moment of his idleness, of suspense, of discouragement, she had come — that creature — and by the touch of her hand had destroyed his future, his dignity of a clever and civilized man; had awakened in his breast the infamous thing which had driven him to what he had done, and to end miserably in the wilderness and be forgotten, or else remembered with hate or contempt. He dared not look at her, because now whenever he looked at her his thought seemed to touch crime, like an outstretched hand. She could only look at him — and at nothing else. What else was there? She followed him with a timorous gaze, with a gaze for ever expecting, patient, and entreating. And in her eyes there was the wonder and desolation of an animal that knows only suffering, of the incomplete soul that knows pain but knows not hope; that can find no refuge from the facts of life in the illusory conviction of its dignity, of an exalted destiny beyond; in the heavenly consolation of a belief in the momentous origin of its hate.

For the first three days after Lingard went away he would not even speak to her. She preferred his silence to the sound of hated and incomprehensible words he had been lately addressing to her with a wild violence of manner, passing at once into complete apathy. And during these three days he hardly ever left the river, as if on that muddy bank he had felt himself nearer to his freedom. He would stay late; he would stay till sunset; he would look at the glow of gold passing away amongst sombre clouds in a bright red flush, like a splash of warm blood. It seemed to him ominous and ghastly with a foreboding of violent death that beckoned him from everywhere — even from the sky.

One evening he remained by the riverside long after sunset, regardless of the night mist that had closed round him, had wrapped him up and clung to him like a wet winding-sheet. A slight shiver recalled him to his senses, and he walked up the courtyard towards his house. Aissa rose from before the fire, that glimmered red through its own smoke, which hung thickening under the boughs of the big tree. She approached him from the side as he neared the plankway of the house. He saw her stop to let him begin his ascent. In the darkness her figure was like the shadow of a woman with clasped hands put out beseechingly. He stopped — could not help glancing at her. In all the sombre gracefulness of the straight figure, her limbs, features — all was indistinct and vague but the gleam of her eyes in the faint starlight. He turned his head away and moved on. He could feel her footsteps behind him on the bending planks, but he walked up without turning his head. He knew what she wanted. She wanted to come in there. He shuddered at the thought of what might happen in the impenetrable darkness of that house if they were to find themselves alone — even for a moment. He stopped in the doorway, and heard her say —

“Let me come in. Why this anger? Why this silence? . . . Let me watch . . . by your side. . . . Have I not watched faithfully? Did harm ever come to you when you closed your eyes while I was by? . . . I have waited . . . I have waited for your smile, for your words . . . I can wait no more. . . . Look at me . . . speak to me. Is there a bad spirit in you? A bad spirit that has eaten up your courage and your love? Let me touch you.

Forget all . . . All. Forget the wicked hearts, the angry faces . . . and remember only the day I came to you . . . to you! O my heart! O my life!"

The pleading sadness of her appeal filled the space with the tremor of her low tones, that carried tenderness and tears into the great peace of the sleeping world. All around them the forests, the clearings, the river, covered by the silent veil of night, seemed to wake up and listen to her words in attentive stillness. After the sound of her voice had died out in a stifled sigh they appeared to listen yet; and nothing stirred among the shapeless shadows but the innumerable fireflies that twinkled in changing clusters, in gliding pairs, in wandering and solitary points — like the glimmering drift of scattered star-dust.

Willems turned round slowly, reluctantly, as if compelled by main force. Her face was hidden in her hands, and he looked above her bent head, into the sombre brilliance of the night. It was one of those nights that give the impression of extreme vastness, when the sky seems higher, when the passing puffs of tepid breeze seem to bring with them faint whispers from beyond the stars. The air was full of sweet scent, of the scent charming, penetrating and violent like the impulse of love. He looked into that great dark place odorous with the breath of life, with the mystery of existence, renewed, fecund, indestructible; and he felt afraid of his solitude, of the solitude of his body, of the loneliness of his soul in the presence of this unconscious and ardent struggle, of this lofty indifference, of this merciless and mysterious purpose, perpetuating strife and death through the march of ages. For the second time in his life he felt, in a sudden sense of his significance, the need to send a cry for help into the wilderness, and for the second time he realized the hopelessness of its unconcern. He could shout for help on every side — and nobody would answer. He could stretch out his hands, he could call for aid, for support, for sympathy, for relief — and nobody would come. Nobody. There was no one there — but that woman.

His heart was moved, softened with pity at his own abandonment. His anger against her, against her who was the cause of all his misfortunes, vanished before his extreme need for some kind of consolation. Perhaps — if he must resign himself to his fate — she might help him to forget. To forget! For a moment, in an access of despair so profound that it seemed like the beginning of peace, he planned the deliberate descent from his pedestal, the throwing away of his superiority, of all his hopes, of old ambitions, of the ungrateful civilization. For a moment, forgetfulness in her arms seemed possible; and lured by that possibility the semblance of renewed desire possessed his breast in a burst of reckless contempt for everything outside himself — in a savage disdain of Earth and of Heaven. He said to himself that he would not repent. The punishment for his only sin was too heavy. There was no mercy under Heaven. He did not want any. He thought, desperately, that if he could find with her again the madness of the past, the strange delirium that had changed him, that had worked his undoing, he would be ready to pay for it with an eternity of perdition. He was intoxicated by the subtle perfumes of the night; he was carried away by the suggestive stir of the warm breeze; he was possessed by the exaltation of the solitude, of the silence, of his memories, in

the presence of that figure offering herself in a submissive and patient devotion; coming to him in the name of the past, in the name of those days when he could see nothing, think of nothing, desire nothing — but her embrace.

He took her suddenly in his arms, and she clasped her hands round his neck with a low cry of joy and surprise. He took her in his arms and waited for the transport, for the madness, for the sensations remembered and lost; and while she sobbed gently on his breast he held her and felt cold, sick, tired, exasperated with his failure — and ended by cursing himself. She clung to him trembling with the intensity of her happiness and her love. He heard her whispering — her face hidden on his shoulder — of past sorrow, of coming joy that would last for ever; of her unshaken belief in his love. She had always believed. Always! Even while his face was turned away from her in the dark days while his mind was wandering in his own land, amongst his own people. But it would never wander away from her any more, now it had come back. He would forget the cold faces and the hard hearts of the cruel people. What was there to remember? Nothing? Was it not so? . . .

He listened hopelessly to the faint murmur. He stood still and rigid, pressing her mechanically to his breast while he thought that there was nothing for him in the world. He was robbed of everything; robbed of his passion, of his liberty, of forgetfulness, of consolation. She, wild with delight, whispered on rapidly, of love, of light, of peace, of long years. . . . He looked drearily above her head down into the deeper gloom of the courtyard. And, all at once, it seemed to him that he was peering into a sombre hollow, into a deep black hole full of decay and of whitened bones; into an immense and inevitable grave full of corruption where sooner or later he must, unavoidably, fall.

In the morning he came out early, and stood for a time in the doorway, listening to the light breathing behind him — in the house. She slept. He had not closed his eyes through all that night. He stood swaying — then leaned against the lintel of the door. He was exhausted, done up; fancied himself hardly alive. He had a disgusted horror of himself that, as he looked at the level sea of mist at his feet, faded quickly into dull indifference. It was like a sudden and final decrepitude of his senses, of his body, of his thoughts. Standing on the high platform, he looked over the expanse of low night fog above which, here and there, stood out the feathery heads of tall bamboo clumps and the round tops of single trees, resembling small islets emerging black and solid from a ghostly and impalpable sea. Upon the faintly luminous background of the eastern sky, the sombre line of the great forests bounded that smooth sea of white vapours with an appearance of a fantastic and unattainable shore.

He looked without seeing anything — thinking of himself. Before his eyes the light of the rising sun burst above the forest with the suddenness of an explosion. He saw nothing. Then, after a time, he murmured with conviction — speaking half aloud to himself in the shock of the penetrating thought:

“I am a lost man.”

He shook his hand above his head in a gesture careless and tragic, then walked down into the mist that closed above him in shining undulations under the first breath of the morning breeze.

Chapter 4

Willems moved languidly towards the river, then retraced his steps to the tree and let himself fall on the seat under its shade. On the other side of the immense trunk he could hear the old woman moving about, sighing loudly, muttering to herself, snapping dry sticks, blowing up the fire. After a while a whiff of smoke drifted round to where he sat. It made him feel hungry, and that feeling was like a new indignity added to an intolerable load of humiliations. He felt inclined to cry. He felt very weak. He held up his arm before his eyes and watched for a little while the trembling of the lean limb. Skin and bone, by God! How thin he was! . . . He had suffered from fever a good deal, and now he thought with tearful dismay that Lingard, although he had sent him food — and what food, great Lord: a little rice and dried fish; quite unfit for a white man — had not sent him any medicine. Did the old savage think that he was like the wild beasts that are never ill? He wanted quinine.

He leaned the back of his head against the tree and closed his eyes. He thought feebly that if he could get hold of Lingard he would like to flay him alive; but it was only a blurred, a short and a passing thought. His imagination, exhausted by the repeated delineations of his own fate, had not enough strength left to grip the idea of revenge. He was not indignant and rebellious. He was cowed. He was cowed by the immense cataclysm of his disaster. Like most men, he had carried solemnly within his breast the whole universe, and the approaching end of all things in the destruction of his own personality filled him with paralyzing awe. Everything was toppling over. He blinked his eyes quickly, and it seemed to him that the very sunshine of the morning disclosed in its brightness a suggestion of some hidden and sinister meaning. In his unreasoning fear he tried to hide within himself. He drew his feet up, his head sank between his shoulders, his arms hugged his sides. Under the high and enormous tree soaring superbly out of the mist in a vigorous spread of lofty boughs, with a restless and eager flutter of its innumerable leaves in the clear sunshine, he remained motionless, huddled up on his seat: terrified and still.

Willems' gaze roamed over the ground, and then he watched with idiotic fixity half a dozen black ants entering courageously a tuft of long grass which, to them, must have appeared a dark and a dangerous jungle. Suddenly he thought: There must be something dead in there. Some dead insect. Death everywhere! He closed his eyes again in an access of trembling pain. Death everywhere — wherever one looks. He did not want to see the ants. He did not want to see anybody or anything. He sat in the darkness of his own making, reflecting bitterly that there was no peace for him. He heard voices now. . . . Illusion! Misery! Torment! Who would come? Who would speak

to him? What business had he to hear voices? . . . yet he heard them faintly, from the river. Faintly, as if shouted far off over there, came the words "We come back soon." . . . Delirium and mockery! Who would come back? Nobody ever comes back! Fever comes back. He had it on him this morning. That was it. . . . He heard unexpectedly the old woman muttering something near by. She had come round to his side of the tree. He opened his eyes and saw her bent back before him. She stood, with her hand shading her eyes, looking towards the landing-place. Then she glided away. She had seen — and now she was going back to her cooking; a woman incurious; expecting nothing; without fear and without hope.

She had gone back behind the tree, and now Willems could see a human figure on the path to the landing-place. It appeared to him to be a woman, in a red gown, holding some heavy bundle in her arms; it was an apparition unexpected, familiar and odd. He cursed through his teeth . . . It had wanted only this! See things like that in broad daylight! He was very bad — very bad. . . . He was horribly scared at this awful symptom of the desperate state of his health.

This scare lasted for the space of a flash of lightning, and in the next moment it was revealed to him that the woman was real; that she was coming towards him; that she was his wife! He put his feet down to the ground quickly, but made no other movement. His eyes opened wide. He was so amazed that for a time he absolutely forgot his own existence. The only idea in his head was: Why on earth did she come here?

Joanna was coming up the courtyard with eager, hurried steps. She carried in her arms the child, wrapped up in one of Almayer's white blankets that she had snatched off the bed at the last moment, before leaving the house. She seemed to be dazed by the sun in her eyes; bewildered by her strange surroundings. She moved on, looking quickly right and left in impatient expectation of seeing her husband at any moment. Then, approaching the tree, she perceived suddenly a kind of a dried-up, yellow corpse, sitting very stiff on a bench in the shade and looking at her with big eyes that were alive. That was her husband.

She stopped dead short. They stared at one another in profound stillness, with astounded eyes, with eyes maddened by the memories of things far off that seemed lost in the lapse of time. Their looks crossed, passed each other, and appeared to dart at them through fantastic distances, to come straight from the incredible.

Looking at him steadily she came nearer, and deposited the blanket with the child in it on the bench. Little Louis, after howling with terror in the darkness of the river most of the night, now slept soundly and did not wake. Willems' eyes followed his wife, his head turning slowly after her. He accepted her presence there with a tired acquiescence in its fabulous improbability. Anything might happen. What did she come for? She was part of the general scheme of his misfortune. He half expected that she would rush at him, pull his hair, and scratch his face. Why not? Anything might happen! In an exaggerated sense of his great bodily weakness he felt somewhat apprehensive of possible assault. At any rate, she would scream at him. He knew her of old. She could

screech. He had thought that he was rid of her for ever. She came now probably to see the end. . . .

Suddenly she turned, and embracing him slid gently to the ground.

This startled him. With her forehead on his knees she sobbed noiselessly. He looked down dismally at the top of her head. What was she up to? He had not the strength to move — to get away. He heard her whispering something, and bent over to listen. He caught the word “Forgive.”

That was what she came for! All that way. Women are queer. Forgive. Not he! . . . All at once this thought darted through his brain: How did she come? In a boat. Boat! boat!

He shouted “Boat!” and jumped up, knocking her over. Before she had time to pick herself up he pounced upon her and was dragging her up by the shoulders. No sooner had she regained her feet than she clasped him tightly round the neck, covering his face, his eyes, his mouth, his nose with desperate kisses. He dodged his head about, shaking her arms, trying to keep her off, to speak, to ask her. . . . She came in a boat, boat, boat! . . . They struggled and swung round, tramping in a semicircle. He blurted out, “Leave off. Listen,” while he tore at her hands. This meeting of lawful love and sincere joy resembled fight. Louis Willems slept peacefully under his blanket.

At last Willems managed to free himself, and held her off, pressing her arms down. He looked at her. He had half a suspicion that he was dreaming. Her lips trembled; her eyes wandered unsteadily, always coming back to his face. He saw her the same as ever, in his presence. She appeared startled, tremulous, ready to cry. She did not inspire him with confidence. He shouted —

“How did you come?”

She answered in hurried words, looking at him intently —

“In a big canoe with three men. I know everything. Lingard’s away. I come to save you. I know. . . . Almayer told me.”

“Canoe! — Almayer — Lies. Told you — You!” stammered Willems in a distracted manner. “Why you? — Told what?”

Words failed him. He stared at his wife, thinking with fear that she — stupid woman — had been made a tool in some plan of treachery . . . in some deadly plot.

She began to cry —

“Don’t look at me like that, Peter. What have I done? I come to beg — to beg — forgiveness. . . . Save — Lingard — danger.”

He trembled with impatience, with hope, with fear. She looked at him and sobbed out in a fresh outburst of grief —

“Oh! Peter. What’s the matter? — Are you ill? . . . Oh! you look so ill . . .”

He shook her violently into a terrified and wondering silence.

“How dare you! — I am well — perfectly well. . . . Where’s that boat? Will you tell me where that boat is — at last? The boat, I say . . . You! . . .”

“You hurt me,” she moaned.

He let her go, and, mastering her terror, she stood quivering and looking at him with strange intensity. Then she made a movement forward, but he lifted his finger, and she restrained herself with a long sigh. He calmed down suddenly and surveyed her with cold criticism, with the same appearance as when, in the old days, he used to find fault with the household expenses. She found a kind of fearful delight in this abrupt return into the past, into her old subjection.

He stood outwardly collected now, and listened to her disconnected story. Her words seemed to fall round him with the distracting clatter of stunning hail. He caught the meaning here and there, and straightway would lose himself in a tremendous effort to shape out some intelligible theory of events. There was a boat. A boat. A big boat that could take him to sea if necessary. That much was clear. She brought it. Why did Almayer lie to her so? Was it a plan to decoy him into some ambush? Better that than hopeless solitude. She had money. The men were ready to go anywhere . . . she said.

He interrupted her —

“Where are they now?”

“They are coming directly,” she answered, tearfully. “Directly. There are some fishing stakes near here — they said. They are coming directly.”

Again she was talking and sobbing together. She wanted to be forgiven. Forgiven? What for? Ah! the scene in Macassar. As if he had time to think of that! What did he care what she had done months ago? He seemed to struggle in the toils of complicated dreams where everything was impossible, yet a matter of course, where the past took the aspects of the future and the present lay heavy on his heart — seemed to take him by the throat like the hand of an enemy. And while she begged, entreated, kissed his hands, wept on his shoulder, adjured him in the name of God, to forgive, to forget, to speak the word for which she longed, to look at his boy, to believe in her sorrow and in her devotion — his eyes, in the fascinated immobility of shining pupils, looked far away, far beyond her, beyond the river, beyond this land, through days, weeks, months; looked into liberty, into the future, into his triumph . . . into the great possibility of a startling revenge.

He felt a sudden desire to dance and shout. He shouted —

“After all, we shall meet again, Captain Lingard.”

“Oh, no! No!” she cried, joining her hands.

He looked at her with surprise. He had forgotten she was there till the break of her cry in the monotonous tones of her prayer recalled him into that courtyard from the glorious turmoil of his dreams. It was very strange to see her there — near him. He felt almost affectionate towards her. After all, she came just in time. Then he thought: That other one. I must get away without a scene. Who knows; she may be dangerous! . . . And all at once he felt he hated Aissa with an immense hatred that seemed to choke him. He said to his wife —

“Wait a moment.”

She, obedient, seemed to gulp down some words which wanted to come out. He muttered: “Stay here,” and disappeared round the tree.

The water in the iron pan on the cooking fire boiled furiously, belching out volumes of white steam that mixed with the thin black thread of smoke. The old woman appeared to him through this as if in a fog, squatting on her heels, impassive and weird.

Willems came up near and asked, "Where is she?"

The woman did not even lift her head, but answered at once, readily, as though she had expected the question for a long time.

"While you were asleep under the tree, before the strange canoe came, she went out of the house. I saw her look at you and pass on with a great light in her eyes. A great light. And she went towards the place where our master Lakamba had his fruit trees. When we were many here. Many, many. Men with arms by their side. Many . . . men. And talk . . . and songs . . ."

She went on like that, raving gently to herself for a long time after Willems had left her.

Willems went back to his wife. He came up close to her and found he had nothing to say. Now all his faculties were concentrated upon his wish to avoid Aissa. She might stay all the morning in that grove. Why did those rascally boatmen go? He had a physical repugnance to set eyes on her. And somewhere, at the very bottom of his heart, there was a fear of her. Why? What could she do? Nothing on earth could stop him now. He felt strong, reckless, pitiless, and superior to everything. He wanted to preserve before his wife the lofty purity of his character. He thought: She does not know. Almayr held his tongue about Aissa. But if she finds out, I am lost. If it hadn't been for the boy I would . . . free of both of them. . . . The idea darted through his head. Not he! Married. . . . Swore solemnly. No . . . sacred tie. . . . Looking on his wife, he felt for the first time in his life something approaching remorse. Remorse, arising from his conception of the awful nature of an oath before the altar. . . . She mustn't find out. . . . Oh, for that boat! He must run in and get his revolver. Couldn't think of trusting himself unarmed with those Bajow fellows. Get it now while she is away. Oh, for that boat! . . . He dared not go to the river and hail. He thought: She might hear me. . . . I'll go and get . . . cartridges . . . then will be all ready . . . nothing else. No.

And while he stood meditating profoundly before he could make up his mind to run to the house, Joanna pleaded, holding to his arm — pleaded despairingly, broken-hearted, hopeless whenever she glanced up at his face, which to her seemed to wear the aspect of unforgiving rectitude, of virtuous severity, of merciless justice. And she pleaded humbly — abashed before him, before the unmoved appearance of the man she had wronged in defiance of human and divine laws. He heard not a word of what she said till she raised her voice in a final appeal —

". . . Don't you see I loved you always? They told me horrible things about you. . . . My own mother! They told me — you have been — you have been unfaithful to me, and I . . ."

"It's a damned lie!" shouted Willems, waking up for a moment into righteous indignation.

“I know! I know — Be generous. — Think of my misery since you went away — Oh! I could have torn my tongue out. . . . I will never believe anybody — Look at the boy — Be merciful — I could never rest till I found you. . . . Say — a word — one word. . . .”

“What the devil do you want?” exclaimed Willems, looking towards the river. “Where’s that damned boat? Why did you let them go away? You stupid!”

“Oh, Peter! — I know that in your heart you have forgiven me — You are so generous — I want to hear you say so. . . . Tell me — do you?”

“Yes! yes!” said Willems, impatiently. “I forgive you. Don’t be a fool.”

“Don’t go away. Don’t leave me alone here. Where is the danger? I am so frightened. . . . Are you alone here? Sure? . . . Let us go away!”

“That’s sense,” said Willems, still looking anxiously towards the river.

She sobbed gently, leaning on his arm.

“Let me go,” he said.

He had seen above the steep bank the heads of three men glide along smoothly. Then, where the shore shelved down to the landing-place, appeared a big canoe which came slowly to land.

“Here they are,” he went on, briskly. “I must get my revolver.”

He made a few hurried paces towards the house, but seemed to catch sight of something, turned short round and came back to his wife. She stared at him, alarmed by the sudden change in his face. He appeared much discomposed. He stammered a little as he began to speak.

“Take the child. Walk down to the boat and tell them to drop it out of sight, quick, behind the bushes. Do you hear? Quick! I will come to you there directly. Hurry up!”

“Peter! What is it? I won’t leave you. There is some danger in this horrible place.”

“Will you do what I tell you?” said Willems, in an irritable whisper.

“No! no! no! I won’t leave you. I will not lose you again. Tell me, what is it?”

From beyond the house came a faint voice singing. Willems shook his wife by the shoulder.

“Do what I tell you! Run at once!”

She gripped his arm and clung to him desperately. He looked up to heaven as if taking it to witness of that woman’s infernal folly.

The song grew louder, then ceased suddenly, and Aissa appeared in sight, walking slowly, her hands full of flowers.

She had turned the corner of the house, coming out into the full sunshine, and the light seemed to leap upon her in a stream brilliant, tender, and caressing, as if attracted by the radiant happiness of her face. She had dressed herself for a festive day, for the memorable day of his return to her, of his return to an affection that would last for ever. The rays of the morning sun were caught by the oval clasp of the embroidered belt that held the silk sarong round her waist. The dazzling white stuff of her body jacket was crossed by a bar of yellow and silver of her scarf, and in the black hair twisted high on her small head shone the round balls of gold pins amongst

crimson blossoms and white star-shaped flowers, with which she had crowned herself to charm his eyes; those eyes that were henceforth to see nothing in the world but her own resplendent image. And she moved slowly, bending her face over the mass of pure white champakas and jasmine pressed to her breast, in a dreamy intoxication of sweet scents and of sweeter hopes.

She did not seem to see anything, stopped for a moment at the foot of the plankway leading to the house, then, leaving her high-heeled wooden sandals there, ascended the planks in a light run; straight, graceful, flexible, and noiseless, as if she had soared up to the door on invisible wings. Willems pushed his wife roughly behind the tree, and made up his mind quickly for a rush to the house, to grab his revolver and . . . Thoughts, doubts, expedients seemed to boil in his brain. He had a flashing vision of delivering a stunning blow, of tying up that flower bedecked woman in the dark house — a vision of things done swiftly with enraged haste — to save his prestige, his superiority — something of immense importance. . . . He had not made two steps when Joanna bounded after him, caught the back of his ragged jacket, tore out a big piece, and instantly hooked herself with both hands to the collar, nearly dragging him down on his back. Although taken by surprise, he managed to keep his feet. From behind she panted into his ear —

“That woman! Who’s that woman? Ah! that’s what those boatmen were talking about. I heard them . . . heard them . . . heard . . . in the night. They spoke about some woman. I dared not understand. I would not ask . . . listen . . . believe! How could I? Then it’s true. No. Say no. . . . Who’s that woman?”

He swayed, tugging forward. She jerked at him till the button gave way, and then he slipped half out of his jacket and, turning round, remained strangely motionless. His heart seemed to beat in his throat. He choked — tried to speak — could not find any words. He thought with fury: I will kill both of them.

For a second nothing moved about the courtyard in the great vivid clearness of the day. Only down by the landing-place a waringan-tree, all in a blaze of clustering red berries, seemed alive with the stir of little birds that filled with the feverish flutter of their feathers the tangle of overloaded branches. Suddenly the variegated flock rose spinning in a soft whirr and dispersed, slashing the sunlit haze with the sharp outlines of stiffened wings. Mahmat and one of his brothers appeared coming up from the landing-place, their lances in their hands, to look for their passengers.

Aissa coming now empty-handed out of the house, caught sight of the two armed men. In her surprise she emitted a faint cry, vanished back and in a flash reappeared in the doorway with Willems’ revolver in her hand. To her the presence of any man there could only have an ominous meaning. There was nothing in the outer world but enemies. She and the man she loved were alone, with nothing round them but menacing dangers. She did not mind that, for if death came, no matter from what hand, they would die together.

Her resolute eyes took in the courtyard in a circular glance. She noticed that the two strangers had ceased to advance and now were standing close together leaning on

the polished shafts of their weapons. The next moment she saw Willems, with his back towards her, apparently struggling under the tree with some one. She saw nothing distinctly, and, unhesitating, flew down the plankway calling out: "I come!"

He heard her cry, and with an unexpected rush drove his wife backwards to the seat. She fell on it; he jerked himself altogether out of his jacket, and she covered her face with the soiled rags. He put his lips close to her, asking —

"For the last time, will you take the child and go?"

She groaned behind the unclean ruins of his upper garment. She mumbled something. He bent lower to hear. She was saying —

"I won't. Order that woman away. I can't look at her!"

"You fool!"

He seemed to spit the words at her, then, making up his mind, spun round to face Aissa. She was coming towards them slowly now, with a look of unbounded amazement on her face. Then she stopped and stared at him — who stood there, stripped to the waist, bare-headed and sombre.

Some way off, Mahmat and his brother exchanged rapid words in calm undertones. . . . This was the strong daughter of the holy man who had died. The white man is very tall. There would be three women and the child to take in the boat, besides that white man who had the money The brother went away back to the boat, and Mahmat remained looking on. He stood like a sentinel, the leaf-shaped blade of his lance glinting above his head.

Willems spoke suddenly.

"Give me this," he said, stretching his hand towards the revolver.

Aissa stepped back. Her lips trembled. She said very low: "Your people?"

He nodded slightly. She shook her head thoughtfully, and a few delicate petals of the flowers dying in her hair fell like big drops of crimson and white at her feet.

"Did you know?" she whispered.

"No!" said Willems. "They sent for me."

"Tell them to depart. They are accursed. What is there between them and you — and you who carry my life in your heart!"

Willems said nothing. He stood before her looking down on the ground and repeating to himself: I must get that revolver away from her, at once, at once. I can't think of trusting myself with those men without firearms. I must have it.

She asked, after gazing in silence at Joanna, who was sobbing gently —

"Who is she?"

"My wife," answered Willems, without looking up. "My wife according to our white law, which comes from God!"

"Your law! Your God!" murmured Aissa, contemptuously.

"Give me this revolver," said Willems, in a peremptory tone. He felt an unwillingness to close with her, to get it by force.

She took no notice and went on —

“Your law . . . or your lies? What am I to believe? I came — I ran to defend you when I saw the strange men. You lied to me with your lips, with your eyes. You crooked heart! . . . Ah!” she added, after an abrupt pause. “She is the first! Am I then to be a slave?”

“You may be what you like,” said Willems, brutally. “I am going.”

Her gaze was fastened on the blanket under which she had detected a slight movement. She made a long stride towards it. Willems turned half round. His legs seemed to him to be made of lead. He felt faint and so weak that, for a moment, the fear of dying there where he stood, before he could escape from sin and disaster, passed through his mind in a wave of despair.

She lifted up one corner of the blanket, and when she saw the sleeping child a sudden quick shudder shook her as though she had seen something inexpressibly horrible. She looked at Louis Willems with eyes fixed in an unbelieving and terrified stare. Then her fingers opened slowly, and a shadow seemed to settle on her face as if something obscure and fatal had come between her and the sunshine. She stood looking down, absorbed, as though she had watched at the bottom of a gloomy abyss the mournful procession of her thoughts.

Willems did not move. All his faculties were concentrated upon the idea of his release. And it was only then that the assurance of it came to him with such force that he seemed to hear a loud voice shouting in the heavens that all was over, that in another five, ten minutes, he would step into another existence; that all this, the woman, the madness, the sin, the regrets, all would go, rush into the past, disappear, become as dust, as smoke, as drifting clouds — as nothing! Yes! All would vanish in the unappeasable past which would swallow up all — even the very memory of his temptation and of his downfall. Nothing mattered. He cared for nothing. He had forgotten Aissa, his wife, Lingard, Hudig — everybody, in the rapid vision of his hopeful future.

After a while he heard Aissa saying —

“A child! A child! What have I done to be made to devour this sorrow and this grief? And while your man-child and the mother lived you told me there was nothing for you to remember in the land from which you came! And I thought you could be mine. I thought that I would . . .”

Her voice ceased in a broken murmur, and with it, in her heart, seemed to die the greater and most precious hope of her new life.

She had hoped that in the future the frail arms of a child would bind their two lives together in a bond which nothing on earth could break, a bond of affection, of gratitude, of tender respect. She the first — the only one! But in the instant she saw the son of that other woman she felt herself removed into the cold, the darkness, the silence of a solitude impenetrable and immense — very far from him, beyond the possibility of any hope, into an infinity of wrongs without any redress.

She strode nearer to Joanna. She felt towards that woman anger, envy, jealousy. Before her she felt humiliated and enraged. She seized the hanging sleeve of the jacket in which Joanna was hiding her face and tore it out of her hands, exclaiming loudly —

“Let me see the face of her before whom I am only a servant and a slave. Ya-wa! I see you!”

Her unexpected shout seemed to fill the sunlit space of cleared grounds, rise high and run on far into the land over the unstirring tree-tops of the forests. She stood in sudden stillness, looking at Joanna with surprised contempt.

“A Sirani woman!” she said, slowly, in a tone of wonder.

Joanna rushed at Willems — clung to him, shrieking: “Defend me, Peter! Defend me from that woman!”

“Be quiet. There is no danger,” muttered Willems, thickly.

Aissa looked at them with scorn. “God is great! I sit in the dust at your feet,” she exclaimed jeeringly, joining her hands above her head in a gesture of mock humility. “Before you I am as nothing.” She turned to Willems fiercely, opening her arms wide. “What have you made of me?” she cried, “you lying child of an accursed mother! What have you made of me? The slave of a slave. Don’t speak! Your words are worse than the poison of snakes. A Sirani woman. A woman of a people despised by all.”

She pointed her finger at Joanna, stepped back, and began to laugh.

“Make her stop, Peter!” screamed Joanna. “That heathen woman. Heathen! Heathen! Beat her, Peter.”

Willems caught sight of the revolver which Aissa had laid on the seat near the child. He spoke in Dutch to his wife, without moving his head.

“Snatch the boy — and my revolver there. See. Run to the boat. I will keep her back. Now’s the time.”

Aissa came nearer. She stared at Joanna, while between the short gusts of broken laughter she raved, fumbling distractedly at the buckle of her belt.

“To her! To her — the mother of him who will speak of your wisdom, of your courage. All to her. I have nothing. Nothing. Take, take.”

She tore the belt off and threw it at Joanna’s feet. She flung down with haste the armlets, the gold pins, the flowers; and the long hair, released, fell scattered over her shoulders, framing in its blackness the wild exaltation of her face.

“Drive her off, Peter. Drive off the heathen savage,” persisted Joanna. She seemed to have lost her head altogether. She stamped, clinging to Willems’ arm with both her hands.

“Look,” cried Aissa. “Look at the mother of your son! She is afraid. Why does she not go from before my face? Look at her. She is ugly.”

Joanna seemed to understand the scornful tone of the words. As Aissa stepped back again nearer to the tree she let go her husband’s arm, rushed at her madly, slapped her face, then, swerving round, darted at the child who, unnoticed, had been wailing for some time, and, snatching him up, flew down to the waterside, sending shriek after shriek in an access of insane terror.

Willems made for the revolver. Aissa passed swiftly, giving him an unexpected push that sent him staggering away from the tree. She caught up the weapon, put it behind her back, and cried —

“You shall not have it. Go after her. Go to meet danger. . . . Go to meet death. . . . Go unarmed. . . . Go with empty hands and sweet words . . . as you came to me. . . . Go helpless and lie to the forests, to the sea . . . to the death that waits for you. . . .”

She ceased as if strangled. She saw in the horror of the passing seconds the half-naked, wild-looking man before her; she heard the faint shrillness of Joanna’s insane shrieks for help somewhere down by the riverside. The sunlight streamed on her, on him, on the mute land, on the murmuring river — the gentle brilliance of a serene morning that, to her, seemed traversed by ghastly flashes of uncertain darkness. Hate filled the world, filled the space between them — the hate of race, the hate of hopeless diversity, the hate of blood; the hate against the man born in the land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune comes to those who are not white. And as she stood, maddened, she heard a whisper near her, the whisper of the dead Omar’s voice saying in her ear: “Kill! Kill!”

She cried, seeing him move —

“Do not come near me . . . or you die now! Go while I remember yet . . . remember. . . .”

Willems pulled himself together for a struggle. He dared not go unarmed. He made a long stride, and saw her raise the revolver. He noticed that she had not cocked it, and said to himself that, even if she did fire, she would surely miss. Go too high; it was a stiff trigger. He made a step nearer — saw the long barrel moving unsteadily at the end of her extended arm. He thought: This is my time . . . He bent his knees slightly, throwing his body forward, and took off with a long bound for a tearing rush.

He saw a burst of red flame before his eyes, and was deafened by a report that seemed to him louder than a clap of thunder. Something stopped him short, and he stood aspiring in his nostrils the acrid smell of the blue smoke that drifted from before his eyes like an immense cloud. . . . Missed, by Heaven! . . . Thought so! . . . And he saw her very far off, throwing her arms up, while the revolver, very small, lay on the ground between them. . . . Missed! . . . He would go and pick it up now. Never before did he understand, as in that second, the joy, the triumphant delight of sunshine and of life. His mouth was full of something salt and warm. He tried to cough; spat out. . . . Who shrieks: In the name of God, he dies! — he dies! — Who dies? — Must pick up — Night! — What? . . . Night already. . . .

* * * * *

Many years afterwards Almayer was telling the story of the great revolution in Sambir to a chance visitor from Europe. He was a Roumanian, half naturalist, half orchid-hunter for commercial purposes, who used to declare to everybody, in the first five minutes of acquaintance, his intention of writing a scientific book about tropical countries. On his way to the interior he had quartered himself upon Almayer. He was a man of some education, but he drank his gin neat, or only, at most, would squeeze the

juice of half a small lime into the raw spirit. He said it was good for his health, and, with that medicine before him, he would describe to the surprised Almayer the wonders of European capitals; while Almayer, in exchange, bored him by expounding, with gusto, his unfavourable opinions of Sambir's social and political life. They talked far into the night, across the deal table on the verandah, while, between them, clear-winged, small, and flabby insects, dissatisfied with moonlight, streamed in and perished in thousands round the smoky light of the evil-smelling lamp.

Almayer, his face flushed, was saying —

“Of course, I did not see that. I told you I was stuck in the creek on account of father's — Captain Lingard's — susceptible temper. I am sure I did it all for the best in trying to facilitate the fellow's escape; but Captain Lingard was that kind of man — you know — one couldn't argue with. Just before sunset the water was high enough, and we got out of the creek. We got to Lakamba's clearing about dark. All very quiet; I thought they were gone, of course, and felt very glad. We walked up the courtyard — saw a big heap of something lying in the middle. Out of that she rose and rushed at us. By God. . . . You know those stories of faithful dogs watching their masters' corpses. . . . don't let anybody approach. . . . got to beat them off — and all that. . . . Well, 'pon my word we had to beat her off. Had to! She was like a fury. Wouldn't let us touch him. Dead — of course. Should think so. Shot through the lung, on the left side, rather high up, and at pretty close quarters too, for the two holes were small. Bullet came out through the shoulder-blade. After we had overpowered her — you can't imagine how strong that woman was; it took three of us — we got the body into the boat and shoved off. We thought she had fainted then, but she got up and rushed into the water after us. Well, I let her clamber in. What could I do? The river's full of alligators. I will never forget that pull up-stream in the night as long as I live. She sat in the bottom of the boat, holding his head in her lap, and now and again wiping his face with her hair. There was a lot of blood dried about his mouth and chin. And for all the six hours of that journey she kept on whispering tenderly to that corpse! . . . I had the mate of the schooner with me. The man said afterwards that he wouldn't go through it again — not for a handful of diamonds. And I believed him — I did. It makes me shiver. Do you think he heard? No! I mean somebody — something — heard? . . .”

“I am a materialist,” declared the man of science, tilting the bottle shakily over the emptied glass.

Almayer shook his head and went on —

“Nobody saw how it really happened but that man Mahmat. He always said that he was no further off from them than two lengths of his lance. It appears the two women rowed each other while that Willems stood between them. Then Mahmat says that when Joanna struck her and ran off, the other two seemed to become suddenly mad together. They rushed here and there. Mahmat says — those were his very words: ‘I saw her standing holding the pistol that fires many times and pointing it all over the campong. I was afraid — lest she might shoot me, and jumped on one side. Then I saw the white man coming at her swiftly. He came like our master the tiger when he

rushes out of the jungle at the spears held by men. She did not take aim. The barrel of her weapon went like this — from side to side, but in her eyes I could see suddenly a great fear. There was only one shot. She shrieked while the white man stood blinking his eyes and very straight, till you could count slowly one, two, three; then he coughed and fell on his face. The daughter of Omar shrieked without drawing breath, till he fell. I went away then and left silence behind me. These things did not concern me, and in my boat there was that other woman who had promised me money. We left directly, paying no attention to her cries. We are only poor men — and had but a small reward for our trouble!’ That’s what Mahmat said. Never varied. You ask him yourself. He’s the man you hired the boats from, for your journey up the river.”

“The most rapacious thief I ever met!” exclaimed the traveller, thickly.

“Ah! He is a respectable man. His two brothers got themselves speared — served them right. They went in for robbing Dyak graves. Gold ornaments in them you know. Serve them right. But he kept respectable and got on. Aye! Everybody got on — but I. And all through that scoundrel who brought the Arabs here.”

“De mortuis nil ni . . . num,” muttered Almayer’s guest.

“I wish you would speak English instead of jabbering in your own language, which no one can understand,” said Almayer, sulkily.

“Don’t be angry,” hiccoughed the other. “It’s Latin, and it’s wisdom. It means: Don’t waste your breath in abusing shadows. No offence there. I like you. You have a quarrel with Providence — so have I. I was meant to be a professor, while — look.”

His head nodded. He sat grasping the glass. Almayer walked up and down, then stopped suddenly.

“Yes, they all got on but I. Why? I am better than any of them. Lakamba calls himself a Sultan, and when I go to see him on business sends that one-eyed fiend of his — Babalatchi — to tell me that the ruler is asleep; and shall sleep for a long time. And that Babalatchi! He is the Shahbandar of the State — if you please. Oh Lord! Shahbandar! The pig! A vagabond I wouldn’t let come up these steps when he first came here. . . . Look at Abdulla now. He lives here because — he says — here he is away from white men. But he has hundreds of thousands. Has a house in Penang. Ships. What did he not have when he stole my trade from me! He knocked everything here into a cocked hat, drove father to gold-hunting — then to Europe, where he disappeared. Fancy a man like Captain Lingard disappearing as though he had been a common coolie. Friends of mine wrote to London asking about him. Nobody ever heard of him there! Fancy! Never heard of Captain Lingard!”

The learned gatherer of orchids lifted his head.

“He was a sen — sentimen — tal old buc — buccaneer,” he stammered out, “I like him. I’m sent — tal myself.”

He winked slowly at Almayer, who laughed.

“Yes! I told you about that gravestone. Yes! Another hundred and twenty dollars thrown away. Wish I had them now. He would do it. And the inscription. Ha! ha! ha! ‘Peter Willems, Delivered by the Mercy of God from his Enemy.’ What enemy —

unless Captain Lingard himself? And then it has no sense. He was a great man — father was — but strange in many ways. . . . You haven't seen the grave? On the top of that hill, there, on the other side of the river. I must show you. We will go there."

"Not I!" said the other. "No interest — in the sun — too tiring. . . . Unless you carry me there."

As a matter of fact he was carried there a few months afterwards, and his was the second white man's grave in Sambir; but at present he was alive if rather drunk. He asked abruptly —

"And the woman?"

"Oh! Lingard, of course, kept her and her ugly brat in Macassar. Sinful waste of money — that! Devil only knows what became of them since father went home. I had my daughter to look after. I shall give you a word to Mrs. Vinck in Singapore when you go back. You shall see my Nina there. Lucky man. She is beautiful, and I hear so accomplished, so . . ."

"I have heard already twenty . . . a hundred times about your daughter. What ab — about — that — that other one, Ai — ssa?"

"She! Oh! we kept her here. She was mad for a long time in a quiet sort of way. Father thought a lot of her. He gave her a house to live in, in my campong. She wandered about, speaking to nobody unless she caught sight of Abdulla, when she would have a fit of fury, and shriek and curse like anything. Very often she would disappear — and then we all had to turn out and hunt for her, because father would worry till she was brought back. Found her in all kinds of places. Once in the abandoned campong of Lakamba. Sometimes simply wandering in the bush. She had one favourite spot we always made for at first. It was ten to one on finding her there — a kind of a grassy glade on the banks of a small brook. Why she preferred that place, I can't imagine! And such a job to get her away from there. Had to drag her away by main force. Then, as the time passed, she became quieter and more settled, like. Still, all my people feared her greatly. It was my Nina that tamed her. You see the child was naturally fearless and used to have her own way, so she would go to her and pull at her sarong, and order her about, as she did everybody. Finally she, I verily believe, came to love the child. Nothing could resist that little one — you know. She made a capital nurse. Once when the little devil ran away from me and fell into the river off the end of the jetty, she jumped in and pulled her out in no time. I very nearly died of fright. Now of course she lives with my serving girls, but does what she likes. As long as I have a handful of rice or a piece of cotton in the store she sha'n't want for anything. You have seen her. She brought in the dinner with Ali."

"What! That doubled-up crone?"

"Ah!" said Almayer. "They age quickly here. And long foggy nights spent in the bush will soon break the strongest backs — as you will find out yourself soon."

"Dis . . . disgusting," growled the traveller.

He dozed off. Almayer stood by the balustrade looking out at the bluish sheen of the moonlit night. The forests, unchanged and sombre, seemed to hang over the water,

listening to the unceasing whisper of the great river; and above their dark wall the hill on which Lingard had buried the body of his late prisoner rose in a black, rounded mass, upon the silver paleness of the sky. Almayer looked for a long time at the clean-cut outline of the summit, as if trying to make out through darkness and distance the shape of that expensive tombstone. When he turned round at last he saw his guest sleeping, his arms on the table, his head on his arms.

“Now, look here!” he shouted, slapping the table with the palm of his hand.

The naturalist woke up, and sat all in a heap, staring owlshly.

“Here!” went on Almayer, speaking very loud and thumping the table, “I want to know. You, who say you have read all the books, just tell me . . . why such infernal things are ever allowed. Here I am! Done harm to nobody, lived an honest life . . . and a scoundrel like that is born in Rotterdam or some such place at the other end of the world somewhere, travels out here, robs his employer, runs away from his wife, and ruins me and my Nina — he ruined me, I tell you — and gets himself shot at last by a poor miserable savage, that knows nothing at all about him really. Where’s the sense of all this? Where’s your Providence? Where’s the good for anybody in all this? The world’s a swindle! A swindle! Why should I suffer? What have I done to be treated so?”

He howled out his string of questions, and suddenly became silent. The man who ought to have been a professor made a tremendous effort to articulate distinctly —

“My dear fellow, don’t — don’t you see that the ba-bare fac — the fact of your existence is off — offensive. . . . I — I like you — like . . .”

He fell forward on the table, and ended his remarks by an unexpected and prolonged snore.

Almayer shrugged his shoulders and walked back to the balustrade.

He drank his own trade gin very seldom, but when he did, a ridiculously small quantity of the stuff could induce him to assume a rebellious attitude towards the scheme of the universe. And now, throwing his body over the rail, he shouted impudently into the night, turning his face towards that far-off and invisible slab of imported granite upon which Lingard had thought fit to record God’s mercy and Willems’ escape.

“Father was wrong — wrong!” he yelled. “I want you to smart for it. You must smart for it! Where are you, Willems? Hey? . . . Hey? . . . Where there is no mercy for you — I hope!”

“Hope,” repeated in a whispering echo the startled forests, the river and the hills; and Almayer, who stood waiting, with a smile of tipsy attention on his lips, heard no other answer.

The Nigger of the Narcissus

A Tale of the Forecastle

This early novella is well-known for its quality compared to other works, and many critics believe it marks the start of Conrad's major period.

Conrad prior to his first voyage

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Edward Garnett

This Tale

About My Friends

Of the Sea

To My Readers in America

From that evening when James Wait joined the ship — late for the muster of the crew — to the moment when he left us in the open sea, shrouded in sailcloth, through the open port, I had much to do with him. He was in my watch. A negro in a British forecandle is a lonely being. He has no chums. Yet James Wait, afraid of death and making her his accomplice was an impostor of some character — mastering our compassion, scornful of our sentimentalism, triumphing over our suspicions.

But in the book he is nothing; he is merely the centre of the ship's collective psychology and the pivot of the action. Yet he, who in the family circle and amongst my friends is familiarly referred to as the Nigger, remains very precious to me. For the book written round him is not the sort of thing that can be attempted more than once in a life-time. It is the book by which, not as a novelist perhaps, but as an artist striving for the utmost sincerity of expression, I am willing to stand or fall. Its pages are the tribute of my unalterable and profound affection for the ships, the seamen, the winds and the great sea — the moulders of my youth, the companions of the best years of my life.

After writing the last words of that book, in the revulsion of feeling before the accomplished task, I understood that I had done with the sea, and that henceforth I had to be a writer. And almost without laying down the pen I wrote a preface, trying to express the spirit in which I was entering on the task of my new life. That preface on advice (which I now think was wrong) was never published with the book. But the late W. E. Henley, who had the courage at that time (1897) to serialize my "Nigger" in the *New Review* judged it worthy to be printed as an afterword at the end of the last instalment of the tale.

I am glad that this book which means so much to me is coming out again, under its proper title of "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" and under the auspices of my good friends and publishers Messrs. Doubleday, Page & Co. into the light of publicity.

Half the span of a generation has passed since W. E. Henley, after reading two chapters, sent me a verbal message: "Tell Conrad that if the rest is up to the sample it shall certainly come out in the *New Review*." The most gratifying recollection of my writer's life!

And here is the Suppressed Preface.

1914

JOSEPH CONRAD.

Preface

A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential — their one illuminating and convincing quality — the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal. Impressed by the aspect of the world the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into facts — whence, presently, emerging they make their appeal to those qualities of our being that fit us best for the hazardous enterprise of living. They speak authoritatively to our common-sense, to our intelligence, to our desire of peace or to our desire of unrest; not seldom to our prejudices, sometimes to our fears, often to our egoism — but always to our credulity. And their words are heard with reverence, for their concern is with weighty matters: with the cultivation of our minds and the proper care of our bodies, with the attainment of our ambitions, with the perfection of the means and the glorification of our precious aims.

It is otherwise with the artist.

Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal. His appeal is made to our less obvious capacities: to that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities — like the vulnerable body within a steel armour. His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring — and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures forever. The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition — and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation — and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity — the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.

It is only some such train of thought, or rather of feeling, that can in a measure explain the aim of the attempt, made in the tale which follows, to present an unrestful episode in the obscure lives of a few individuals out of all the disregarded multitude of the bewildered, the simple and the voiceless. For, if any part of truth dwells in the belief confessed above, it becomes evident that there is not a place of splendour or a dark corner of the earth that does not deserve, if only a passing glance of wonder and pity. The motive then, may be held to justify the matter of the work; but this preface, which is simply an avowal of endeavour, cannot end here — for the avowal is not yet complete. Fiction — if it at all aspires to be art — appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time. Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way, because temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion. All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its highest desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music — which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.

The sincere endeavour to accomplish that creative task, to go as far on that road as his strength will carry him, to go undeterred by faltering, weariness or reproach, is the only valid justification for the worker in prose. And if his conscience is clear, his answer to those who in the fulness of a wisdom which looks for immediate profit, demand specifically to be edified, consoled, amused; who demand to be promptly improved, or encouraged, or frightened, or shocked, or charmed, must run thus: — My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see. That — and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm — all you demand — and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask. To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth — disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment. In a single-minded

attempt of that kind, if one be deserving and fortunate, one may perchance attain to such clearness of sincerity that at last the presented vision of regret or pity, of terror or mirth, shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world. It is evident that he who, rightly or wrongly, holds by the convictions expressed above cannot be faithful to any one of the temporary formulas of his craft. The enduring part of them — the truth which each only imperfectly veils — should abide with him as the most precious of his possessions, but they all: Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism, even the unofficial sentimentalism (which like the poor, is exceedingly difficult to get rid of,) all these gods must, after a short period of fellowship, abandon him — even on the very threshold of the temple — to the stammerings of his conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work. In that uneasy solitude the supreme cry of Art for Art itself, loses the exciting ring of its apparent immorality. It sounds far off. It has ceased to be a cry, and is heard only as a whisper, often incomprehensible, but at times and faintly encouraging.

Sometimes, stretched at ease in the shade of a roadside tree, we watch the motions of a labourer in a distant field, and after a time, begin to wonder languidly as to what the fellow may be at. We watch the movements of his body, the waving of his arms, we see him bend down, stand up, hesitate, begin again. It may add to the charm of an idle hour to be told the purpose of his exertions. If we know he is trying to lift a stone, to dig a ditch, to uproot a stump, we look with a more real interest at his efforts; we are disposed to condone the jar of his agitation upon the restfulness of the landscape; and even, if in a brotherly frame of mind, we may bring ourselves to forgive his failure. We understood his object, and, after all, the fellow has tried, and perhaps he had not the strength — and perhaps he had not the knowledge. We forgive, go on our way — and forget.

And so it is with the workman of art. Art is long and life is short, and success is very far off. And thus, doubtful of strength to travel so far, we talk a little about the aim — the aim of art, which, like life itself, is inspiring, difficult — obscured by mists; it is not in the clear logic of a triumphant conclusion; it is not in the unveiling of one of those heartless secrets which are called the Laws of Nature. It is not less great, but only more difficult.

To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile — such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a very few to achieve. But sometimes, by the deserving and the fortunate, even that task is accomplished. And when it is accomplished — behold! — all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile — and the return to an eternal rest.

1897. J. C.

The Nigger of the “narcissus”

Chapter 1

Mr. Baker, chief mate of the ship *Narcissus*, stepped in one stride out of his lighted cabin into the darkness of the quarter-deck. Above his head, on the break of the poop, the night-watchman rang a double stroke. It was nine o'clock. Mr. Baker, speaking up to the man above him, asked: — "Are all the hands aboard, Knowles?"

The man limped down the ladder, then said reflectively: —

"I think so, sir. All our old chaps are there, and a lot of new men has come... They must be all there."

"Tell the boatswain to send all hands aft," went on Mr. Baker; "and tell one of the youngsters to bring a good lamp here. I want to muster our crowd."

The main deck was dark aft, but halfway from forward, through the open doors of the forecabin, two streaks of brilliant light cut the shadow of the quiet night that lay upon the ship. A hum of voices was heard there, while port and starboard, in the illuminated doorways, silhouettes of moving men appeared for a moment, very black, without relief, like figures cut out of sheet tin. The ship was ready for sea. The carpenter had driven in the last wedge of the mainhatch battens, and, throwing down his maul, had wiped his face with great deliberation, just on the stroke of five. The decks had been swept, the windlass oiled and made ready to heave up the anchor; the big tow-rope lay in long bights along one side of the main deck, with one end carried up and hung over the bows, in readiness for the tug that would come paddling and hissing noisily, hot and smoky, in the limpid, cool quietness of the early morning. The captain was ashore, where he had been engaging some new hands to make up his full crew; and, the work of the day over, the ship's officers had kept out of the way, glad of a little breathing-time. Soon after dark the few liberty-men and the new hands began to arrive in shore-boats rowed by white-clad Asiatics, who clamoured fiercely for payment before coming alongside the gangway-ladder. The feverish and shrill babble of Eastern language struggled against the masterful tones of tipsy seamen, who argued against brazen claims and dishonest hopes by profane shouts. The resplendent and bestarred peace of the East was torn into squalid tatters by howls of rage and shrieks of lament raised over sums ranging from five annas to half a rupee; and every soul afloat in Bombay Harbour became aware that the new hands were joining the *Narcissus*.

Gradually the distracting noise had subsided. The boats came no longer in splashing clusters of three or four together, but dropped alongside singly, in a subdued buzz of expostulation cut short by a "Not a pace more! You go to the devil!" from some man staggering up the accommodation-ladder — a dark figure, with a long bag poised on the shoulder. In the forecabin the newcomers, upright and swaying amongst corded

boxes and bundles of bedding, made friends with the old hands, who sat one above another in the two tiers of bunks, gazing at their future shipmates with glances critical but friendly. The two fore-castle lamps were turned up high, and shed an intense hard glare; shore-going round hats were pushed far on the backs of heads, or rolled about on the deck amongst the chain-cables; white collars, undone, stuck out on each side of red faces; big arms in white sleeves gesticulated; the growling voices hummed steady amongst bursts of laughter and hoarse calls. "Here, sonny, take that bunk!... Don't you do it!... What's your last ship?... I know her... Three years ago, in Puget Sound... This here berth leaks, I tell you!... Come on; give us a chance to swing that chest!... Did you bring a bottle, any of you shore toffs?... Give us a bit of 'baccy... I know her; her skipper drank himself to death... He was a dandy boy!... Liked his lotion inside, he did!... No!... Hold your row, you chaps!... I tell you, you came on board a hooker, where they get their money's worth out of poor Jack, by — !..."

A little fellow, called Craik and nicknamed Belfast, abused the ship violently, romancing on principle, just to give the new hands something to think over. Archie, sitting aslant on his sea-chest, kept his knees out of the way, and pushed the needle steadily through a white patch in a pair of blue trousers. Men in black jackets and stand-up collars, mixed with men bare-footed, bare-armed, with coloured shirts open on hairy chests, pushed against one another in the middle of the fore-castle. The group swayed, reeled, turning upon itself with the motion of a scrimmage, in a haze of tobacco smoke. All were speaking together, swearing at every second word. A Russian Finn, wearing a yellow shirt with pink stripes, stared upwards, dreamy-eyed, from under a mop of tumbled hair. Two young giants with smooth, baby faces — two Scandinavians — helped each other to spread their bedding, silent, and smiling placidly at the tempest of good-humoured and meaningless curses. Old Singleton, the oldest able seaman in the ship, set apart on the deck right under the lamps, stripped to the waist, tattooed like a cannibal chief all over his powerful chest and enormous biceps. Between the blue and red patterns his white skin gleamed like satin; his bare back was propped against the heel of the bowsprit, and he held a book at arm's length before his big, sunburnt face. With his spectacles and a venerable white beard, he resembled a learned and savage patriarch, the incarnation of barbarian wisdom serene in the blasphemous turmoil of the world. He was intensely absorbed, and as he turned the pages an expression of grave surprise would pass over his rugged features. He was reading "Pelham." The popularity of Bulwer Lytton in the fore-castles of Southern-going ships is a wonderful and bizarre phenomenon. What ideas do his polished and so curiously insincere sentences awaken in the simple minds of the big children who people those dark and wandering places of the earth? What meaning can their rough, inexperienced souls find in the elegant verbiage of his pages? What excitement? — what forgetfulness? — what appeasement? Mystery! Is it the fascination of the incomprehensible? — is it the charm of the impossible? Or are those beings who exist beyond the pale of life stirred by his tales as by an enigmatical disclosure of a resplendent world that exists within the frontier of infamy and filth, within that border of dirt and hunger, of misery

and dissipation, that comes down on all sides to the water's edge of the incorruptible ocean, and is the only thing they know of life, the only thing they see of surrounding land — those life-long prisoners of the sea? Mystery! Singleton, who had sailed to the southward since the age of twelve, who in the last forty-five years had lived (as we had calculated from his papers) no more than forty months ashore — old Singleton, who boasted, with the mild composure of long years well spent, that generally from the day he was paid off from one ship till the day he shipped in another he seldom was in a condition to distinguish daylight — old Singleton sat unmoved in the clash of voices and cries, spelling through "Pelham" with slow labour, and lost in an absorption profound enough to resemble a trance. He breathed regularly. Every time he turned the book in his enormous and blackened hands the muscles of his big white arms rolled slightly under the smooth skin. Hidden by the white moustache, his lips, stained with tobacco-juice that trickled down the long beard, moved in inward whisper. His bleared eyes gazed fixedly from behind the glitter of black-rimmed glasses. Opposite to him, and on a level with his face, the ship's cat sat on the barrel of the windlass in the pose of a crouching chimera, blinking its green eyes at its old friend. It seemed to meditate a leap on to the old man's lap over the bent back of the ordinary seaman who sat at Singleton's feet. Young Charley was lean and long-necked. The ridge of his backbone made a chain of small hills under the old shirt. His face of a street-boy — a face precocious, sagacious, and ironic, with deep downward folds on each side of the thin, wide mouth — hung low over his bony knees. He was learning to make a lanyard knot with a bit of an old rope. Small drops of perspiration stood out on his bulging forehead; he sniffed strongly from time to time, glancing out of the corners of his restless eyes at the old seaman, who took no notice of the puzzled youngster muttering at his work.

The noise increased. Little Belfast seemed, in the heavy heat of the forecastle, to boil with facetious fury. His eyes danced; in the crimson of his face, comical as a mask, the mouth yawned black, with strange grimaces. Facing him, a half-undressed man held his sides, and, throwing his head back, laughed with wet eyelashes. Others stared with amazed eyes. Men sitting doubled up in the upper bunks smoked short pipes, swinging bare brown feet above the heads of those who, sprawling below on sea-chests, listened, smiling stupidly or scornfully. Over the white rims of berths stuck out heads with blinking eyes; but the bodies were lost in the gloom of those places, that resembled narrow niches for coffins in a whitewashed and lighted mortuary. Voices buzzed louder. Archie, with compressed lips, drew himself in, seemed to shrink into a smaller space, and sewed steadily, industrious and dumb. Belfast shrieked like an inspired Dervish: — "... So I seez to him, boys, seez I, 'Beggin' yer pardon, sorr,' seez I to that second mate of that steamer — 'beggin' your-r-r pardon, sorr, the Board of Trade must 'ave been drunk when they granted you your certificate!' 'What do you say, you — — !' seez he, comin' at me like a mad bull... all in his white clothes; and I up with my tar-pot and capsizes it all over his blamed lovely face and his lovely jacket... 'Take that!' seez I. 'I am a sailor, anyhow, you nosing, skipper-licking, useless, sooperfloos

bridge-stanchion, you! That's the kind of man I am!' shouts I... You should have seed him skip, boys! Drowned, blind with tar, he was! So..."

"Don't 'ee believe him! He never upset no tar; I was there!" shouted somebody. The two Norwegians sat on a chest side by side, alike and placid, resembling a pair of love-birds on a perch, and with round eyes stared innocently; but the Russian Finn, in the racket of explosive shouts and rolling laughter, remained motionless, limp and dull, like a deaf man without a backbone. Near him Archie smiled at his needle. A broad-chested, slow-eyed newcomer spoke deliberately to Belfast during an exhausted lull in the noise: — "I wonder any of the mates here are alive yet with such a chap as you on board! I concloude they ain't that bad now, if you had the taming of them, sonny."

"Not bad! Not bad!" screamed Belfast. "If it wasn't for us sticking together... Not bad! They ain't never bad when they ain't got a chawnce, blast their black 'arts..."

He foamed, whirling his arms, then suddenly grinned and, taking a tablet of black tobacco out of his pocket, bit a piece off with a funny show of ferocity. Another new hand — a man with shifty eyes and a yellow hatchet face, who had been listening open-mouthed in the shadow of the midship locker — observed in a squeaky voice: — "Well, it's a 'omeward trip, anyhow. Bad or good, I can do it on my 'ed — s'long as I get 'ome. And I can look after my rights! I will show 'em!" All the heads turned towards him. Only the ordinary seaman and the cat took no notice. He stood with arms akimbo, a little fellow with white eyelashes. He looked as if he had known all the degradations and all the furies. He looked as if he had been cuffed, kicked, rolled in the mud; he looked as if he had been scratched, spat upon, pelted with unmentionable filth... and he smiled with a sense of security at the faces around. His ears were bending down under the weight of his battered felt hat. The torn tails of his black coat flapped in fringes about the calves of his legs. He unbuttoned the only two buttons that remained and every one saw that he had no shirt under it. It was his deserved misfortune that those rags which nobody could possibly be supposed to own looked on him as if they had been stolen. His neck was long and thin; his eyelids were red; rare hairs hung about his jaws; his shoulders were peaked and drooped like the broken wings of a bird; all his left side was caked with mud which showed that he had lately slept in a wet ditch. He had saved his inefficient carcass from violent destruction by running away from an American ship where, in a moment of forgetful folly, he had dared to engage himself; and he had knocked about for a fortnight ashore in the native quarter, cadging for drinks, starving, sleeping on rubbish-heaps, wandering in sunshine: a startling visitor from a world of nightmares. He stood repulsive and smiling in the sudden silence. This clean white forecastle was his refuge; the place where he could be lazy; where he could wallow, and lie and eat — and curse the food he ate; where he could display his talents for shirking work, for cheating, for cadging; where he could find surely some one to wheedle and some one to bully — and where he would be paid for doing all this. They all knew him. Is there a spot on earth where such a man is unknown, an ominous survival testifying to the eternal fitness of lies and impudence? A taciturn long-armed

shellback, with hooked fingers, who had been lying on his back smoking, turned in his bed to examine him dispassionately, then, over his head, sent a long jet of clear saliva towards the door. They all knew him! He was the man that cannot steer, that cannot splice, that dodges the work on dark nights; that, aloft, holds on frantically with both arms and legs, and swears at the wind, the sleet, the darkness; the man who curses the sea while others work. The man who is the last out and the first in when all hands are called. The man who can't do most things and won't do the rest. The pet of philanthropists and self-seeking landlubbers. The sympathetic and deserving creature that knows all about his rights, but knows nothing of courage, of endurance, and of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company. The independent offspring of the ignoble freedom of the slums full of disdain and hate for the austere servitude of the sea.

Some one cried at him: "What's your name?" — "Donkin," he said, looking round with cheerful effrontery. — "What are you?" asked another voice. — "Why, a sailor like you, old man," he replied, in a tone that meant to be hearty but was impudent. — "Blamme if you don't look a blamed sight worse than a broken-down fireman," was the comment in a convinced mutter. Charley lifted his head and piped in a cheeky voice: "He is a man and a sailor" — then wiping his nose with the back of his hand bent down industriously over his bit of rope. A few laughed. Others stared doubtfully. The ragged newcomer was indignant — "That's a fine way to welcome a chap into a fo'c'sle," he snarled. "Are you men or a lot of 'artless canny-bals?" — "Don't take your shirt off for a word, shipmate," called out Belfast, jumping up in front, fiery, menacing, and friendly at the same time. — "Is that 'ere bloke blind?" asked the indomitable scarecrow, looking right and left with affected surprise. "Can't 'ee see I 'aven't got no shirt?"

He held both his arms out crosswise and shook the rags that hung over his bones with dramatic effect.

"'Cos why?" he continued very loud. "The bloody Yankees been tryin' to jump my guts out 'cos I stood up for my rights like a good 'un. I am an Englishman, I am. They set upon me an' I 'ad to run. That's why. A'n't yer never seed a man 'ard up? Yah! What kind of blamed ship is this? I'm dead broke. I 'aven't got nothink. No bag, no bed, no blanket, no shirt — not a bloomin' rag but what I stand in. But I 'ad the 'art to stand up agin' them Yankees. 'As any of you 'art enough to spare a pair of old pants for a chum?"

He knew how to conquer the naïve instincts of that crowd. In a moment they gave him their compassion, jocularly, contemptuously, or surlily; and at first it took the shape of a blanket thrown at him as he stood there with the white skin of his limbs showing his human kinship through the black fantasy of his rags. Then a pair of old shoes fell at his muddy feet. With a cry: — "From under," a rolled-up pair of canvas trousers, heavy with tar stains, struck him on the shoulder. The gust of their benevolence sent a wave of sentimental pity through their doubting hearts. They were touched by their own readiness to alleviate a shipmate's misery. Voices cried: — "We

will fit you out, old man." Murmurs: "Never seed seech a hard case... Poor beggar... I've got an old singlet... Will that be of any use to you?... Take it, matey..." Those friendly murmurs filled the forecastle. He pawed around with his naked foot, gathering the things in a heap and looked about for more. Unemotional Archie perfunctorily contributed to the pile an old cloth cap with the peak torn off. Old Singleton, lost in the serene regions of fiction, read on unheeding. Charley, pitiless with the wisdom of youth, squeaked: — "If you want brass buttons for your new unyforms I've got two for you." The filthy object of universal charity shook his fist at the youngster. — "I'll make you keep this 'ere fo'c'sle clean, young feller," he snarled viciously. "Never you fear. I will learn you to be civil to an able seaman, you ignerant ass." He glared harmfully, but saw Singleton shut his book, and his little beady eyes began to roam from berth to berth. — "Take that bunk by the door there — it's pretty fair," suggested Belfast. So advised, he gathered the gifts at his feet, pressed them in a bundle against his breast, then looked cautiously at the Russian Finn, who stood on one side with an unconscious gaze, contemplating, perhaps, one of those weird visions that haunt the men of his race. — "Get out of my road, Dutchy," said the victim of Yankee brutality. The Finn did not move — did not hear. "Get out, blast ye," shouted the other, shoving him aside with his elbow. "Get out, you blanked deaf and dumb fool. Get out." The man staggered, recovered himself, and gazed at the speaker in silence. — "Those damned furriners should be kept under," opined the amiable Donkin to the forecastle. "If you don't teach 'em their place they put on you like anythink." He flung all his worldly possessions into the empty bed-place, gauged with another shrewd look the risks of the proceeding, then leaped up to the Finn, who stood pensive and dull. — "I'll teach you to swell around," he yelled. "I'll plug your eyes for you, you blooming square-head." Most of the men were now in their bunks and the two had the forecastle clear to themselves. The development of the destitute Donkin aroused interest. He danced all in tatters before the amazed Finn, squaring from a distance at the heavy, unmoved face. One or two men cried encouragingly: "Go it, Whitechapel!" settling themselves luxuriously in their beds to survey the fight. Others shouted: "Shut yer row!... Go an' put yer 'ed in a bag!..." The hubbub was recommencing. Suddenly many heavy blows struck with a handspike on the deck above boomed like discharges of small cannon through the forecastle. Then the boatswain's voice rose outside the door with an authoritative note in its drawl: — "D'ye hear, below there? Lay aft! Lay aft to muster all hands!"

There was a moment of surprised stillness. Then the forecastle floor disappeared under men whose bare feet flopped on the planks as they sprang clear out of their berths. Caps were rooted for amongst tumbled blankets. Some, yawning, buttoned waistbands. Half-smoked pipes were knocked hurriedly against woodwork and stuffed under pillows. Voices growled: — "What's up?... Is there no rest for us?" Donkin yelled: — "If that's the way of this ship, we'll 'ave to change all that... You leave me alone... I will soon..." None of the crowd noticed him. They were lurching in twos and threes through the doors, after the manner of merchant Jacks who cannot go out of a door fairly, like mere landsmen. The votary of change followed them. Singleton, struggling

into his jacket, came last, tall and fatherly, bearing high his head of a weather-beaten sage on the body of an old athlete. Only Charley remained alone in the white glare of the empty place, sitting between the two rows of iron links that stretched into the narrow gloom forward. He pulled hard at the strands in a hurried endeavour to finish his knot. Suddenly he started up, flung the rope at the cat, and skipped after the black tom which went off leaping sedately over chain compressors, with its tail carried stiff and upright, like a small flag pole.

Outside the glare of the steaming forecastle the serene purity of the night enveloped the seamen with its soothing breath, with its tepid breath flowing under the stars that hung countless above the mastheads in a thin cloud of luminous dust. On the town side the blackness of the water was streaked with trails of light which undulated gently on slight ripples, similar to filaments that float rooted to the shore. Rows of other lights stood away in straight lines as if drawn up on parade between towering buildings; but on the other side of the harbour sombre hills arched high their black spines, on which, here and there, the point of a star resembled a spark fallen from the sky. Far off, Byculla way, the electric lamps at the dock gates shone on the end of lofty standards with a glow blinding and frigid like captive ghosts of some evil moons. Scattered all over the dark polish of the roadstead, the ships at anchor floated in perfect stillness under the feeble gleam of their riding-lights, looming up, opaque and bulky, like strange and monumental structures abandoned by men to an everlasting repose.

Before the cabin door Mr. Baker was mustering the crew. As they stumbled and lurched along past the mainmast, they could see aft his round, broad face with a white paper before it, and beside his shoulder the sleepy head, with dropped eyelids, of the boy, who held, suspended at the end of his raised arm, the luminous globe of a lamp. Even before the shuffle of naked soles had ceased along the decks, the mate began to call over the names. He called distinctly in a serious tone befitting this roll-call to unquiet loneliness, to inglorious and obscure struggle, or to the more trying endurance of small privations and wearisome duties. As the chief mate read out a name, one of the men would answer: "Yes, sir!" or "Here!" and, detaching himself from the shadowy mob of heads visible above the blackness of starboard bulwarks, would step bare-footed into the circle of light, and in two noiseless strides pass into the shadows on the port side of the quarterdeck. They answered in divers tones: in thick mutters, in clear, ringing voices; and some, as if the whole thing had been an outrage on their feelings, used an injured intonation: for discipline is not ceremonious in merchant ships, where the sense of hierarchy is weak, and where all feel themselves equal before the unconcerned immensity of the sea and the exacting appeal of the work. Mr. Baker read on steadily: — "Hansen — Campbell — Smith — Wamibo. Now, then, Wamibo. Why don't you answer? Always got to call your name twice." The Finn emitted at last an uncouth grunt, and, stepping out, passed through the patch of light, weird and gaudy, with the face of a man marching through a dream. The mate went on faster: — "Craik — Singleton — Donkin... O Lord!" he involuntarily ejaculated as the incredibly dilapidated figure appeared in the light. It stopped; it uncovered pale gums and long,

upper teeth in a malevolent grin. — "Is there any-think wrong with me, Mister Mate?" it asked, with a flavour of insolence in the forced simplicity of its tone. On both sides of the deck subdued titters were heard. — "That'll do. Go over," growled Mr. Baker, fixing the new hand with steady blue eyes. And Donkin vanished suddenly out of the light into the dark group of mustered men, to be slapped on the back and to hear flattering whispers: — "He ain't afeard, he'll give sport to 'em, see if he don't... Reg'lar Punch and Judy show... Did ye see the mate start at him?... Well! Damme, if I ever!..." The last man had gone over, and there was a moment of silence while the mate peered at his list. — "Sixteen, seventeen," he muttered. "I am one hand short, bo'sen," he said aloud. The big west-countryman at his elbow, swarthy and bearded like a gigantic Spaniard, said in a rumbling bass: — "There's no one left forward, sir. I had a look round. He ain't aboard, but he may, turn up before daylight." — "Ay. He may or he may not," commented the mate, "can't make out that last name. It's all a smudge... That will do, men. Go below."

The distinct and motionless group stirred, broke up, began to move forward.

"Wait!" cried a deep, ringing voice.

All stood still. Mr. Baker, who had turned away yawning, spun round open-mouthed. At last, furious, he blurted out: — "What's this? Who said 'Wait'? What..."

But he saw a tall figure standing on the rail. It came down and pushed through the crowd, marching with a heavy tread towards the light on the quarterdeck. Then again the sonorous voice said with insistence: — "Wait!" The lamplight lit up the man's body. He was tall. His head was away up in the shadows of lifeboats that stood on skids above the deck. The whites of his eyes and his teeth gleamed distinctly, but the face was indistinguishable. His hands were big and seemed gloved.

Mr. Baker advanced intrepidly. "Who are you? How dare you..." he began.

The boy, amazed like the rest, raised the light to the man's face. It was black. A surprised hum — a faint hum that sounded like the suppressed mutter of the word "Nigger" — ran along the deck and escaped out into the night. The nigger seemed not to hear. He balanced himself where he stood in a swagger that marked time. After a moment he said calmly: — "My name is Wait — James Wait."

"Oh!" said Mr. Baker. Then, after a few seconds of smouldering silence, his temper blazed out. "Ah! Your name is Wait. What of that? What do you want? What do you mean, coming shouting here?"

The nigger was calm, cool, towering, superb. The men had approached and stood behind him in a body. He overtopped the tallest by half a head. He said: "I belong to the ship." He enunciated distinctly, with soft precision. The deep, rolling tones of his voice filled the deck without effort. He was naturally scornful, unaffectedly condescending, as if from his height of six foot three he had surveyed all the vastness of human folly and had made up his mind not to be too hard on it. He went on: — "The captain shipped me this morning. I couldn't get aboard sooner. I saw you all aft as I came up the ladder, and could see directly you were mustering the crew. Naturally I called out my name. I thought you had it on your list, and would understand. You misapprehended."

He stopped short. The folly around him was confounded. He was right as ever, and as ever ready to forgive. The disdainful tones had ceased, and, breathing heavily, he stood still, surrounded by all these white men. He held his head up in the glare of the lamp — a head vigorously modelled into deep shadows and shining lights — a head powerful and misshapen with a tormented and flattened face — a face pathetic and brutal: the tragic, the mysterious, the repulsive mask of a nigger's soul.

Mr. Baker, recovering his composure, looked at the paper close. "Oh, yes; that's so. All right, Wait. Take your gear forward," he said.

Suddenly the nigger's eyes rolled wildly, became all whites. He put his hand to his side and coughed twice, a cough metallic, hollow, and tremendously loud; it resounded like two explosions in a vault; the dome of the sky rang to it, and the iron plates of the ship's bulwarks seemed to vibrate in unison, then he marched off forward with the others. The officers lingering by the cabin door could hear him say: "Won't some of you chaps lend a hand with my dunnage? I've got a chest and a bag." The words, spoken sonorously, with an even intonation, were heard all over the ship, and the question was put in a manner that made refusal impossible. The short, quick shuffle of men carrying something heavy went away forward, but the tall figure of the nigger lingered by the main hatch in a knot of smaller shapes. Again he was heard asking: "Is your cook a coloured gentleman?" Then a disappointed and disapproving "Ah! h'm!" was his comment upon the information that the cook happened to be a mere white man. Yet, as they went all together towards the forecabin, he condescended to put his head through the galley door and boom out inside a magnificent "Good evening, doctor!" that made all the saucepans ring. In the dim light the cook dozed on the coal locker in front of the captain's supper. He jumped up as if he had been cut with a whip, and dashed wildly on deck to see the backs of several men going away laughing. Afterwards, when talking about that voyage, he used to say: — "The poor fellow had scared me. I thought I had seen the devil." The cook had been seven years in the ship with the same captain. He was a serious-minded man with a wife and three children, whose society he enjoyed on an average one month out of twelve. When on shore he took his family to church twice every Sunday. At sea he went to sleep every evening with his lamp turned up full, a pipe in his mouth, and an open Bible in his hand. Some one had always to go during the night to put out the light, take the book from his hand, and the pipe from between his teeth. "For" — Belfast used to say, irritated and complaining — "some night, you stupid cookie, you'll swallow your ould clay, and we will have no cook." — "Ah! sonny, I am ready for my Maker's call... wish you all were," the other would answer with a benign serenity that was altogether imbecile and touching. Belfast outside the galley door danced with vexation. "You holy fool! I don't want you to die," he howled, looking up with furious, quivering face and tender eyes. "What's the hurry? You blessed wooden-headed ould heretic, the divvle will have you soon enough. Think of Us... of Us... of Us!" And he would go away, stamping, spitting aside, disgusted and worried; while the other, stepping out, saucepan in hand, hot, begrimed and placid,

watched with a superior, cock-sure smile the back of his "queer little man" reeling in a rage. They were great friends.

Mr. Baker, lounging over the after-hatch, sniffed the humid night in the company of the second mate. — "Those West India niggers run fine and large — some of them... Ough!... Don't they? A fine, big man that, Mr. Creighton. Feel him on a rope. Hey? Ough! I will take him into my watch, I think." The second mate, a fair, gentlemanly young fellow, with a resolute face and a splendid physique, observed quietly that it was just about what he expected. There could be felt in his tone some slight bitterness which Mr. Baker very kindly set himself to argue away. "Come, come, young man," he said, grunting between the words. "Come! Don't be too greedy. You had that big Finn in your watch all the voyage. I will do what's fair. You may have those two young Scandinavians and I... Ough!... I get the nigger, and will take that... Ough! that cheeky costermonger chap in a black frock-coat. I'll make him... Ough!... make him toe the mark, or my... Ough!... name isn't Baker. Ough! Ough! Ough!"

He grunted thrice — ferociously. He had that trick of grunting so between his words and at the end of sentences. It was a fine, effective grunt that went well with his menacing utterance, with his heavy, bull-necked frame, his jerky, rolling gait; with his big, seamed face, his steady eyes, and sardonic mouth. But its effect had been long ago discounted by the men. They liked him; Belfast — who was a favourite, and knew it — mimicked him, not quite behind his back. Charley — but with greater caution — imitated his rolling gait. Some of his sayings became established, daily quotations in the forecastle. Popularity can go no farther! Besides, all hands were ready to admit that on a fitting occasion the mate could "jump down a fellow's throat in a reg'lar Western Ocean style."

Now he was giving his last orders. "Ough! You, Knowles! Call all hands at four. I want... Ough!... to heave short before the tug comes. Look out for the captain. I am going to lie down in my clothes... Ough!... Call me when you see the boat coming. Ough! Ough!. The old man is sure to have something to say when he gets aboard," he remarked to Creighton. "Well, good-night... Ough! A long day before us to-morrow... Ough!... Better turn in now. Ough! Ough!"

Upon the dark deck a band of light flashed, then a door slammed, and Mr. Baker was gone into his neat cabin. Young Creighton stood leaning over the rail, and looked dreamily into the night of the East. And he saw in it a long country lane, a lane of waving leaves and dancing sunshine. He saw stirring boughs of old trees outspread, and framing in their arch the tender, the caressing blueness of an English sky. And through the arch a girl in a light dress, smiling under a sunshade, seemed to be stepping out of the tender sky.

At the other end of the ship the forecastle, with only one lamp burning now, was going to sleep in a dim emptiness traversed by loud breathings, by sudden short sighs. The double row of berths yawned black, like graves tenanted by uneasy corpses. Here and there a curtain of gaudy chintz, half drawn, marked the resting-place of a sybarite. A leg hung over the edge very white and lifeless. An arm stuck straight out with a dark

palm turned up, and thick fingers half closed. Two light snores, that did not synchronise, quarrelled in funny dialogue. Singleton stripped again — the old man suffered much from prickly heat — stood cooling his back in the doorway, with his arms crossed on his bare and adorned chest. His head touched the beam of the deck above. The nigger, half undressed, was busy casting adrift the lashing of his box, and spreading his bedding in an upper berth. He moved about in his socks, tall and noiseless, with a pair of braces beating about his calves. Amongst the shadows of stanchions and bowsprit, Donkin munched a piece of hard ship's bread, sitting on the deck with upturned feet and restless eyes; he held the biscuit up before his mouth in the whole fist and snapped his jaws at it with a raging face. Crumbs fell between his outspread legs. Then he got up.

"Where's our water-cask?" he asked in a contained voice.

Singleton, without a word, pointed with a big hand that held a short smouldering pipe. Donkin bent over the cask, drank out of the tin, splashing the water, turned round and noticed the nigger looking at him over the shoulder with calm loftiness. He moved up sideways.

"There's a blooming supper for a man," he whispered bitterly. "My dorg at 'ome wouldn't 'ave it. It's fit enouf for you an' me. 'Ere's a big ship's fo'c'sle!... Not a blooming scrap of meat in the kids. I've looked in all the lockers..."

The nigger stared like a man addressed unexpectedly in a foreign language. Donkin changed his tone: — "Giv' us a bit of 'baccy, mate," he breathed out confidentially, "I 'aven't 'ad smoke or chew for the last month. I am rampin' mad for it. Come on, old man!"

"Don't be familiar," said the nigger. Donkin started and sat down on a chest near by, out of sheer surprise. "We haven't kept pigs together," continued James Wait in a deep undertone. "Here's your tobacco." Then, after a pause, he inquired: — "What ship?" — "Golden State," muttered Donkin indistinctly, biting the tobacco. The nigger whistled low. — "Ran?" he said curtly. Donkin nodded: one of his cheeks bulged out. "In course I ran," he mumbled. "They booted the life hout of one Dago chap on the passage 'ere, then started on me. I cleared hout 'ere. — " "Left your dunnage behind?" — "Yes, dunnage and money," answered Donkin, raising his voice a little; "I got nothink. No clothes, no bed. A bandy-legged little Hirish chap 'ere 'as give me a blanket. Think I'll go an' sleep in the fore topmast staysail to-night."

He went on deck trailing behind his back a corner of the blanket. Singleton, without a glance, moved slightly aside to let him pass. The nigger put away his shore togs and sat in clean working clothes on his box, one arm stretched over his knees. After staring at Singleton for some time he asked without emphasis: — "What kind of ship is this? Pretty fair? Eh?"

Singleton didn't stir. A long while after he said, with unmoved face: — "Ship!... Ships are all right. It is the men in them!"

He went on smoking in the profound silence. The wisdom of half a century spent in listening to the thunder of the waves had spoken unconsciously through his old lips. The cat purred on the windlass. Then James Wait had a fit of roaring, rattling cough,

that shook him, tossed him like a hurricane, and flung him panting with staring eyes headlong on his sea-chest. Several men woke up. One said sleepily out of his bunk: "Struth! what a blamed row!" — "I have a cold on my chest," gasped Wait. — "Cold! you call it," grumbled the man; "should think 'twas something more..." — "Oh! you think so," said the nigger upright and loftily scornful again. He climbed into his berth and began coughing persistently while he put his head out to glare all round the fore-castle. There was no further protest. He fell back on the pillow, and could be heard there wheezing regularly like a man oppressed in his sleep.

Singleton stood at the door with his face to the light and his back to the darkness. And alone in the dim emptiness of the sleeping fore-castle he appeared bigger, colossal, very old; old as Father Time himself, who should have come there into this place as quiet as a sepulchre to contemplate with patient eyes the short victory of sleep, the consoler. Yet he was only a child of time, a lonely relic of a devoured and forgotten generation. He stood, still strong, as ever unthinking; a ready man with a vast empty past and with no future, with his childlike impulses and his man's passions already dead within his tattooed breast. The men who could understand his silence were gone — those men who knew how to exist beyond the pale of life and within sight of eternity. They had been strong, as those are strong who know neither doubts nor hopes. They had been impatient and enduring, turbulent and devoted, unruly and faithful. Well-meaning people had tried to represent those men as whining over every mouthful of their food; as going about their work in fear of their lives. But in truth they had been men who knew toil, privation, violence, debauchery — but knew not fear, and had no desire of spite in their hearts. Men hard to manage, but easy to inspire; voiceless men — but men enough to scorn in their hearts the sentimental voices that bewailed the hardness of their fate. It was a fate unique and their own; the capacity to bear it appeared to them the privilege of the chosen! Their generation lived inarticulate and, indispensable, without knowing the sweetness of affections or the refuge of a home — and died free from the dark menace of a narrow grave. They were the everlasting children of the mysterious sea. Their successors are the grown-up children of a discontented earth. They are less naughty, but less innocent; less profane, but perhaps also less believing; and if they have learned how to speak they have also learned how to whine. But the others were strong and mute; they were effaced, bowed and enduring, like stone caryatides that hold up in the night the lighted halls of a resplendent and glorious edifice. They are gone now — and it does not matter. The sea and the earth are unfaithful to their children: a truth, a faith, a generation of men goes — and is forgotten, and it does not matter! Except, perhaps, to the few of those who believed the truth, confessed the faith — or loved the men.

A breeze was coming. The ship that had been lying tide-rode swung to a heavier puff; and suddenly the slack of the chain cable between the windlass and the hawse-pipe clinked, slipped forward an inch, and rose gently off the deck with a startling suggestion as of unsuspected life that had been lurking stealthily in the iron. In the hawse-pipe the grinding links sent through the ship a sound like a low groan of a man

sighing under a burden. The strain came on the windlass, the chain tautened like a string, vibrated — and the handle of the screw-brake moved in slight jerks. Singleton stepped forward.

Till then he had been standing meditative and unthinking, reposeful and hopeless, with a face grim and blank — a sixty-year-old child of the mysterious sea. The thoughts of all his lifetime could have been expressed in six words, but the stir of those things that were as much part of his existence as his beating heart called up a gleam of alert understanding upon the sternness of his aged face. The flame of the lamp swayed, and the old man, with knitted and bushy eyebrows, stood over the brake, watchful and motionless in the wild saraband of dancing shadows. Then the ship, obedient to the call of her anchor, forged ahead slightly and eased the strain. The cable relieved, hung down, and after swaying imperceptibly to and fro dropped with a loud tap on the hard wood planks. Singleton seized the high lever, and, by a violent throw forward of his body, wrung out another half-turn from the brake. He recovered himself, breathed largely, and remained for a while glaring down at the powerful and compact engine that squatted on the deck at his feet like some quiet monster — a creature amazing and tame.

“You... hold!” he growled at it masterfully in the incult tangle of his white beard.

Chapter 2

Next morning, at daylight, the *Narcissus* went to sea.

A slight haze blurred the horizon. Outside the harbour the measureless expanse of smooth water lay sparkling like a floor of jewels, and as empty as the sky. The short black tug gave a pluck to windward, in the usual way, then let go the rope, and hovered for a moment on the quarter with her engines stopped; while the slim, long hull of the ship moved ahead slowly under lower topsails. The loose upper canvas blew out in the breeze with soft round contours, resembling small white clouds snared in the maze of ropes. Then the sheets were hauled home, the yards hoisted, and the ship became a high and lonely pyramid, gliding, all shining and white, through the sunlit mist. The tug turned short round and went away towards the land. Twenty-six pairs of eyes watched her low broad stern crawling languidly over the smooth swell between the two paddle-wheels that turned fast, beating the water with fierce hurry. She resembled an enormous and aquatic black beetle, surprised by the light, overwhelmed by the sunshine, trying to escape with ineffectual effort into the distant gloom of the land. She left a lingering smudge of smoke on the sky, and two vanishing trails of foam on the water. On the place where she had stopped a round black patch of soot remained, undulating on the swell — an unclean mark of the creature's rest.

The *Narcissus* left alone, heading south, seemed to stand resplendent and still upon the restless sea, under the moving sun. Flakes of foam swept past her sides; the water struck her with flashing blows; the land glided away slowly fading; a few birds screamed on motionless wings over the swaying mastheads. But soon the land disappeared, the birds went away; and to the west the pointed sail of an Arab dhow running for Bombay, rose triangular and upright above the sharp edge of the horizon, lingered and vanished like an illusion. Then the ship's wake, long and straight, stretched itself out through a day of immense solitude. The setting sun, burning on the level of the water, flamed crimson below the blackness of heavy rain clouds. The sunset squall, coming up from behind, dissolved itself into the short deluge of a hissing shower. It left the ship glistening from trucks to water-line, and with darkened sails. She ran easily before a fair monsoon, with her decks cleared for the night; and, moving along with her, was heard the sustained and monotonous swishing of the waves, mingled with the low whispers of men mustered aft for the setting of watches; the short plaint of some block aloft; or, now and then, a loud sigh of wind.

Mr. Baker, coming out of his cabin, called out the first name sharply before closing the door behind him. He was going to take charge of the deck. On the homeward trip, according to an old custom of the sea, the chief officer takes the first night-watch —

from eight till midnight. So Mr. Baker, after he had heard the last "Yes, sir!" said moodily, "Relieve the wheel and look-out"; and climbed with heavy feet the poop ladder to windward. Soon after Mr. Creighton came down, whistling softly, and went into the cabin. On the doorstep the steward lounged, in slippers, meditative, and with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to the armpits.

On the main deck the cook, locking up the galley doors, had an altercation with young Charley about a pair of socks. He could be heard saying impressively, in the darkness amidships: "You don't deserve a kindness. I've been drying them for you, and now you complain about the holes — and you swear, too! Right in front of me! If I hadn't been a Christian — which you ain't, you young ruffian — I would give you a clout on the head... Go away!" Men in couples or threes stood pensive or moved silently along the bulwarks in the waist. The first busy day of a homeward passage was sinking into the dull peace of resumed routine. Aft, on the high poop, Mr. Baker walked shuffling and grunted to himself in the pauses of his thoughts. Forward, the look-out man, erect between the flukes of the two anchors, hummed an endless tune, keeping his eyes fixed dutifully ahead in a vacant stare. A multitude of stars coming out into the clear night peopled the emptiness of the sky. They glittered, as if alive above the sea; they surrounded the running ship on all sides; more intense than the eyes of a staring crowd, and as inscrutable as the souls of men.

The passage had begun, and the ship, a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet. Round her the abysses of sky and sea met in an unattainable frontier. A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same, always monotonous and always imposing. Now and then another wandering white speck, burdened with life, appeared far off — disappeared; intent on its own destiny. The sun looked upon her all day, and every morning rose with a burning, round stare of undying curiosity. She had her own future; she was alive with the lives of those beings who trod her decks; like that earth which had given her up to the sea, she had an intolerable load of regrets and hopes. On her lived timid truth and audacious lies; and, like the earth, she was unconscious, fair to see — and condemned by men to an ignoble fate. The august loneliness of her path lent dignity to the sordid inspiration of her pilgrimage. She drove foaming to the southward, as if guided by the courage of a high endeavour. The smiling greatness of the sea dwarfed the extent of time. The days raced after one another, brilliant and quick like the flashes of a lighthouse, and the nights, eventful and short, resembled fleeting dreams.

The men had shaken into their places, and the half-hourly voice of the bells ruled their life of unceasing care. Night and day the head and shoulders of a seaman could be seen aft by the wheel, outlined high against sunshine or starlight, very steady above the stir of revolving spokes. The faces changed, passing in rotation. Youthful faces, bearded faces, dark faces: faces serene, or faces moody, but all akin with the brotherhood of the sea; all with the same attentive expression of eyes, carefully watching the compass or the sails. Captain Allistoun, serious, and with an old red muffler round his throat, all day long pervaded the poop. At night, many times he rose out of the darkness of the

companion, such as a phantom above a grave, and stood watchful and mute under the stars, his night-shirt fluttering like a flag — then, without a sound, sank down again. He was born on the shores of the Pentland Firth. In his youth he attained the rank of harpooner in Peterhead whalers. When he spoke of that time his restless grey eyes became still and cold, like the loom of ice. Afterwards he went into the East Indian trade for the sake of change. He had commanded the *Narcissus* since she was built. He loved his ship, and drove her unmercifully; for his secret ambition was to make her accomplish some day a brilliantly quick passage which would be mentioned in nautical papers. He pronounced his owner's name with a sardonic smile, spoke but seldom to his officers, and reproofed errors in a gentle voice, with words that cut to the quick. His hair was iron-grey, his face hard and of the colour of pump-leather. He shaved every morning of his life — at six — but once (being caught in a fierce hurricane eighty miles southwest of Mauritius) he had missed three consecutive days. He feared naught but an unforgiving God, and wished to end his days in a little house, with a plot of ground attached — far in the country — out of sight of the sea.

He, the ruler of that minute world, seldom descended from the Olympian heights of his poop. Below him — at his feet, so to speak — common mortals led their busy and insignificant lives. Along the main deck, Mr. Baker grunted in a manner bloodthirsty and innocuous; and kept all our noses to the grindstone, being — as he once remarked — paid for doing that very thing. The men working about the deck were healthy and contented — as most seamen are, when once well out to sea. The true peace of God begins at any spot a thousand miles from the nearest land; and when He sends there the messengers of His might it is not in terrible wrath against crime, presumption, and folly, but paternally, to chasten simple hearts — ignorant hearts that know nothing of life, and beat undisturbed by envy or greed.

In the evening the cleared decks had a reposeful aspect, resembling the autumn of the earth. The sun was sinking to rest, wrapped in a mantle of warm clouds. Forward, on the end of the spare spars, the boatswain and the carpenter sat together with crossed arms; two men friendly, powerful, and deep-chested. Beside them the short, dumpy sailmaker — who had been in the Navy — related, between the whiffs of his pipe, impossible stories about Admirals. Couples tramped backwards and forwards, keeping step and balance without effort, in a confined space. Pigs grunted in the big pigstye. Belfast, leaning thoughtfully on his elbow, above the bars, communed with them through the silence of his meditation. Fellows with shirts open wide on sunburnt breasts sat upon the mooring bits, and all up the steps of the fore-castle ladders. By the fore-mast a few discussed in a circle the characteristics of a gentleman. One said: — "It's money as does it." Another maintained: — "No, it's the way they speak." Lame Knowles stumped up with an unwashed face (he had the distinction of being the dirty man of the fore-castle), and showing a few yellow fangs in a shrewd smile, explained craftily that he "had seen some of their pants." The backsides of them — he had observed — were thinner than paper from constant sitting down in offices, yet otherwise they looked first-rate and would last for years. It was all appearance. "It was," he said, "bloomin' "

easy to be a gentleman when you had a clean job for life.” They disputed endlessly, obstinate and childish; they repeated in shouts and with inflamed faces their amazing arguments; while the soft breeze, eddying down the enormous cavity of the foresail, distended above their bare heads, stirred the tumbled hair with a touch passing and light like an indulgent caress.

They were forgetting their toil, they were forgetting themselves. The cook approached to hear, and stood by, beaming with the inward consciousness of his faith, like a conceited saint unable to forget his glorious reward; Donkin, solitary and brooding over his wrongs on the fore-castle-head, moved closer to catch the drift of the discussion below him; he turned his sallow face to the sea, and his thin nostrils moved, sniffing the breeze, as he lounged negligently by the rail. In the glow of sunset faces shone with interest, teeth flashed, eyes sparkled. The walking couples stood still suddenly, with broad grins; a man, bending over a wash-tub, sat up, entranced, with the soapsuds flecking his wet arms. Even the three petty officers listened leaning back, comfortably propped, and with superior smiles. Belfast left off scratching the ear of his favourite pig, and, open mouthed, tried with eager eyes to have his say. He lifted his arms, grimacing and baffled. From a distance Charley screamed at the ring: — ”I know about gentlemen more’n any of you. I’ve been intermit with ‘em... I’ve blacked their boots.” The cook, craning his neck to hear better, was scandalised. “Keep your mouth shut when your elders speak, you impudent young heathen — you.” “All right, old Hallelujah, I’m done,” answered Charley, soothingly. At some opinion of dirty Knowles, delivered with an air of supernatural cunning, a ripple of laughter ran along, rose like a wave, burst with a startling roar. They stamped with both feet; they turned their shouting faces to the sky; many, spluttering, slapped their thighs; while one or two, bent double, gasped, hugging themselves with both arms like men in pain. The carpenter and the boatswain, without changing their attitude, shook with laughter where they sat; the sailmaker, charged with an anecdote about a Commodore, looked sulky; the cook was wiping his eyes with a greasy rag; and lame Knowles, astonished at his own success, stood in their midst showing a slow smile.

Suddenly the face of Donkin leaning high-shouldered over the after-rail became grave. Something like a weak rattle was heard through the fore-castle door. It became a murmur; it ended in a sighing groan. The washerman plunged both his arms into the tub abruptly; the cook became more crestfallen than an exposed backslider; the boatswain moved his shoulders uneasily; the carpenter got up with a spring and walked away — while the sailmaker seemed mentally to give his story up, and began to puff at his pipe with sombre determination. In the blackness of the doorway a pair of eyes glimmered white, and big, and staring. Then James Wait’s head protruding, became visible, as if suspended between the two hands that grasped a doorpost on each side of the face. The tassel of his blue woollen nightcap, cocked forward, danced gaily over his left eyelid. He stepped out in a tottering stride. He looked powerful as ever, but showed a strange and affected unsteadiness in his gait; his face was perhaps a trifle thinner, and his eyes appeared rather startlingly prominent. He seemed to hasten the

retreat of departing light by his very presence; the setting sun dipped sharply, as though fleeing before our nigger; a black mist emanated from him; a subtle and dismal influence; a something cold and gloomy that floated out and settled on all the faces like a mourning veil. The circle broke up. The joy of laughter died on stiffened lips. There was not a smile left among all the ship's company. Not a word was spoken. Many turned their backs, trying to look unconcerned; others, with averted heads, sent half-reluctant glances out of the corners of their eyes. They resembled criminals conscious of misdeeds more than honest men distracted by doubt; only two or three stared frankly, but stupidly, with lips slightly open. All expected James Wait to say something, and, at the same time, had the air of knowing beforehand what he would say. He leaned his back against the doorpost, and with heavy eyes swept over them a glance domineering and pained, like a sick tyrant overawing a crowd of abject but untrustworthy slaves.

No one went away. They waited in fascinated dread. He said ironically, with gasps between the words: —

“Thank you... chaps. You... are nice... and... quiet... you are! Yelling so... before... the door...”

He made a longer pause, during which he worked his ribs in an exaggerated labour of breathing. It was intolerable. Feet were shuffled. Belfast let out a groan; but Donkin above blinked his red eyelids with invisible eyelashes, and smiled bitterly over the nigger's head.

The nigger went on again with surprising ease. He gasped no more, and his voice rang, hollow and loud, as though he had been talking in an empty cavern. He was contemptuously angry.

“I tried to get a wink of sleep. You know I can't sleep o' nights. And you come jabbering near the door here like a blooming lot of old women... You think yourselves good shipmates. Do you?... Much you care for a dying man!”

Belfast spun away from the pigstye. “Jimmy,” he cried tremulously, “if you hadn't been sick I would — — — ”

He stopped. The nigger waited awhile, then said, in a gloomy tone: — “You would... What? Go an' fight another such one as yourself. Leave me alone. It won't be for long. I'll soon die... It's coming right enough!”

Men stood around very still and with exasperated eyes. It was just what they had expected, and hated to hear, that idea of a stalking death, thrust at them many times a day like a boast and like a menace by this obnoxious nigger. He seemed to take a pride in that death which, so far, had attended only upon the ease of his life; he was overbearing about it, as if no one else in the world had ever been intimate with such a companion; he paraded it unceasingly before us with an affectionate persistence that made its presence indubitable, and at the same time incredible. No man could be suspected of such monstrous friendship! Was he a reality — or was he a sham — this ever-expected visitor of Jimmy's? We hesitated between pity and mistrust, while, on the slightest provocation, he shook before our eyes the bones of his bothersome and infamous skeleton. He was for ever trotting him out. He would talk of that coming

death as though it had been already there, as if it had been walking the deck outside, as if it would presently come in to sleep in the only empty bunk; as if it had sat by his side at every meal. It interfered daily with our occupations, with our leisure, with our amusements. We had no songs and no music in the evening, because Jimmy (we all lovingly called him Jimmy, to conceal our hate of his accomplice) had managed, with that prospective decease of his, to disturb even Archie's mental balance. Archie was the owner of the concertina; but after a couple of stinging lectures from Jimmy he refused to play any more. He said: — "Yon's an uncanny joker. I dinna ken what's wrang wi' him, but there's something verra wrang, verra wrang. It's nae manner of use asking me. I won't play." Our singers became mute because Jimmy was a dying man. For the same reason no chap — as Knowles remarked — could "drive in a nail to hang his few poor rags upon," without being made aware of the enormity he committed in disturbing Jimmy's interminable last moments. At night, instead of the cheerful yell, "One bell! Turn out! Do you hear there? Hey! hey! hey! Show leg!" the watches were called man by man, in whispers, so as not to interfere with Jimmy's, possibly, last slumber on earth. True, he was always awake, and managed, as we sneaked out on deck, to plant in our backs some cutting remark that, for the moment, made us feel as if we had been brutes, and afterwards made us suspect ourselves of being fools. We spoke in low tones within that fo'c'sle as though it had been a church. We ate our meals in silence and dread, for Jimmy was capricious with his food, and railed bitterly at the salt meat, at the biscuits, at the tea, as at articles unfit for human consumption — "let alone for a dying man!" He would say: — "Can't you find a better slice of meat for a sick man who's trying to get home to be cured — or buried? But there! If I had a chance, you fellows would do away with it. You would poison me. Look at what you have given me!" We served him in his bed with rage and humility, as though we had been the base courtiers of a hated prince; and he rewarded us by his unconciliating criticism. He had found the secret of keeping for ever on the run the fundamental imbecility of mankind; he had the secret of life, that confounded dying man, and he made himself master of every moment of our existence. We grew desperate, and remained submissive. Emotional little Belfast was for ever on the verge of assault or on the verge of tears. One evening he confided to Archie: — "For a ha'penny I would knock his ugly black head off — the skulking dodger!" And the straightforward Archie pretended to be shocked! Such was the infernal spell which that casual St. Kitt's nigger had cast upon our guileless manhood! But the same night Belfast stole from the galley the officers' Sunday fruit pie, to tempt the fastidious appetite of Jimmy. He endangered not only his long friendship with the cook but also — as it appeared — his eternal welfare. The cook was overwhelmed with grief; he did not know the culprit but he knew that wickedness flourished; he knew that Satan was abroad amongst those men, whom he looked upon as in some way under his spiritual care. Whenever he saw three or four of us standing together he would leave his stove, to run out and preach. We fled from him; and only Charley (who knew the thief) affronted the cook with a candid gaze which irritated the good man. "It's you, I believe," he groaned, sorrowful and with a

patch of soot on his chin. "It's you. You are a brand for the burning! No more of your socks in my galley." Soon, unofficially, the information was spread about that, should there be another case of stealing, our marmalade (an extra allowance: half a pound per man) would be stopped. Mr. Baker ceased to heap jocular abuse upon his favourites, and grunted suspiciously at all. The captain's cold eyes, high up on the poop, glittered mistrustful, as he surveyed us trooping in a small mob from halyards to braces for the usual evening pull at all the ropes. Such stealing in a merchant ship is difficult to check, and may be taken as a declaration by men of their dislike for their officers. It is a bad symptom. It may end in God knows what trouble. The *Narcissus* was still a peaceful ship, but mutual confidence was shaken. Donkin did not conceal his delight. We were dismayed.

Then illogical Belfast reproached our nigger with great fury. James Wait, with his elbow on the pillow, choked, gasped out: — "Did I ask you to bone the dratted thing? Blow your blamed pie. It has made me worse — you little Irish lunatic, you!" Belfast, with scarlet face and trembling lips, made a dash at him. Every man in the forecabin rose with a shout. There was a moment of wild tumult. Some one shrieked piercingly: — "Easy, Belfast! Easy!..." We expected Belfast to strangle Wait without more ado. Dust flew. We heard through it the nigger's cough, metallic and explosive like a gong. Next moment we saw Belfast hanging over him. He was saying plaintively: — "Don't! Don't, Jimmy! Don't be like that. An angel couldn't put up with ye — sick as ye are." He looked round at us from Jimmy's bedside, his comical mouth twitching, and through tearful eyes; then he tried to put straight the disarranged blankets. The unceasing whisper of the sea filled the forecabin. Was James Wait frightened, or touched, or repentant? He lay on his back with a hand to his side, and as motionless as if his expected visitor had come at last. Belfast fumbled about his feet, repeating with emotion: — "Yes. We know. Ye are bad, but... Just say what ye want done, and... We all know ye are bad — very bad..." No! Decidedly James Wait was not touched or repentant. Truth to say, he seemed rather startled. He sat up with incredible suddenness and ease. "Ah! You think I am bad, do you?" he said gloomily, in his clearest baritone voice (to hear him speak sometimes you would never think there was anything wrong with that man). "Do you?... Well, act according! Some of you haven't sense enough to put a blanket shipshape over a sick man. There! Leave it alone! I can die anyhow!" Belfast turned away limply with a gesture of discouragement. In the silence of the forecabin, full of interested men, Donkin pronounced distinctly: — "Well, I'm blown!" and sniggered. Wait looked at him. He looked at him in a quite friendly manner. Nobody could tell what would please our incomprehensible invalid: but for us the scorn of that snigger was hard to bear.

Donkin's position in the forecabin was distinguished but unsafe. He stood on the bad eminence of a general dislike. He was left alone; and in his isolation he could do nothing but think of the gales of the Cape of Good Hope and envy us the possession of warm clothing and waterproofs. Our sea-boots, our oilskin coats, our well-filled sea-chests, were to him so many causes for bitter meditation: he had none of those

things, and he felt instinctively that no man, when the need arose, would offer to share them with him. He was impudently cringing to us and systematically insolent to the officers. He anticipated the best results, for himself, from such a line of conduct — and was mistaken. Such natures forget that under extreme provocation men will be just — whether they want to be so or not. Donkin's insolence to long-suffering Mr. Baker became at last intolerable to us, and we rejoiced when the mate, one dark night, tamed him for good.

It was done neatly, with great decency and decorum, and with little noise. We had been called — just before midnight — to trim the yards, and Donkin — as usual — made insulting remarks. We stood sleepily in a row with the forebrace in our hands waiting for the next order, and heard in the darkness a scuffly trampling of feet, an exclamation of surprise, sounds of cuffs and slaps, suppressed, hissing whispers: — "Ah! Will you!"... "Don't!... Don't!"... "Then behave."... "Oh! Oh!..." Afterwards there were soft thuds mixed with the rattle of iron things as if a man's body had been tumbling helplessly amongst the main-pump rods. Before we could realise the situation, Mr. Baker's voice was heard very near and a little impatient: — "Haul away, men! Lay back on that rope!" And we did lay back on the rope with great alacrity. As if nothing had happened, the chief mate went on trimming the yards with his usual and exasperating fastidiousness. We didn't at the time see anything of Donkin, and did not care. Had the chief officer thrown him overboard, no man would have said as much as "Hallo! he's gone!" But, in truth, no great harm was done — even if Donkin did lose one of his front teeth. We perceived this in the morning, and preserved a ceremonious silence: the etiquette of the fore-castle commanded us to be blind and dumb in such a case, and we cherished the decencies of our life more than ordinary landsmen respect theirs. Charley, with unpardonable want of savoir vivre, yelled out: — "Ave you been to your dentist?... Hurt ye, didn't it?" He got a box on the ear from one of his best friends. The boy was surprised, and remained plunged in grief for at least three hours. We were sorry for him, but youth requires even more discipline than age. Donkin grinned venomously. From that day he became pitiless; told Jimmy that he was a "black fraud"; hinted to us that we were an imbecile lot, daily taken in by a vulgar nigger. And Jimmy seemed to like the fellow!

Singleton lived untouched by human emotions. Taciturn and unsmiling, he breathed amongst us — in that alone resembling the rest of the crowd. We were trying to be decent chaps, and found it jolly difficult; we oscillated between the desire of virtue and the fear of ridicule; we wished to save ourselves from the pain of remorse, but did not want to be made the contemptible dupes of our sentiment. Jimmy's hateful accomplice seemed to have blown with his impure breath undreamt of subtleties into our hearts. We were disturbed and cowardly. That we knew. Singleton seemed to know nothing, understand nothing. We had thought him till then as wise as he looked, but now we dared, at times, suspect him of being stupid — from old age. One day, however, at dinner, as we sat on our boxes round a tin dish that stood on the deck within the circle of our feet, Jimmy expressed his general disgust with men and things in words

that were particularly disgusting. Singleton lifted his head. We became mute. The old man, addressing Jimmy, asked: — "Are you dying?" Thus interrogated, James Wait appeared horribly startled and confused. We all were startled. Mouths remained open; hearts thumped, eyes blinked; a dropped tin fork rattled in the dish; a man rose as if to go out, and stood still. In less than a minute Jimmy pulled himself together: — "Why? Can't you see I am?" he answered shakily. Singleton lifted a piece of soaked biscuit ("his teeth" — he declared — "had no edge on them now") to his lips. — "Well, get on with your dying," he said with venerable mildness; "don't raise a blamed fuss with us over that job. We can't help you." Jimmy fell back in his bunk, and for a long time lay very still wiping the perspiration off his chin. The dinner-tins were put away quickly. On deck we discussed the incident in whispers. Some showed a chuckling exultation. Many looked grave. Wamibo, after long periods of staring dreaminess, attempted abortive smiles; and one of the young Scandinavians, much tormented by doubt, ventured in the second dog-watch to approach Singleton (the old man did not encourage us much to speak to him) and ask sheepishly: — "You think he will die?" Singleton looked up. — "Why, of course he will die," he said deliberately. This seemed decisive. It was promptly imparted to every one by him who had consulted the oracle. Shy and eager, he would step up and with averted gaze recite his formula: — "Old Singleton says he will die." It was a relief! At last we knew that our compassion would not be misplaced, and we could again smile without misgivings — but we reckoned without Donkin. Donkin "didn't want to 'ave no truck with 'em dirty furriners." When Nilsen came to him with the news: "Singleton says he will die," he answered him by a spiteful "And so will you — you fat-headed Dutchman. Wish you Dutchmen were all dead — 'stead comin' takin' our money inter your starvin' country." We were appalled. We perceived that after all Singleton's answer meant nothing. We began to hate him for making fun of us. All our certitudes were going; we were on doubtful terms with our officers; the cook had given us up for lost; we had overheard the boatswain's opinion that "we were a crowd of softies." We suspected Jimmy, one another, and even our very selves. We did not know what to do. At every insignificant turn of our humble life we met Jimmy overbearing and blocking the way, arm-in-arm with his awful and veiled familiar. It was a weird servitude.

It began a week after leaving Bombay and came on us stealthily like any other great misfortune. Every one had remarked that Jimmy from the first was very slack at his work; but we thought it simply the outcome of his philosophy of life. Donkin said: — "You put no more weight on a rope than a bloody sparrer." He disdained him. Belfast, ready for a fight, exclaimed provokingly: — "You don't kill yourself, old man!" — "Would you?" he retorted with extreme, scorn — and Belfast retired. One morning, as we were washing decks, Mr. Baker called to him: — "Bring your broom over here, Wait." He strolled languidly.

"Move yourself! Ough!" grunted Mr. Baker; "what's the matter with your hind legs?" He stopped dead short. He gazed slowly with eyes that bulged out with an expression audacious and sad. — "It isn't my legs," he said, "it's my lungs." Everybody listened.

— "What's... Ough!... What's wrong with them?" inquired Mr. Baker. All the watch stood around on the wet deck, grinning, and with brooms or buckets in their hands. He said mournfully: — "Going — or gone. Can't you see I'm a dying man? I know it!" Mr. Baker was disgusted. — "Then why the devil did you ship aboard here?" — "I must live till I die — mustn't I?" he replied. The grins became audible. — "Go off my deck — get out of my sight," said Mr. Baker. He was nonplussed. It was a unique experience. James Wait, obedient, dropped his broom, and walked slowly forward. A burst of laughter followed him. It was too funny. All hands laughed... They laughed!... Alas!

He became the tormentor of all our moments; he "was worse than a nightmare. You couldn't see that there was anything wrong with him: a nigger does not show. He was not very fat — certainly — but then he was no leaner than other niggers we had known. He coughed often, but the most prejudiced person could perceive that, mostly, he coughed when it suited his purpose. He wouldn't, or couldn't, do his work — and he wouldn't lie-up. One day he would skip aloft with the best of them, and next time we would be obliged to risk our lives to get his limp body down. He was reported, he was examined; he was remonstrated with, threatened, cajoled, lectured. He was called into the cabin to interview the captain. There were wild rumours. It was said he had cheeked the old man; it was said he had frightened him. Charley maintained that the "skipper, weepin,' 'as giv' 'im 'is blessin' an' a pot of jam." Knowles had it from the steward that the unspeakable Jimmy had been reeling against the cabin furniture; that he had groaned; that he had complained of general brutality and disbelief; and had ended by coughing all over the old man's meteorological journals which were then spread on the table. At any rate, Wait returned forward supported by the steward, who, in a pained and shocked voice, entreated us: — "Here! Catch hold of him, one of you. He is to lie-up." Jimmy drank a tin mugful of coffee, and, after bullying first one and then another, went to bed. He remained there most of the time, but when it suited him would come on deck and appear amongst us. He was scornful and brooding; he looked ahead upon the sea, and no one could tell what was the meaning of that black man sitting apart in a meditative attitude and as motionless as a carving.

He refused steadily all medicine; he threw sago and cornflour overboard till the steward got tired of bringing it to him. He asked for paregoric. They sent him a big bottle; enough to poison a wilderness of babies. He kept it between his mattress and the deal lining of the ship's side; and nobody ever saw him take a dose. Donkin abused him to his face, jeered at him while he gasped; and the same day Wait would lend him a warm jersey. Once Donkin reviled him for half an hour; reproached him with the extra work his malingering gave to the watch; and ended by calling him "a black-faced swine." Under the spell of our accursed perversity we were horror-struck. But Jimmy positively seemed to revel in that abuse. It made him look cheerful — and Donkin had a pair of old sea boots thrown at him. "Here, you East-end trash," boomed Wait, "you may have that."

At last Mr. Baker had to tell the captain that James Wait was disturbing the peace of the ship. "Knock discipline on the head — he will, Ough," grunted Mr. Baker. As a matter of fact, the starboard watch came as near as possible to refusing duty, when ordered one morning by the boatswain to wash out their fore-castle. It appears Jimmy objected to a wet floor — and that morning we were in a compassionate mood. We thought the boatswain a brute, and, practically, told him so. Only Mr. Baker's delicate tact prevented an all-fired row: he refused to take us seriously. He came bustling forward, and called us many unpolite names but in such a hearty and seamanlike manner that we began to feel ashamed of ourselves. In truth, we thought him much too good a sailor to annoy him willingly: and after all Jimmy might have been a fraud — probably was! The fore-castle got a clean up that morning; but in the afternoon a sick-bay was fitted up in the deck-house. It was a nice little cabin opening on deck, and with two berths. Jimmy's belongings were transported there, and then — notwithstanding his protests — Jimmy himself. He said he couldn't walk. Four men carried him on a blanket. He complained that he would have to die there alone, like a dog. We grieved for him, and were delighted to have him removed from the fore-castle. We attended him as before. The galley was next door, and the cook looked in many times a day. Wait became a little more cheerful. Knowles affirmed having heard him laugh to himself in peals one day. Others had seen him walking about on deck at night. His little place, with the door ajar on a long hook, was always full of tobacco smoke. We spoke through the crack cheerfully, sometimes abusively, as we passed by, intent on our work. He fascinated us. He would never let doubt die. He overshadowed the ship. Invulnerable in his promise of speedy corruption he trampled on our self-respect, he demonstrated to us daily our want of moral courage; he tainted our lives. Had we been a miserable gang of wretched immortals, unhallowed alike by hope and fear, he could not have lorded it over us with a more pitiless assertion of his sublime privilege.

Chapter 3

Meantime the *Narcissus*, with square yards, ran out of the fair monsoon. She drifted slowly, swinging round and round the compass, through a few days of baffling light airs. Under the patter of short warm showers, grumbling men whirled the heavy yards from side to side; they caught hold of the soaked ropes with groans and sighs, while their officers, sulky and dripping with rain water, unceasingly ordered them about in wearied voices. During the short respites they looked with disgust into the smarting palms of their stiff hands, and asked one another bitterly: — "Who would be a sailor if he could be a farmer?" All the tempers were spoilt, and no man cared what he said. One black night, when the watch, panting in the heat and half-drowned with the rain, had been through four mortal hours hunted from brace to brace, Belfast declared that he would "chuck the sea for ever and go in a steamer." This was excessive, no doubt. Captain Allistoun, with great self-control, would mutter sadly to Mr. Baker: — "It is not so bad — not so bad," when he had managed to shove, and dodge, and manoeuvre his smart ship through sixty miles in twenty-four hours. From the doorstep of the little cabin, Jimmy, chin in hand, watched our distasteful labours with insolent and melancholy eyes. We spoke to him gently — and out of his sight exchanged sour smiles.

Then, again, with a fair wind and under a clear sky, the ship went on piling up the South Latitude. She passed outside Madagascar and Mauritius without a glimpse of the land. Extra lashings were put on the spare spars. Hatches were looked to. The steward in his leisure moments and with a worried air tried to fit washboards to the cabin doors. Stout canvas was bent with care. Anxious eyes looked to the westward, towards the cape of storms. The ship began to dip into a southwest swell, and the softly luminous sky of low latitudes took on a harder sheen from day to day above our heads: it arched high above the ship vibrating and pale, like an immense dome of steel, resonant with the deep voice of freshening gales. The sunshine gleamed cold on the white curls of black waves. Before the strong breath of westerly squalls the ship, with reduced sail, lay slowly over, obstinate and yielding. She drove to and fro in the unceasing endeavour to fight her way through the invisible violence of the winds: she pitched headlong into dark smooth hollows; she struggled upwards over the snowy ridges of great running seas; she rolled, restless, from side to side, like a thing in pain. Enduring and valiant, she answered to the call of men; and her slim spars waving for ever in abrupt semicircles, seemed to beckon in vain for help towards the stormy sky.

It was a bad winter off the Cape that year. The relieved helmsmen came off flapping their arms, or ran stamping hard and blowing into swollen, red fingers. The watch on deck dodged the sting of cold sprays or, crouching in sheltered corners, watched

dismally the high and merciless seas boarding the ship time after time in unappeasable fury. Water tumbled in cataracts over the fore-castle doors. You had to dash through a waterfall to get into your damp bed. The men turned in wet and turned out stiff to face the redeeming and ruthless exactions of their glorious and obscure fate. Far aft, and peering watchfully to windward, the officers could be seen through the mist of squalls. They stood by the weather-rail, holding on grimly, straight and glistening in their long coats; and in the disordered plunges of the hard-driven ship, they appeared high up, attentive, tossing violently above the grey line of a clouded horizon in motionless attitudes.

They watched the weather and the ship as men on shore watch the momentous chances of fortune. Captain Allistoun never left the deck, as though he had been part of the ship's fittings. Now and then the steward, shivering, but always in shirt sleeves, would struggle towards him with some hot coffee, half of which the gale blew out of the cup before it reached the master's lips. He drank what was left gravely in one long gulp, while heavy sprays pattered loudly on his oilskin coat, the seas swishing broke about his high boots; and he never took his eyes off the ship. He kept his gaze riveted upon her as a loving man watches the unselfish toil of a delicate woman upon the slender thread of whose existence is hung the whole meaning and joy of the world. We all watched her. She was beautiful and had a weakness. We loved her no less for that. We admired her qualities aloud, we boasted of them to one another, as though they had been our own, and the consciousness of her only fault we kept buried in the silence of our profound affection. She was born in the thundering peal of hammers beating upon iron, in black eddies of smoke, under a grey sky, on the banks of the Clyde. The clamorous and sombre stream gives birth to things of beauty that float away into the sunshine of the world to be loved by men. The *Narcissus* was one of that perfect brood. Less perfect than many perhaps, but she was ours, and, consequently, incomparable. We were proud of her. In Bombay, ignorant landlubbers alluded to her as that "pretty grey ship." Pretty! A scurvy meed of commendation! We knew she was the most magnificent sea-boat ever launched. We tried to forget that, like many good sea-boats, she was at times rather crank. She was exacting. She wanted care in loading and handling, and no one knew exactly how much care would be enough. Such are the imperfections of mere men! The ship knew, and sometimes would correct the presumptuous human ignorance by the wholesome discipline of fear. We had heard ominous stories about past voyages. The cook (technically a seaman, but in reality no sailor) — the cook, when unstrung by some misfortune, such as the rolling over of a saucepan, would mutter gloomily while he wiped the floor: — "There! Look at what she has done! Some voy'ge she will drown all hands! You'll see if she won't." To which the steward, snatching in the galley a moment to draw breath in the hurry of his worried life, would remark philosophically: — "Those that see won't tell, anyhow. I don't want to see it." We derided those fears. Our hearts went out to the old man when he pressed her hard so as to make her hold her own, hold to every inch gained to windward; when he made her, under reefed sails, leap obliquely at enormous waves. The men, knitted

together aft into a ready group by the first sharp order of an officer coming to take charge of the deck in bad weather: — "Keep handy the watch," stood admiring her valiance. Their eyes blinked in the wind; their dark faces were wet with drops of water more salt and bitter than human tears; beards and moustaches, soaked, hung straight and dripping like fine seaweed. They were fantastically misshapen; in high boots, in hats like helmets, and swaying clumsily, stiff and bulky in glistening oilskins, they resembled men strangely equipped for some fabulous adventure. Whenever she rose easily to a towering green sea, elbows dug ribs, faces brightened, lips murmured: — "Didn't she do it cleverly," and all the heads turning like one watched with sardonic grins the foiled wave go roaring to leeward, white with the foam of a monstrous rage. But when she had not been quick enough and, struck heavily, lay over trembling under the blow, we clutched at ropes, and looking up at the narrow bands of drenched and strained sails waving desperately aloft, we thought in our hearts: — "No wonder. Poor thing!"

The thirty-second day out of Bombay began inauspiciously. In the morning a sea smashed one of the galley doors. We dashed in through lots of steam and found the cook very wet and indignant with the ship: — "She's getting worse every day. She's trying to drown me in front of my own stove!" He was very angry. We pacified him, and the carpenter, though washed away twice from there, managed to repair the door. Through that accident our dinner was not ready till late, but it didn't matter in the end because Knowles, who went to fetch it, got knocked down by a sea and the dinner went over the side. Captain Allistoun, looking more hard and thin-lipped than ever, hung on to full topsails and foresail, and would not notice that the ship, asked to do too much, appeared to lose heart altogether for the first time since we knew her. She refused to rise, and bored her way sullenly through the seas. Twice running, as though she had been blind or weary of life, she put her nose deliberately into a big wave and swept the decks from end to end. As the boatswain observed with marked annoyance, while we were splashing about in a body to try and save a worthless wash-tub: — "Every blooming thing in the ship is going overboard this afternoon." Venerable Singleton broke his habitual silence and said with a glance aloft: — "The old man's in a temper with the weather, but it's no good bein' angry with the winds of heaven." Jimmy had shut his door, of course. We knew he was dry and comfortable within his little cabin, and in our absurd way were pleased one moment, exasperated the next, by that certitude. Donkin skulked shamelessly, uneasy and miserable. He grumbled: — "I'm perishin' with cold outside in bloomin' wet rags, an' that 'ere black sojer sits dry on a blamed chest full of bloomin' clothes; blank his black soul!" We took no notice of him; we hardly gave a thought to Jimmy and his bosom friend. There was no leisure for idle probing of hearts. Sails blew adrift. Things broke loose. Cold and wet, we were washed about the deck while trying to repair damages. The ship tossed about, shaken furiously, like a toy in the hand of a lunatic. Just at sunset there was a rush to shorten sail before the menace of a sombre hail cloud. The hard gust of wind came brutal like the blow of a fist. The ship relieved of her canvas in time received it pluckily: she

yielded reluctantly to the violent onset; then coming up with a stately and irresistible motion, brought her spars to windward in the teeth of the screeching squall. Out of the abysmal darkness of the black cloud overhead white hail streamed on her, rattled on the rigging, leaped in handfuls off the yards, rebounded on the deck — round and gleaming in the murky turmoil like a shower of pearls. It passed away. For a moment a livid sun shot horizontally the last rays of sinister light between the hills of steep, rolling waves. Then a wild night rushed in — stamped out in a great howl that dismal remnant of a stormy day.

There was no sleep on board that night. Most seamen remember in their life one or two such nights of a culminating gale. Nothing seems left of the whole universe but darkness, clamour, fury — and the ship. And like the last vestige of a shattered creation she drifts, bearing an anguished remnant of sinful mankind, through the distress, tumult, and pain of an avenging terror. No one slept in the fore-castle. The tin oil-lamp suspended on a long string, smoking, described wide circles; wet clothing made dark heaps on the glistening floor; a thin layer of water rushed to and fro. In the bed-places men lay booted, resting on elbows and with open eyes. Hung-up suits of oilskin swung out and in, lively and disquieting like reckless ghosts of decapitated seamen dancing in a tempest. No one spoke and all listened. Outside the night moaned and sobbed to the accompaniment of a continuous loud tremor as of innumerable drums beating far off. Shrieks passed through the air. Tremendous dull blows made the ship tremble while she rolled under the weight of the seas toppling on her deck. At times she soared up swiftly as if to leave this earth for ever, then during interminable moments fell through a void with all the hearts on board of her standing still, till a frightful shock, expected and sudden, started them off again with a big thump. After every dislocating jerk of the ship, Wamibo, stretched full length, his face on the pillow, groaned slightly with the pain of his tormented universe. Now and then, for the fraction of an intolerable second, the ship, in the fiercer burst of a terrible uproar, remained on her side, vibrating and still, with a stillness more appalling than the wildest motion. Then upon all those prone bodies a stir would pass, a shiver of suspense. A man would protrude his anxious head and a pair of eyes glistened in the sway of light glaring wildly. Some moved their legs a little as if making ready to jump out. But several, motionless on their backs and with one hand gripping hard the edge of the bunk, smoked nervously with quick puffs, staring upwards; immobilised in a great craving for peace.

At midnight, orders were given to furl the fore and mizen topsails. With immense efforts men crawled aloft through a merciless buffeting, saved the canvas and crawled down almost exhausted, to bear in panting silence the cruel battering of the seas. Perhaps for the first time in the history of the merchant service the watch, told to go below, did not leave the deck, as if compelled to remain there by the fascination of a venomous violence. At every heavy gust men, huddled together, whispered to one another, "It can blow no harder," and presently the gale would give them the lie with a piercing shriek, and drive their breath back into their throats. A fierce squall seemed to burst asunder the thick mass of sooty vapours; and above the wrack of torn clouds

glimpses could be caught of the high moon rushing backwards with frightful speed over the sky, right into the wind's eye. Many hung their heads, muttering that it "turned their inwards out" to look at it. Soon the clouds closed up and the world again became a raging, blind darkness that howled, flinging at the lonely ship salt sprays and sleet.

About half-past seven the pitchy obscurity round us turned a ghastly grey, and we knew that the sun had risen. This unnatural and threatening daylight, in which we could see one another's wild eyes and drawn faces, was only an added tax on our endurance. The horizon seemed to have come on all sides within arm's length of the ship. Into that narrowed circle furious seas leaped in, struck, and leaped out. A rain of salt, heavy drops flew aslant like mist. The main-topsail had to be goose-winged, and with stolid resignation every one prepared to go aloft once more; but the officers yelled, pushed back, and at last we understood that no more men would be allowed to go on the yard than were absolutely necessary for the work. As at any moment the masts were likely to be jumped out or blown overboard, we concluded that the captain didn't want to see all his crowd go over the side at once. That was reasonable. The watch then on duty, led by Mr. Creighton, began to struggle up the rigging. The wind flattened them against the ratlines; then, easing a little, would let them ascend a couple of steps; and again, with a sudden gust, pin all up the shrouds the whole crawling line in attitudes of crucifixion. The other watch plunged down on the main deck to haul up the sail. Men's heads bobbed up as the water flung them irresistibly from side to side. Mr. Baker grunted encouragingly in our midst, spluttering and blowing amongst the tangled ropes like an energetic porpoise. Favoured by an ominous and untrustworthy lull, the work was done without any one being lost either off the deck or from the yard. For the moment the gale seemed to take off, and the ship, as if grateful for our efforts, plucked up heart and made better weather of it.

At eight the men off duty, watching their chance, ran forward over the flooded deck to get some rest. The other half of the crew remained aft for their turn of "seeing her through her trouble," as they expressed it. The two mates urged the master to go below. Mr. Baker grunted in his ear: — "Ough! surely now... Ough!... confidence in us... nothing more to do... she must lay it out or go.

"Ough! Ough!" Tall young Mr. Creighton smiled down at him cheerfully: — "...She's as right as a trivet! Take a spell, sir." He looked at them stonily with bloodshot, sleepless eyes. The rims of his eyelids were scarlet, and he moved his jaws unceasingly with a slow effort, as though he had been masticating a lump of india-rubber. He shook his head. He repeated: — "Never mind me. I must see it out — I must see it out," but he consented to sit down for a moment on the skylight, with his hard face turned unflinchingly to windward. The sea spat at it — and stoical, it streamed with water as though he had been weeping. On the weather side of the poop the watch, hanging on to the mizen rigging and to one another, tried to exchange encouraging words. Singleton, at the wheel, yelled out: — "Look out for yourselves!" His voice reached them in a warning whisper. They were startled.

A big, foaming sea came out of the mist; it made for the ship, roaring wildly, and in its rush it looked as mischievous and discomposing as a madman with an axe. One or two, shouting, scrambled up the rigging; most, with a convulsive catch of the breath, held on where they stood. Singleton dug his knees under the wheel-box, and carefully eased the helm to the headlong pitch of the ship, but without taking his eyes off the coming wave. It towered close-to and high, like a wall of green glass topped with snow. The ship rose to it as though she had soared on wings, and for a moment rested poised upon the foaming crest as if she had been a great sea-bird. Before we could draw breath a heavy gust struck her, another roller took her unfairly under the weather bow, she gave a toppling lurch, and filled her decks. Captain Allistoun leaped up, and fell; Archie rolled over him, screaming: — "She will rise!"

She gave another lurch to leeward; the lower deadeyes dipped heavily; the men's feet flew from under them, and they hung kicking above the slanting poop. They could see the ship putting her side in the water, and shouted all together: — "She's going!" Forward the forecastle doors flew open, and the watch below were seen leaping out one after another, throwing their arms up; and, falling on hands and knees, scrambled aft on all fours along the high side of the deck, sloping more than the roof of a house. From leeward the seas rose, pursuing them; they looked wretched in a hopeless struggle, like vermin fleeing before a flood; they fought up the weather ladder of the poop one after another, half naked and staring wildly; and as soon as they got up they shot to leeward in clusters, with closed eyes, till they brought up heavily with their ribs against the iron stanchions of the rail; then, groaning, they rolled in a confused mass. The immense volume of water thrown forward by the last scend of the ship had burst the lee door of the forecastle. They could see their chests, pillows, blankets, clothing, come out floating upon the sea. While they struggled back to windward they looked in dismay. The straw beds swam high, the blankets, spread out, undulated; while the chests, waterlogged and with a heavy list, pitched heavily like dismasted hulks, before they sank; Archie's big coat passed with outspread arms, resembling a drowned seaman floating with his head under water. Men were slipping down while trying to dig their fingers into the planks; others, jammed in corners, rolled enormous eyes. They all yelled unceasingly: — "The masts! Cut! Cut!..." A black squall howled low over the ship, that lay on her side with the weather yard-arms pointing to the clouds; while the tall masts, inclined nearly to the horizon, seemed to be of an immeasurable length. The carpenter let go his hold, rolled against the skylight, and began to crawl to the cabin entrance, where a big axe was kept ready for just such an emergency. At that moment the topsail sheet parted, the end of the heavy chain racketed aloft, and sparks of red fire streamed down through the flying sprays. The sail flapped once with a jerk that seemed to tear our hearts out through our teeth, and instantly changed into a bunch of fluttering narrow ribbons that tied themselves into knots and became quiet along the yard. Captain Allistoun struggled, managed to stand up with his face near the deck, upon which men swung on the ends of ropes, like nest robbers upon a cliff. One of his feet was on somebody's chest; his face was purple; his lips moved. He yelled also; he yelled,

bending down: — "No! No!" Mr. Baker, one leg over the binnacle-stand, roared out: — "Did you say no? Not cut?" He shook his head madly. "No! No!" Between his legs the crawling carpenter heard, collapsed at once, and lay full length in the angle of the skylight. Voices took up the shout — "No! No!" Then all became still. They waited for the ship to turn over altogether, and shake them out into the sea; and upon the terrific noise of wind and sea not a murmur of remonstrance came out from those men, who each would have given ever so many years of life to see "them damned sticks go overboard!" They all believed it their only chance; but a little hard-faced man shook his grey head and shouted "No!" without giving them as much as a glance. They were silent, and gasped. They gripped rails, they had wound ropes'-ends under their arms; they clutched ringbolts, they crawled in heaps where there was foothold; they held on with both arms, hooked themselves to anything to windward with elbows, with chins, almost with their teeth: and some, unable to crawl away from where they had been flung, felt the sea leap up, striking against their backs as they struggled upwards. Singleton had stuck to the wheel. His hair flew out in the wind; the gale seemed to take its life-long adversary by the beard and shake his old head. He wouldn't let go, and, with his knees forced between the spokes, flew up and down like a man on a bough. As Death appeared unready, they began to look about. Donkin, caught by one foot in a loop of some rope, hung, head down, below us, and yelled, with his face to the deck: — "Cut! Cut!" Two men lowered themselves cautiously to him; others hauled on the rope. They caught him up, shoved him into a safer place, held him. He shouted curses at the master, shook his fist at him with horrible blasphemies, called upon us in filthy words to "Cut! Don't mind that murdering fool! Cut, some of you!" One of his rescuers struck him a back-handed blow over the mouth; his head banged on the deck, and he became suddenly very quiet, with a white face, breathing hard, and with a few drops of blood trickling from his cut lip. On the lee side another man could be seen stretched out as if stunned; only the washboard prevented him from going over the side. It was the steward. We had to sling him up like a bale, for he was paralysed with fright. He had rushed up out of the pantry when he felt the ship go over, and had rolled down helplessly, clutching a china mug. It was not broken. With difficulty we tore it away from him, and when he saw it in our hands he was amazed. "Where did you get that thing?" he kept on asking us in a trembling voice. His shirt was blown to shreds; the ripped sleeves flapped like wings. Two men made him fast, and, doubled over the rope that held him, he resembled a bundle of wet rags. Mr. Baker crawled along the line of men, asking: — "Are you all there?" and looking them over. Some blinked vacantly, others shook convulsively; Wamibo's head hung over his breast; and in painful attitudes, cut by lashings, exhausted with clutching, screwed up in corners, they breathed heavily. Their lips twitched, and at every sickening heave of the overturned ship they opened them wide as if to shout. The cook, embracing a wooden stanchion, unconsciously repeated a prayer. In every short interval of the fiendish noises around he could be heard there, without cap or slippers, imploring in that storm the Master of our lives not to lead him into temptation. Soon he also

became silent. In all that crowd of cold and hungry men, waiting wearily for a violent death, not a voice was heard; they were mute, and in sombre thoughtfulness listened to the horrible imprecations of the gale.

Hours passed. They were sheltered by the heavy inclination of the ship from the wind that rushed in one long unbroken moan above their heads, but cold rain showers fell at times into the uneasy calm of their refuge. Under the torment of that new infliction a pair of shoulders would writhe a little. Teeth chattered. The sky was clearing, and bright sunshine gleamed over the ship. After every burst of battering seas, vivid and fleeting rainbows arched over the drifting hull in the flick of sprays. The gale was ending in a clear blow, which gleamed and cut like a knife. Between two bearded shellbacks Charley, fastened with somebody's long muffler to a deck ring-bolt, wept quietly, with rare tears wrung out by bewilderment, cold, hunger, and general misery. One of his neighbours punched him in the ribs asking roughly: — "What's the matter with your cheek? In fine weather there's no holding you, youngster." Turning about with prudence he worked himself out of his coat and threw it over the boy. The other man closed up, muttering: — "'Twill make a bloomin' man of you, sonny." They flung their arms over and pressed against him. Charley drew his feet up and his eyelids dropped. Sighs were heard, as men, perceiving that they were not to be "drowned in a hurry," tried easier positions. Mr. Creighton, who had hurt his leg, lay amongst us with compressed lips. Some fellows belonging to his watch set about securing him better. Without a word or a glance he lifted his arms one after another to facilitate the operation, and not a muscle moved in his stern, young face. They asked him with solicitude: — "Easier now, sir?" He answered with a curt: — "That'll do." He was a hard young officer, but many of his watch used to say they liked him well enough because he had "such a gentlemanly way of damning us up and down the deck." Others unable to discern such fine shades of refinement, respected him for his smartness. For the first time since the ship had gone on her beam ends Captain Allistoun gave a short glance down at his men. He was almost upright — one foot against the side of the skylight, one knee on the deck; and with the end of the vang round his waist swung back and forth with his gaze fixed ahead, watchful, like a man looking out for a sign. Before his eyes the ship, with half her deck below water, rose and fell on heavy seas that rushed from under her flashing in the cold sunshine. We began to think she was wonderfully buoyant — considering. Confident voices were heard shouting: — "She'll do, boys!" Belfast exclaimed with fervour: — "I would giv' a month's pay for a draw at a pipe!" One or two, passing dry tongues on their salt lips, muttered something about a "drink of water." The cook, as if inspired, scrambled up with his breast against the poop water-cask and looked in. There was a little at the bottom. He yelled, waving his arms, and two men began to crawl backwards and forwards with the mug. We had a good mouthful all round. The master shook his head impatiently, refusing. When it came to Charley one of his neighbours shouted: — "That bloom-in' boy's asleep." He slept as though he had been dosed with narcotics. They let him be. Singleton held to the wheel with one hand while he drank, bending down to shelter his lips from the wind.

Wamibo had to be poked and yelled at before he saw the mug held before his eyes. Knowles said sagaciously: — "It's better'n a tot o' rum." Mr. Baker grunted: — "Thank ye." Mr. Creighton drank and nodded. Donkin gulped greedily, glaring over the rim. Belfast made us laugh when with grimacing mouth he shouted: — "Pass it this way. We're all taytottlers here." The master, presented with the mug again by a crouching man, who screamed up at him: — "We all had a drink, captain," groped for it without ceasing to look ahead, and handed it back stiffly as though he could not spare half a glance away from the ship. Faces brightened. We shouted to the cook: — "Well done, doctor!" He sat to leeward, propped by the water-cask and yelled back abundantly, but the seas were breaking in thunder just then, and we only caught snatches that sounded like: "Providence" and "born again." He was at his old game of preaching. We made friendly but derisive gestures at him, and from below he lifted one arm, holding on with the other, moved his lips; he beamed up to us, straining his voice — earnest, and ducking his head before the sprays.

Suddenly some one cried: — "Where's Jimmy?" and we were appalled once more. On the end of the row the boatswain shouted hoarsely: — "Has any one seed him come out?" Voices exclaimed dismally: — "Drowned — is he?... No! In his cabin!... Good Lord!... Caught like a bloomin' rat in a trap... Couldn't open his door... Aye! She went over too quick and the water jammed it... Poor beggar!... No help for 'im... Let's go and see..." "Damn him, who could go?" screamed Donkin. — "Nobody expects you to," growled the man next to him: "you're only a thing." — "Is there half a chance to get at 'im?" inquired two or three men together. Belfast untied himself with blind impetuosity, and all at once shot down to leeward quicker than a flash of lightning. We shouted all together with dismay; but with his legs overboard he held and yelled for a rope. In our extremity nothing could be terrible; so we judged him funny kicking there, and with his scared face. Some one began to laugh, and, as if hysterically infected with screaming merriment, all those haggard men went off laughing, wild-eyed, like a lot of maniacs tied up on a wall. Mr. Baker swung off the binnacle-stand and tendered him one leg. He scrambled up rather scared, and consigning us with abominable words to the "divvle." "You are... Ough! You're a foul-mouthed beggar, Craik," grunted Mr. Baker. He answered, stuttering with indignation: — "Look at 'em, sorr. The bloomin dirty images! laughing at a chum going overboard. Call themselves men, too." But from the break of the poop the boatswain called out: — "Come along," and Belfast crawled away in a hurry to join him. The five men, poised and gazing over the edge of the poop, looked for the best way to get forward. They seemed to hesitate. The others, twisting in their lashings, turning painfull, stared with open lips. Captain Allistoun saw nothing; he seemed with his eyes to hold the ship up in a superhuman concentration of effort. The wind screamed loud in sunshine; columns of spray rose straight up; and in the glitter of rainbows bursting over the trembling hull the men went over cautiously, disappearing from sight with deliberate movements.

They went swinging from belaying pin to cleat above the seas that beat the half-submerged deck. Their toes scraped the planks. Lumps of green cold water toppled over

the bulwark and on their heads. They hung for a moment on strained arms, with the breath knocked out of them, and with closed eyes — then, letting go with one hand, balanced with lolling heads, trying to grab some rope or stanchion further forward. The long-armed and athletic boatswain swung quickly, gripping things with a fist hard as iron, and remembering suddenly snatches of the last letter from his “old woman.” Little Belfast scrambled in a rage spluttering “cursed nigger.” Wamibo’s tongue hung out with excitement; and Archie, intrepid and calm, watched his chance to move with intelligent coolness.

When above the side of the house, they let go one after another, and falling heavily, sprawled, pressing their palms to the smooth teak wood. Round them the backwash of waves seethed white and hissing. All the doors had become trap-doors, of course. The first was the galley door. The galley extended from side to side, and they could hear the sea splashing with hollow noises in there. The next door was that of the carpenter’s shop. They lifted it, and looked down. The room seemed to have been devastated by an earthquake. Everything in it had tumbled on the bulkhead facing the door, and on the other side of that bulkhead there was Jimmy dead or alive. The bench, a half-finished meat-safe, saws, chisels, wire rods, axes, crowbars, lay in a heap besprinkled with loose nails. A sharp adze stuck up with a shining edge that gleamed dangerously down there like a wicked smile. The men clung to one another, peering. A sickening, sly lurch of the ship nearly sent them overboard in a body. Belfast howled “Here goes!” and leaped down. Archie followed cannily, catching at shelves that gave way with him, and eased himself in a great crash of ripped wood. There was hardly room for three men to move. And in the sunshiny blue square of the door, the boatswain’s face, bearded and dark, Wamibo’s face, wild and pale, hung over — watching.

Together they shouted: “Jimmy! Jim!” From above the boatswain contributed a deep growl: “You. Wait!” In a pause, Belfast entreated: “Jimmy, darlin’, are ye aloive?” The boatswain said: “Again! All together, boys!” All yelled excitedly. Wamibo made noises resembling loud barks. Belfast drummed on the side of the bulkhead with a piece of iron. All ceased suddenly. The sound of screaming and hammering went on thin and distinct — like a solo after a chorus. He was alive. He was screaming and knocking below us with the hurry of a man prematurely shut up in a coffin. We went to work. We attacked with desperation the abominable heap of things heavy, of things sharp, of things clumsy to handle. The boatswain crawled away to find somewhere a flying end of a rope; and Wamibo, held back by shouts: — ”Don’t jump!... Don’t come in here, muddle-head!” — remained glaring above us — all shining eyes, gleaming fangs, tumbled hair; resembling an amazed and half-witted fiend gloating over the extraordinary agitation of the damned. The boatswain adjured us to “bear a hand,” and a rope descended. We made things fast to it and they went up spinning, never to be seen by man again. A rage to fling things overboard possessed us. We worked fiercely, cutting our hands and speaking brutally to one another. Jimmy kept up a distracting row; he screamed piercingly, without drawing breath, like a tortured woman; he banged with hands and feet. The agony of his fear wrung our hearts so terribly that we longed

to abandon him, to get out of that place deep as a well and swaying like a tree, to get out of his hearing, back on the poop where we could wait passively for death in incomparable repose. We shouted to him to "shut up, for God's sake." He redoubled his cries. He must have fancied we could not hear him. Probably he heard his own clamour but faintly. We could picture him crouching on the edge of the upper berth, letting out with both fists at the wood, in the dark, and with his mouth wide open for that unceasing cry. Those were loathsome moments. A cloud driving across the sun would darken the doorway menacingly. Every movement of the ship was pain. We scrambled about with no room to breathe, and felt frightfully sick. The boatswain yelled down at us: — "Bear a hand! Bear a hand! We two will be washed away from here directly if you ain't quick!" Three times a sea leaped over the high side and flung bucketfuls of water on our heads. Then Jimmy, startled by the shock, would stop his noise for a moment — waiting for the ship to sink, perhaps — and began again, distressingly loud, as if invigorated by the gust of fear. At the bottom the nails lay in a layer several inches thick. It was ghastly. Every nail in the world, not driven in firmly somewhere, seemed to have found its way into that carpenter's shop. There they were, of all kinds, the remnants of stores from seven voyages. Tin-tacks, copper tacks (sharp as needles); pump nails with big heads, like tiny iron mushrooms; nails without any heads (horrible); French nails polished and slim. They lay in a solid mass more inabordable than a hedgehog. We hesitated, yearning for a shovel, while Jimmy below us yelled as though he had been flayed. Groaning, we dug our fingers in, and very much hurt, shook our hands, scattering nails and drops of blood. We passed up our hats full of assorted nails to the boatswain, who, as if performing a mysterious and appeasing rite, cast them wide upon a raging sea.

We got to the bulkhead at last. Those were stout planks. She was a ship, well finished in every detail — the *Narcissus* was. They were the stoutest planks ever put into a ship's bulkhead — we thought — and then we perceived that, in our hurry, we had sent all the tools overboard. Absurd little Belfast wanted to break it down with his own weight, and with both feet leaped straight up like a springbok, cursing the Clyde shipwrights for not scamping their work. Incidentally he reviled all North Britain, the rest of the earth, the sea — and all his companions. He swore, as he alighted heavily on his heels, that he would never, never any more associate with any fool that "hadn't savee enough to know his knee from his elbow." He managed by his thumping to scare the last remnant of wits out of Jimmy. We could hear the object of our exasperated solicitude darting to and fro under the planks. He had cracked his voice at last, and could only squeak miserably. His back or else his head rubbed the planks, now here, now there, in a puzzling manner. He squeaked as he dodged the invisible blows. It was more heartrending even than his yells. Suddenly Archie produced a crowbar. He had kept it back; also a small hatchet. We howled with satisfaction. He struck a mighty blow and small chips flew at our eyes. The boatswain above shouted: — "Look out! Look out there. Don't kill the man. Easy does it!" Wamibo, maddened with excitement, hung head down and insanely urged us: — "Hoo! Strook'im! Hoo! Hoo!" We were afraid he

would fall in and kill one of us and, hurriedly, we entreated the boatswain to “shove the blamed Finn overboard.” Then, all together, we yelled down at the planks: — “Stand from under! Get forward,” and listened. We only heard the deep hum and moan of the wind above us, the mingled roar and hiss of the seas. The ship, as if overcome with despair, wallowed lifelessly, and our heads swam with that unnatural motion. Belfast clamoured: — “For the love of God, Jimmy, where are ye?... Knock! Jimmy darlint!... Knock! You bloody black beast! Knock!” He was as quiet as a dead man inside a grave; and, like men standing above a grave, we were on the verge of tears — but with vexation, the strain, the fatigue; with the great longing to be done with it, to get away, and lie down to rest somewhere where we could see our danger and breathe. Archie shouted: — “Gi’e me room!” We crouched behind him, guarding our heads, and he struck time after time in the joint of planks. They cracked. Suddenly the crowbar went halfway in through a splintered oblong hole. It must have missed Jimmy’s head by less than an inch. Archie withdrew it quickly, and that infamous nigger rushed at the hole, put his lips to it, and whispered “Help” in an almost extinct voice; he pressed his head to it, trying madly to get out through that opening one inch wide and three inches long. In our disturbed state we were absolutely paralysed by his incredible action. It seemed impossible to drive him away. Even Archie at last lost his composure. “If ye don’t clear oot I’ll drive the crowbar thro’ your head,” he shouted in a determined voice. He meant what he said, and his earnestness seemed to make an impression on Jimmy. He disappeared suddenly, and we set to prising and tearing at the planks with the eagerness of men trying to get at a mortal enemy, and spurred by the desire to tear him limb from limb. The wood split, cracked, gave way. Belfast plunged in head and shoulders and groped viciously. “I’ve got ‘im! Got ‘im,” he shouted. “Oh! There!... He’s gone; I’ve got ‘im!... Pull at my legs!... Pull!” Wamibo hooted unceasingly. The boatswain shouted directions: — “Catch hold of his hair, Belfast; pull straight up, you two!... Pull fair!” We pulled fair. We pulled Belfast out with a jerk, and dropped him with disgust. In a sitting posture, purple-faced, he sobbed despairingly: — “How can I hold on to ‘is blooming short wool?” Suddenly Jimmy’s head and shoulders appeared. He stuck halfway, and with rolling eyes foamed at our feet. We flew at him with brutal impatience, we tore the shirt off his back, we tugged at his ears, we panted over him; and all at once he came away in our hands as though somebody had let go his legs. With the same movement, without a pause, we swung him up. His breath whistled, he kicked our upturned faces, he grasped two pairs of arms above his head, and he squirmed up with such precipitation that he seemed positively to escape from our hands like a bladder full of gas. Streaming with perspiration, we swarmed up the rope, and, coming into the blast of cold wind, gasped like men plunged into icy water. With burning faces we shivered to the very marrow of our bones. Never before had the gale seemed to us more furious, the sea more mad, the sunshine more merciless and mocking, and the position of the ship more hopeless and appalling. Every movement of her was ominous of the end of her agony and of the beginning of ours. We staggered away from the door, and, alarmed by a sudden roll, fell down in a bunch. It appeared

to us that the side of the house was more smooth than glass and more slippery than ice. There was nothing to hang on to but a long brass hook used sometimes to keep back an open door. Wamibo held on to it and we held on to Wamibo, clutching our Jimmy. He had completely collapsed now. He did not seem to have the strength to close his hand. We stuck to him blindly in our fear. We were not afraid of Wamibo letting go (we remembered that the brute was stronger than any three men in the ship), but we were afraid of the hook giving way, and we also believed that the ship had made up her mind to turn over at last. But she didn't. A sea swept over us. The boatswain spluttered: — "Up and away. There's a lull. Away aft with you, or we will all go to the devil here." We stood up surrounding Jimmy. We begged him to hold up, to hold on, at least. He glared with his bulging eyes, mute as a fish, and with all the stiffening knocked out of him. He wouldn't stand; he wouldn't even as much as clutch at our necks; he was only a cold black skin loosely stuffed with soft cotton wool; his arms and legs swung jointless and pliable; his head rolled about; the lower lip hung down, enormous and heavy. We pressed round him, bothered and dismayed; sheltering him we swung here and there in a body; and on the very brink of eternity we tottered all together with concealing and absurd gestures, like a lot of drunken men embarrassed with a stolen corpse.

Something had to be done. We had to get him aft. A rope was tied slack under his armpits, and, reaching up at the risk of our lives, we hung him on the fore-sheet cleet. He emitted no sound; he looked as ridiculously lamentable as a doll that had lost half its sawdust, and we started on our perilous journey over the main deck, dragging along with care that pitiful, that limp, that hateful burden. He was not very heavy, but had he weighed a ton he could not have been more awkward to handle. We literally passed him from hand to hand. Now and then we had to hang him up on a handy belaying-pin, to draw a breath and reform the line. Had the pin broken he would have irretrievably gone into the Southern Ocean, but he had to take his chance of that; and after a little while, becoming apparently aware of it, he groaned slightly, and with a great effort whispered a few words. We listened eagerly. He was reproaching us with our carelessness in letting him run such risks: "Now, after I got myself out from there," he breathed out weakly. "There" was his cabin. And he got himself out. We had nothing to do with it apparently!... No matter... We went on and let him take his chances, simply because we could not help it; for though at that time we hated him more than ever — more than anything under heaven — we did not want to lose him. We had so far saved him; and it had become a personal matter between us and the sea. We meant to stick to him. Had we (by an incredible hypothesis) undergone similar toil and trouble for an empty cask, that cask would have become as precious to us as Jimmy was. More precious, in fact, because we would have had no reason to hate the cask. And we hated James Wait. We could not get rid of the monstrous suspicion that this astounding black-man was shamming sick, had been malingering heartlessly in the face of our toil, of our scorn, of our patience — and now was malingering in the face of our devotion — in the face of death. Our vague and imperfect morality

rose with disgust at his unmanly lie. But he stuck to it manfully — amazingly. No! It couldn't be. He was at all extremity. His cantankerous temper was only the result of the provoking invincible-ness of that death he felt by his side. Any man may be angry with such a masterful chum. But, then, what kind of men were we — with our thoughts! Indignation and doubt grappled within us in a scuffle that trampled upon the finest of our feelings. And we hated him because of the suspicion; we detested him because of the doubt. We could not scorn him safely — neither could we pity him without risk to our dignity. So we hated him and passed him carefully from hand to hand. We cried, "Got him?" — "Yes. All right. Let go."

And he swung from one enemy to another, showing about as much life as an old bolster would do. His eyes made two narrow white slits in the black face. The air escaped through his lips with a noise like the sound of bellows. We reached the poop ladder at last, and it being a comparatively safe place, we lay for a moment in an exhausted heap to rest a little. He began to mutter. We were always incurably anxious to hear what he had to say. This time he mumbled peevishly, "It took you some time to come! I began to think the whole smart lot of you had been washed overboard. What kept you back? Hey? Funk?" We said nothing. With sighs we started again to drag him up. The secret and ardent desire of our hearts was the desire to beat him viciously with our fists about the head; and we handled him as tenderly as though he had been made of glass...

The return on the poop was like the return of wanderers after many years amongst people marked by the desolation of time. Eyes were turned slowly in their sockets, glancing at us. Faint murmurs were heard, "Have you got 'im after all?" The well-known faces looked strange and familiar; they seemed faded and grimy; they had a mingled expression of fatigue and eagerness. They seemed to have become much thinner during our absence, as if all these men had been starving for a long time in their abandoned attitudes. The captain, with a round turn of a rope on his wrist, and kneeling on one knee, swung with a face cold and stiff; but with living eyes he was still holding the ship up, heeding no one, as if lost in the unearthly effort of that endeavour. We fastened up James Wait in a safe place. Mr. Baker scrambled along to lend a hand. Mr. Creighton, on his back, and very pale, muttered, "Well done," and gave us, Jimmy and the sky, a scornful glance, then closed his eyes slowly. Here and there a man stirred a little, but most of them remained apathetic, in cramped positions, muttering between shivers. The sun was setting. A sun enormous, unclouded and red, declining low as if bending down to look into their faces. The wind whistled across long sunbeams that, resplendent and cold, struck full on the dilated pupils of staring eyes without making them wink. The wisps of hair and the tangled beards were grey with the salt of the sea. The faces were earthy, and the dark patches under the eyes extended to the ears, smudged into the hollows of sunken cheeks. The lips were livid and thin, and when they moved it was with difficulty, as though they had been glued to the teeth. Some grinned sadly in the sunlight, shaking with cold. Others were sad and still. Charley, subdued by the sudden disclosure of the insignificance of his youth, darted fearful glances. The two

smooth-faced Norwegians resembled decrepit children, staring stupidly. To leeward, on the edge of the horizon, black seas leaped up towards the glowing sun. It sank slowly, round and blazing, and the crests of waves splashed on the edge of the luminous circle. One of the Norwegians appeared to catch sight of it, and, after giving a violent start, began to speak. His voice, startling the others, made them stir. They moved their heads stiffly, or turning with difficulty, looked at him with surprise, with fear, or in grave silence. He chattered at the setting sun, nodding his head, while the big seas began to roll across the crimson disc; and over miles of turbulent waters the shadows of high waves swept with a running darkness the faces of men. A crested roller broke with a loud hissing roar, and the sun, as if put out, disappeared. The chattering voice faltered, went out together with the light. There were sighs. In the sudden lull that follows the crash of a broken sea a man said wearily, "Here's that blooming Dutchman gone off his chump." A seaman, lashed by the middle, tapped the deck with his open hand with unceasing quick flaps. In the gathering greyness of twilight a bulky form was seen rising aft, and began marching on all fours with the movements of some big cautious beast. It was Mr. Baker passing along the line of men. He grunted encouragingly over every one, felt their fastenings. Some, with half-open eyes, puffed like men oppressed by heat; others mechanically and in dreamy voices answered him, "Aye! aye! sir!" He went from one to another grunting, "Ough!... See her through it yet;" and unexpectedly, with loud angry outbursts, blew up Knowles for cutting off a long piece from the fall of the relieving tackle. "Ough! — — — Ashamed of yourself — — — Relieving tackle — — — Don't you know better! — — — Ough! — — — Able seaman! Ough!" The lame man was crushed. He muttered, "Get som'think for a lashing for myself, sir." — "Ough! Lashing — — — yourself. Are you a tinker or a sailor — — — What? Ough! — — — May want that tackle directly — — — Ough! — — — More use to the ship than your lame carcass. Ough! — — — Keep it! — — — Keep it, now you've done it."

He crawled away slowly, muttering to himself about some men being "worse than children." It had been a comforting row. Low exclamations were heard: "Hallo... Hallo..." Those who had been painfully dozing asked with convulsive starts, "What's up?... What is it?" The answers came with unexpected cheerfulness: "The mate is going bald-headed for lame Jack about something or other." "No!"... "What 'as he done?" Some one even chuckled. It was like a whiff of hope, like a reminder of safe days. Donkin, who had been stupefied with fear, revived suddenly and began to shout: — "'Ear 'im; that's the way they tawlk to us. Vy donch 'ee 'it 'im — one ov yer? 'It 'im. 'It 'im! Comin' the mate over us. We are as good men as 'ee! We're all goin' to 'ell now. We 'ave been starved in this rotten ship, an' now we're goin' to be drowned for them black 'earted bullies! 'It 'im!" He shrieked in the deepening gloom, he blubbered and sobbed, screaming: — "'It 'im! 'It 'im!" The rage and fear of his disregarded right to live tried the steadfastness of hearts more than the menacing shadows of the night that advanced through the unceasing clamour of the gale. From aft Mr. Baker was heard: — "Is one of you men going to stop him — must I come along?" "Shut up!"...

“Keep quiet!” cried various voices, exasperated, trembling with cold. — ”You’ll get one across the mug from me directly,” said an invisible seaman, in a weary tone, “I won’t let the mate have the trouble.” He ceased and lay still with the silence of despair. On the black sky the stars, coming out, gleamed over an inky sea that, speckled with foam, flashed back at them the evanescent and pale light of a dazzling whiteness born from the black turmoil of the waves. Remote in the eternal calm they glittered hard and cold above the uproar of the earth; they surrounded the vanquished and tormented ship on all sides: more pitiless than the eyes of a triumphant mob, and as unapproachable as the hearts of men.

The icy south wind howled exultingly under the sombre splendour of the sky. The cold shook the men with a resistless violence as though it had tried to shake them to pieces. Short moans were swept unheard off the stiff lips. Some complained in mutters of “not feeling themselves below the waist;” while those who had closed their eyes, imagined they had a block of ice on their chests. Others, alarmed at not feeling any pain in their fingers, beat the deck feebly with their hands — obstinate and exhausted. Wamibo stared vacant and dreamy. The Scandinavians kept on a meaningless mutter through chattering teeth. The spare Scotchmen, with determined efforts, kept their lower jaws still. The West-country men lay big and stolid in an invulnerable surliness. A man yawned and swore in turns. Another breathed with a rattle in his throat. Two elderly hard-weather shellbacks, fast side by side, whispered dismally to one another about the landlady of a boarding-house in Sunderland, whom they both knew. They extolled her motherliness and her liberality; they tried to talk about the joint of beef and the big fire in the downstairs kitchen. The words dying faintly on their lips, ended in light sighs. A sudden voice cried into the cold night, “O Lord!” No one changed his position or took any notice of the cry. One or two passed, with a repeated and vague gesture, their hand over their faces, but most of them kept very still. In the benumbed immobility of their bodies they were excessively wearied by their thoughts, which rushed with the rapidity and vividness of dreams. Now and then, by an abrupt and startling exclamation, they answered the weird hail of some illusion; then, again, in silence contemplated the vision of known faces and familiar things. They recalled the aspect of forgotten shipmates and heard the voice of dead and gone skippers. They remembered the noise of gaslit streets, the steamy heat of tap-rooms or the scorching sunshine of calm days at sea.

Mr. Baker left his insecure place, and crawled, with stoppages, along the poop. In the dark and on all fours he resembled some carnivorous animal prowling amongst corpses. At the break, propped to windward of a stanchion, he looked down on the main deck. It seemed to him that the ship had a tendency to stand up a little more. The wind had eased a little, he thought, but the sea ran as high as ever. The waves foamed viciously, and the lee side of the deck disappeared under a hissing whiteness as of boiling milk, while the rigging sang steadily with a deep vibrating note, and, at every upward swing of the ship, the wind rushed with a long-drawn clamour amongst the spars. Mr. Baker watched very still. A man near him began to make a blabbing

noise with his lips, all at once and very loud, as though the cold had broken brutally through him. He went on: — "Ba — ba — ba — brrr — brr — ba — ba." — "Stop that!" cried Mr. Baker, groping in the dark. "Stop it!" He went on shaking the leg he found under his hand. — "What is it, sir?" called out Belfast, in the tone of a man awakened suddenly; "we are looking after that 'ere Jimmy." — "Are you? Ough! Don't make that row then. Who's that near you?" — "It's me — the boatswain, sir," growled the West-country man; "we are trying to keep life in that poor devil." — "Aye, aye!" said Mr. Baker. "Do it quietly, can't you?" — "He wants us to hold him up above the rail," went on the boatswain, with irritation, "says he can't breathe here under our jackets." — "If we lift 'im, we drop 'im overboard," said another voice, "we can't feel our hands with cold." — "I don't care. I am choking!" exclaimed James Wait in a clear tone. — "Oh, no, my son," said the boatswain, desperately, "you don't go till we all go on this fine night." — "You will see yet many a worse," said Mr. Baker, cheerfully. — "It's no child's play, sir!" answered the boatswain. "Some of us further aft, here, are in a pretty bad way." — "If the blamed sticks had been cut out of her she would be running along on her bottom now like any decent ship, an' giv' us all a chance," said some one, with a sigh. — "The old man wouldn't have it... much he cares for us," whispered another. — "Care for you!" exclaimed Mr. Baker, angrily. "Why should he care for you? Are you a lot of women passengers to be taken care of? We are here to take care of the ship — and some of you ain't up to that. Ough!... What have you done so very smart to be taken care of? Ough!... Some of you can't stand a bit of a breeze without crying over it." — "Come, sorr. We ain't so bad," protested Belfast, in a voice shaken by shivers; "we ain't... brr..." — "Again," shouted the mate, grabbing at the shadowy form; "again!... Why, you're in your shirt! What have you done?" — "I've put my oilskin and jacket over that half-dead nayggur — and he says he chokes," said Belfast, complainingly. — "You wouldn't call me nigger if I wasn't half dead, you Irish beggar!" boomed James Wait, vigorously. — "You... brrr... You wouldn't be white if you were ever so well... I will fight you... brrrr... in fine weather... brrr ... with one hand tied behind my back... brrrrr..." — "I don't want your rags — I want air," gasped out the other faintly, as if suddenly exhausted.

The sprays swept over whistling and pattering. Men disturbed in their peaceful torpor by the pain of quarrelsome shouts, moaned, muttering curses. Mr. Baker crawled off a little way to leeward where a water-cask loomed up big, with something white against it. "Is it you, Podmore?" asked Mr. Baker, He had to repeat the question twice before the cook turned, coughing feebly. — "Yes, sir. I've been praying in my mind for a quick deliverance; for I am prepared for any call... I — — —" — "Look here, cook," interrupted Mr. Baker, "the men are perishing with cold." — "Cold!" said the cook, mournfully; "they will be warm enough before long." — "What?" asked Mr. Baker, looking along the deck into the faint sheen of frothing water. — "They are a wicked lot," continued the cook solemnly, but in an unsteady voice, "about as wicked as any ship's company in this sinful world! Now, I" — he trembled so that he could hardly speak; his was an exposed place, and in a cotton shirt, a thin pair of trousers, and with

his knees under his nose, he received, quaking, the flicks of stinging, salt drops; his voice sounded exhausted — "now. I — any time ... My eldest youngster, Mr. Baker.. a clever boy... last Sunday on shore before this voyage he wouldn't go to church, sir. Says I, 'You go and clean yourself, or I'll know the reason why!' What does he do?... Pond, Mr. Baker — fell into the pond in his best rig, sir!... Accident?... 'Nothing will save you, fine scholar though you are!' says I... Accident!... I whopped him, sir, till I couldn't lift my arm..." His voice faltered. "I whopped 'im!" he repeated, rattling his teeth; then, after a while, let out a mournful sound that was half a groan, half a snore. Mr. Baker shook him by the shoulders. "Hey! Cook! Hold up, Podmore! Tell me — is there any fresh water in the galley tank? The ship is lying along less, I think; I would try to get forward. A little water would do them good. Hallo! Look out! Look out!" The cook struggled. — "Not you, sir — not you!" He began to scramble to windward. "Galley!... my business!" he shouted. — "Cook's going crazy now," said several voices. He yelled: — "Crazy, am I? I am more ready to die than any of you, officers incloosive — there! As long as she swims I will cook! I will get you coffee." — "Cook, ye are a gentleman!" cried Belfast. But the cook was already going over the weather-ladder. He stopped for a moment to shout back on the poop: — "As long as she swims I will cook!" and disappeared as though he had gone overboard. The men who had heard sent after him a cheer that sounded like a wail of sick children. An hour or more afterwards some one said distinctly: "He's gone for good." — "Very likely," assented the boatswain; "even in fine weather he was as smart about the deck as a milch-cow on her first voyage. We ought to go and see." Nobody moved. As the hours dragged slowly through the darkness Mr. Baker crawled back and forth along the poop several times. Some men fancied they had heard him exchange murmurs with the master, but at that time the memories were incomparably more vivid than anything actual, and they were not certain whether the murmurs were heard now or many years ago. They did not try to find out. A mutter more or less did not matter. It was too cold for curiosity, and almost for hope. They could not spare a moment or a thought from the great mental occupation of wishing to live. And the desire of life kept them alive, apathetic and enduring, under the cruel persistence of wind and cold; while the bestarred black dome of the sky revolved slowly above the ship, that drifted, bearing their patience and their suffering, through the stormy solitude of the sea.

Huddled close to one another, they fancied themselves utterly alone. They heard sustained loud noises, and again bore the pain of existence through long hours of profound silence. In the night they saw sunshine, felt warmth, and suddenly, with a start, thought that the sun would never rise upon a freezing world. Some heard laughter, listened to songs; others, near the end of the poop, could hear loud human shrieks, and opening their eyes, were surprised to hear them still, though very faint, and far away. The boatswain said: — "Why, it's the cook, hailing from forward, I think." He hardly believed his own words or recognised his own voice. It was a long time before the man next to him gave a sign of life. He punched hard his other neighbour and said: — "The cook's shouting!" Many did not understand, others did not care; the majority

further aft did not believe. But the boatswain and another man had the pluck to crawl away forward to see. They seemed to have been gone for hours, and were very soon forgotten. Then suddenly men who had been plunged in a hopeless resignation became as if possessed with a desire to hurt. They belaboured one another with fists. In the darkness they struck persistently anything soft they could feel near, and, with a greater effort than for a shout, whispered excitedly: — "They've got some hot coffee... Boss'en got it..." "No!... Where?"... "It's coming! Cook made it." James Wait moaned. Donkin scrambled viciously, caring not where he kicked, and anxious that the officers should have none of it. It came in a pot, and they drank in turns. It was hot, and while it blistered the greedy palates, it seemed incredible. The men sighed out parting with the mug: — "How 'as he done it?" Some cried weakly: — "Bully for you, doctor!"

He had done it somehow. Afterwards Archie declared that the thing was "meeraculous." For many days we wondered, and it was the one ever-interesting subject of conversation to the end of the voyage. We asked the cook, in fine weather, how he felt when he saw his stove "reared up on end." We inquired, in the north-east trade and on serene evenings, whether he had to stand on his head to put things right somewhat. We suggested he had used his bread-board for a raft, and from there comfortably had stoked his grate; and we did our best to conceal our admiration under the wit of fine irony. He affirmed not to know anything about it, rebuked our levity, declared himself, with solemn animation, to have been the object of a special mercy for the saving of our unholy lives. Fundamentally he was right, no doubt; but he need not have been so offensively positive about it — he need not have hinted so often that it would have gone hard with us had he not been there, meritorious and pure, to receive the inspiration and the strength for the work of grace. Had we been saved by his recklessness or his agility, we could have at length become reconciled to the fact; but to admit our obligation to anybody's virtue and holiness alone was as difficult for us as for any other handful of mankind. Like many benefactors of humanity, the cook took himself too seriously, and reaped the reward of irreverence. We were not un-ungrateful, however. He remained heroic. His saying — the saying of his life — became proverbial in the mouth of men as are the sayings of conquerors or sages. Later, whenever one of us was puzzled by a task and advised to relinquish it, he would express his determination to persevere and to succeed by the words: — "As long as she swims I will cook!"

The hot drink helped us through the bleak hours that precede the dawn. The sky low by the horizon took on the delicate tints of pink and yellow like the inside of a rare shell. And higher, where it glowed with a pearly sheen, a small black cloud appeared, like a forgotten fragment of the night set in a border of dazzling gold. The beams of light skipped on the crests of waves. The eyes of men turned to the eastward. The sunlight flooded their weary faces. They were giving themselves up to fatigue as though they had done for ever with their work. On Singleton's black oilskin coat the dried salt glistened like hoar frost. He hung on by the wheel, with open and lifeless eyes. Captain Allistoun, unblinking, faced the rising sun. His lips stirred, opened for the first time in twenty-four hours, and with a fresh firm voice he cried, "Wear ship!"

The commanding sharp tones made all these torpid men start like a sudden flick of a whip. Then again, motionless where they lay, the force of habit made some of them repeat the order in hardly audible murmurs. Captain Allistoun glanced down at his crew, and several, with fumbling fingers and hopeless movements, tried to cast themselves adrift. He repeated impatiently, "Wear ship. Now then, Mr. Baker, get the men along. What's the matter with them?" — "Wear ship. Do you hear there? — Wear ship!" thundered out the boatswain suddenly. His voice seemed to break through a deadly spell. Men began to stir and crawl. — "I want the fore-top-mast staysail run up smartly," said the master, very loudly; "if you can't manage it standing up you must do it lying down — that's all. Bear a hand!" — "Come along! Let's give the old girl a chance," urged the boatswain. — "Aye! aye! Wear ship!" exclaimed quavering voices. The fore-castle men, with reluctant faces, prepared to go forward. Mr. Baker pushed ahead, grunting, on all fours to show the way, and they followed him over the break. The others lay still with a vile hope in their hearts of not being required to move till they got saved or drowned in peace.

After some time they could be seen forward appearing on the fore-castle head, one by one in unsafe attitudes; hanging on to the rails, clambering over the anchors; embracing the cross-head of the windlass or hugging the fore-capstan. They were restless with strange exertions, waved their arms, knelt, lay flat down, staggered up, seemed to strive their hardest to go overboard. Suddenly a small white piece of canvas fluttered amongst them, grew larger, beating. Its narrow head rose in jerks — and at last it stood distended and triangular in the sunshine. — "They have done it!" cried the voices aft. Captain Allistoun let go the rope he had round his wrist and rolled to leeward headlong. He could be seen casting the lee main braces off the pins while the backwash of waves splashed over him. — "Square the main yard!" he shouted up to us — who stared at him in wonder. We hesitated to stir. "The main brace, men. Haul! haul anyhow! Lay on your backs and haul!" he screeched, half drowned down there. We did not believe we could move the main yard, but the strongest and the less discouraged tried to execute the order. Others assisted half-heartedly. Singleton's eyes blazed suddenly as he took a fresh grip of the spokes. Captain Allistoun fought his way up to windward. — "Haul, men! Try to move it! Haul, and help the ship." His hard face worked suffused and furious. "Is she going off, Singleton?" he cried. — "Not a move yet, sir," croaked the old seaman in a horribly hoarse voice. — "Watch the helm, Singleton," spluttered the master. "Haul, men! Have you no more strength than rats? Haul, and earn your salt." Mr. Creighton, on his back, with a swollen leg and a face as white as a piece of paper, blinked his eyes; his bluish lips twitched. In the wild scramble men grabbed at him, crawled over his hurt leg, knelt on his chest. He kept perfectly still, setting his teeth without a moan, without a sigh. The master's ardour, the cries of that silent man inspired us. We hauled and hung in bunches on the rope. We heard him say with violence to Donkin, who sprawled abjectly on his stomach, — "I will brain you with this belaying pin if you don't catch hold of the brace," and that victim of men's injustice, cowardly and cheeky, whimpered: — "Are you goin' to murder us

now?" while with sudden desperation he gripped the rope. Men sighed, shouted, hissed meaningless words, groaned. The yards moved, came slowly square against the wind, that hummed loudly on the yard-arms. — "Going off, sir," shouted Singleton, "she's just started." — "Catch a turn with that brace. Catch a turn!" clamoured the master. Mr. Creighton, nearly suffocated and unable to move, made a mighty effort, and with his left hand managed to nip the rope.

— "All fast!" cried some one. He closed his eyes as if going off into a swoon, while huddled together about the brace we watched with scared looks what the ship would do now.

She went off slowly as though she had been weary and disheartened like the men she carried. She paid off very gradually, making us hold our breath till we choked, and as soon as she had brought the wind abaft the beam she started to move, and fluttered our hearts. It was awful to see her, nearly overturned, begin to gather way and drag her submerged side through the water. The dead-eyes of the rigging churned the breaking seas. The lower half of the deck was full of mad whirlpools and eddies; and the long line of the lee rail could be seen showing black now and then in the swirls of a field of foam as dazzling and white as a field of snow. The wind sang shrilly amongst the spars; and at every slight lurch we expected her to slip to the bottom sideways from under our backs. When dead before it she made the first distinct attempt to stand up, and we encouraged her with a feeble and discordant howl. A great sea came running up aft and hung for a moment over us with a curling top; then crashed down under the counter and spread out on both sides into a great sheet of bursting froth. Above its fierce hiss we heard Singleton's croak: — "She is steering!" He had both his feet now planted firmly on the grating, and the wheel spun fast as he eased the helm. — "Bring the wind on the port quarter and steady her!" called out the master, staggering to his feet, the first man up from amongst our prostrate heap. One or two screamed with excitement: — "She rises!" Far away forward, Mr. Baker and three others were seen erect and black on the clear sky, lifting their arms, and with open mouths as though they had been shouting all together. The ship trembled, trying to lift her side, lurched back, seemed to give up with a nerveless dip, and suddenly with an unexpected jerk swung violently to windward, as though she had torn herself out from a deadly grasp. The whole immense volume of water, lifted by her deck, was thrown bodily across to starboard. Loud cracks were heard. Iron ports breaking open thundered with ringing blows. The water topped over the starboard rail with the rush of a river falling over a dam. The sea on deck, and the seas on every side of her, mingled together in a deafening roar. She rolled violently. We got up and were helplessly run or flung about from side to side. Men, rolling over and over, yelled, — "The house will go!" — "She clears herself!" Lifted by a towering sea she ran along with it for a moment, spouting thick streams of water through every opening of her wounded sides. The lee braces having been carried away or washed off the pins, all the ponderous yards on the fore swung from side to side and with appalling rapidity at every roll. The men forward were seen crouching here and there with fearful glances upwards at the enormous spars that whirled about

over their heads. The torn canvas and the ends of broken gear streamed in the wind like wisps of hair. Through the clear sunshine, over the flashing turmoil and uproar of the seas, the ship ran blindly, dishevelled and headlong, as if fleeing for her life; and on the poop we spun, we tottered about, distracted and noisy. We all spoke at once in a thin babble; we had the aspect of invalids and the gestures of maniacs. Eyes shone, large and haggard, in smiling, meagre faces that seemed to have been dusted over with powdered chalk. We stamped, clapped our hands, feeling ready to jump and do anything; but in reality hardly able to keep on our feet.

Captain Allistoun, hard and slim, gesticulated madly from the poop at Mr. Baker: "Steady these fore-yards! Steady them the best you can!" On the main deck, men excited by his cries, splashed, dashing aimlessly, here and there with the foam swirling up to their waists. Apart, far aft, and alone by the helm, old Singleton had deliberately tucked his white beard under the top button of his glistening coat. Swaying upon the din and tumult of the seas, with the whole battered length of the ship launched forward in a rolling rush before his steady old eyes, he stood rigidly still, forgotten by all, and with an attentive face. In front of his erect figure only the two arms moved crosswise with a swift and sudden readiness, to check or urge again the rapid stir of circling spokes. He steered with care.

Chapter 4

On men reprieved by its disdainful mercy, the immortal sea confers in its justice the full privilege of desired unrest. Through the perfect wisdom of its grace they are not permitted to meditate at ease upon the complicated and acrid savour of existence. They must without pause justify their life to the eternal pity that commands toil to be hard and unceasing, from sunrise to sunset, from sunset to sunrise; till the weary succession of nights and days tainted by the obstinate clamour of sages, demanding bliss and an empty heaven, is redeemed at last by the vast silence of pain and labour, by the dumb fear and the dumb courage of men obscure, forgetful, and enduring.

The master and Mr. Baker coming face to face stared for a moment, with the intense and amazed looks of men meeting unexpectedly after years of trouble. Their voices were gone, and they whispered desperately at one another. — "Any one missing?" asked Captain Allistoun. — "No. All there." — "Anybody hurt?" — "Only the second mate." — "I will look after him directly. We're lucky." — "Very," articulated Mr. Baker, faintly. He gripped the rail and rolled bloodshot eyes. The little grey man made an effort to raise his voice above a dull mutter, and fixed his chief mate with a cold gaze, piercing like a dart. — "Get sail on the ship," he said, speaking authoritatively and with an inflexible snap of his thin lips. "Get sail on her as soon as you can. This is a fair wind. At once, sir — Don't give the men time to feel themselves. They will get done up and stiff, and we will never... We must get her along now"... He reeled to a long heavy roll; the rail dipped into the glancing, hissing water. He caught a shroud, swung helplessly against the mate... "now we have a fair wind at last — — — Make — — — sail." His head rolled from shoulder to shoulder. His eyelids began to beat rapidly. "And the pumps — — — pumps, Mr. Baker." He peered as though the face within a foot of his eyes had been half a mile off. "Keep the men on the move to — — — to get her along," he mumbled in a drowsy tone, like a man going off into a doze. He pulled himself together suddenly. "Mustn't stand. Won't do," he said with a painful attempt at a smile. He let go his hold, and, propelled by the dip of the ship, ran aft unwillingly, with small steps, till he brought up against the binnacle stand. Hanging on there he looked up in an aimless manner at Singleton, who, unheeding him, watched anxiously the end of the jib-boom — "Steering gear works all right?" he asked. There was a noise in the old seaman's throat, as though the words had been rattling together before they could come out. — "Steers... like a little boat," he said, at last, with hoarse tenderness, without giving the master as much as half a glance — then, watchfully, spun the wheel down, steadied, flung it back again. Captain Allistoun tore himself

away from the delight of leaning against the binnacle, and began to walk the poop, swaying and reeling to preserve his balance...

The pump-rods, clanking, stamped in short jumps while the fly-wheels turned smoothly, with great speed, at the foot of the mainmast, flinging back and forth with a regular impetuosity two limp clusters of men clinging to the handles. They abandoned themselves, swaying from the hip with twitching faces and stony eyes. The carpenter, sounding from time to time, exclaimed mechanically: "Shake her up! Keep her going!" Mr. Baker could not speak, but found his voice to shout; and under the goad of his oburgations, men looked to the lashings, dragged out new sails; and thinking themselves unable to move, carried heavy blocks aloft — overhauled the gear. They went up the rigging with faltering and desperate efforts. Their heads swam as they shifted their hold, stepped blindly on the yards like men in the dark; or trusted themselves to the first rope at hand with the negligence of exhausted strength. The narrow escapes from falls did not disturb the languid beat of their hearts; the roar of the seas seething far below them sounded continuous and faint like an indistinct noise from another world: the wind filled their eyes with tears, and with heavy gusts tried to push them off from where they swayed in insecure positions. With streaming faces and blowing hair they flew up and down between sky and water, bestriding the ends of yard-arms, crouching on foot-ropes, embracing lifts to have their hands free, or standing up against chain ties. Their thoughts floated vaguely between the desire of rest and the desire of life, while their stiffened fingers cast off head-earrings, fumbled for knives, or held with tenacious grip against the violent shocks of beating canvas. They glared savagely at one another, made frantic signs with one hand while they held their life in the other, looked down on the narrow strip of flooded deck, shouted along to leeward: "Light-to!"... "Haul out!"... "Make fast!" Their lips moved, their eyes started, furious and eager with the desire to be understood, but the wind tossed their words unheard upon the disturbed sea. In an unendurable and unending strain they worked like men driven by a merciless dream to toil in an atmosphere of ice or flame. They burnt and shivered in turns. Their eyeballs smarted as if in the smoke of a conflagration; their heads were ready to burst with every shout. Hard fingers seemed to grip their throats. At every roll they thought: Now I must let go. It will shake us all off — and thrown about aloft they cried wildly: "Look out there — catch the end."... "Reeve clear"... "Turn this block..." They nodded desperately; shook infuriated faces, "No! No! From down up." They seemed to hate one another with a deadly hate, The longing to be done with it all gnawed their breasts, and the wish to do things well was a burning pain. They cursed their fate, contemned their life, and wasted their breath in deadly imprecations upon one another.' The sailmaker, with his bald head bared, worked feverishly, forgetting his intimacy with so many admirals. The boatswain, climbing up with marlinspikes and bunches of spunyarn rovings, or kneeling on the yard and ready to take a turn with the midship-stop, had acute and fleeting visions of his old woman and the youngsters in a moorland village. Mr. Baker, feeling very weak, tottered here and there, grunting and inflexible, like a man of iron. He waylaid those who, coming from aloft, stood

gasping for breath. He ordered, encouraged, scolded. "Now then — to the main topsail now! Tally on to that gantline. Don't stand about there!" — "Is there no rest for us?" muttered voices. He spun round fiercely, with a sinking heart. — "No! No rest till the work is done. Work till you drop. That's what you're here for." A bowed seaman at his elbow gave a short laugh. — "Do or die," he croaked bitterly, then spat into his broad palms, swung up his long arms, and grasping the rope high above his head sent out a mournful, wailing cry for a pull all together. A sea boarded the quarter-deck and sent the whole lot sprawling to leeward. Caps, handspikes floated. Clenched hands, kicking legs, with here and there a spluttering face, stuck out of the white hiss of foaming water. Mr. Baker, knocked down with the rest, screamed — "Don't let go that rope! Hold on to it! Hold!" And sorely bruised by the brutal fling, they held on to it, as though it had been the fortune of their life. The ship ran, rolling heavily, and the topping crests glanced past port and starboard flashing their white heads. Pumps were freed. Braces were rove. The three topsails and foresail were set. She spurted faster over the water, outpacing the swift rush of waves. The menacing thunder of distanced seas rose behind her — filled the air with the tremendous vibrations of its voice. And devastated, battered, and wounded she drove foaming to the northward, as though inspired by the courage of a high endeavour...

The forecabin was a place of damp desolation. They looked at their dwelling with dismay. It was slimy, dripping; it hummed hollow with the wind, and was strewn with shapeless wreckage like a half-tide cavern in a rocky and exposed coast. Many had lost all they had in the world, but most of the starboard watch had preserved their chests; thin streams of water trickled out of them, however. The beds were soaked; the blankets spread out and saved by some nail squashed under foot. They dragged wet rags from evil-smelling corners, and wringing the water out, recognised their property. Some smiled stiffly. Others looked round blank and mute. There were cries of joy over old waistcoats, and groans of sorrow over shapeless things found among the splinters of smashed bed boards. One lamp was discovered jammed under the bowsprit. Charley whimpered a little. Knowles stumped here and there, sniffing, examining dark places for salvage. He poured dirty water out of a boot, and was concerned to find the owner. Those who, overwhelmed by their losses, sat on the forepeak hatch, remained elbows on knees, and, with a fist against each cheek, disdained to look up. He pushed it under their noses. "Here's a good boot. Yours?" They snarled, "No — get out." One snapped at him, "Take it to hell out of this." He seemed surprised. "Why? It's a good boot," but remembering suddenly that he had lost every stitch of his clothing, he dropped his find and began to swear. In the dim light cursing voices clashed. A man came in and, dropping his arms, stood still, repeating from the doorstep, "Here's a bloomin' old go! Here's a bloomin' old go!" A few rooted anxiously in flooded chests for tobacco. They breathed hard, clamoured with heads down. "Look at that Jack!"... "Here! Sam! Here's my shore-going rig spoilt for ever." One blasphemed tearfully, holding up a pair of dripping trousers. No one looked at him. The cat came out from somewhere. He had an ovation. They snatched him from hand to hand, caressed him in a murmur

of pet names. They wondered where he had “weathered it out;” disputed about it. A squabbling argument began. Two men brought in a bucket of fresh water, and all crowded round it; but Tom, lean and mewing, came up with every hair astir and had the first drink. A couple of hands went aft for oil and biscuits.

Then in the yellow light and in the intervals of mopping the deck they crunched hard bread, arranging to “worry through somehow.” Men chummed as to beds. Turns were settled for wearing boots and having the use of oilskin coats. They called one another “old man” and “sonny” in cheery voices. Friendly slaps resounded. Jokes were shouted. One or two stretched on the wet deck, slept with heads pillowed on their bent arms, and several, sitting on the hatch, smoked. Their weary faces appeared through a thin blue haze, pacified and with sparkling eyes. The boatswain put his head through the door. “Relieve the wheel, one of you” — he shouted inside — “it’s six. Blamme if that old Singleton hasn’t been there more’n thirty hours. You are a fine lot.” He slammed the door again. “Mate’s watch on deck,” said some one. “Hey, Donkin, it’s your relief!” shouted three or four together. He had crawled into an empty bunk and on wet planks lay still. “Donkin, your wheel.” He made no sound. “Donkin’s dead,” guffawed some one, “Sell ‘is bloomin’ clothes,” shouted another. “Donkin, if ye don’t go to the bloomin’ wheel they will sell your clothes — d’ye hear?” jeered a third. He groaned from his dark hole. He complained about pains in all his bones, he whimpered pitifully. “He won’t go,” exclaimed a contemptuous voice, “your turn, Davis.” The young seaman rose painfully, squaring his shoulders. Donkin stuck his head out, and it appeared in the yellow light, fragile and ghastly. “I will giv’ yer a pound of tobaccer,” he whined in a conciliating voice, “so soon as I draw it from aft. I will — s’elp me...” Davis swung his arm backhanded and the head vanished. “I’ll go,” he said, “but you will pay for it.” He walked unsteady but resolute to the door. “So I will,” yelled Donkin, popping out behind him. “So I will — s’elp me... a pound... three bob they chawrge.” Davis flung the door open. “You will pay my price... in fine weather,” he shouted over his shoulder. One of the men unbuttoned his wet coat rapidly, threw it at his head. “Here, Taffy — take that, you thief!” “Thank you!” he cried from the darkness above the swish of rolling water. He could be heard splashing; a sea came on board with a thump. “He’s got his bath already,” remarked a grim shellback. “Aye, aye!” grunted others. Then, after a long silence, Wamibo made strange noises. “Hallo, what’s up with you?” said some one grumpily. “He says he would have gone for Davy,” explained Archie, who was the Finn’s interpreter generally. “I believe him!” cried voices... “Never mind, Dutchy... You’ll do, muddle-head... Your turn will come soon enough... You don’t know when ye’re well off.” They ceased, and all together turned their faces to the door. Singleton stepped in, advanced two paces, and stood swaying slightly. The sea hissed, flowed roaring past the bows, and the forecastle trembled, full of deep murmurs; the lamp flared, swinging like a pendulum. He looked with a dreamy and puzzled stare, as though he could not distinguish the still men from their restless shadows. There were awestruck exclamations: — “Hallo, hallo”... “How does it look outside now, Singleton?” Those who sat on the hatch lifted their eyes in silence, and the next oldest seaman in the

ship (those two understood one another, though they hardly exchanged three words in a day) gazed up at his friend attentively for a moment, then taking a short clay pipe out of his mouth, offered it without a word. Singleton put out his arm towards it, missed, staggered, and suddenly fell forward, crashing down, stiff and headlong like an uprooted tree. There was a swift rush. Men pushed, crying: — "He's done!"... "Turn him over!"... "Stand clear there!" Under a crowd of startled faces bending over him he lay on his back, staring upwards in a continuous and intolerable manner. In the breathless silence of a general consternation, he said in a grating murmur: — "I am all right," and clutched with his hands. They helped him up. He mumbled despondently: — "I am getting old... old." — "Not you," cried Belfast, with ready tact. Supported on all sides, he hung his head. — "Are you better?" they asked. He glared at them from under his eyebrows with large black eyes, spreading over his chest the bushy whiteness of a beard long and thick. — "Old! old!" he repeated sternly. Helped along, he reached his bunk. There was in it a slimy soft heap of something that smelt, as does at dead low water a muddy foreshore. It was his soaked straw bed. With a convulsive effort he pitched himself on it, and in the darkness of the narrow place could be heard growling angrily, like an irritated and savage animal uneasy in its den: — "Bit of breeze... small thing... can't stand up... old!" He slept at last, high-booted, sou'wester on head, and his oilskin clothes rustled, when with a deep sighing groan he turned over. Men conversed about him in quiet, concerned whispers. "This will break'im up"... "Strong as a horse"... "Aye. But he ain't what he used to be." In sad murmurs they gave him up. Yet at midnight he turned out to duty as if nothing had been the matter, and answered to his name with a mournful "Here!" He brooded alone more than ever, in an impenetrable silence and with a saddened face. For many years he had heard himself called "Old Singleton," and had serenely accepted the qualification, taking it as a tribute of respect due to a man who through half a century had measured his strength against the favours and the rages of the sea. He had never given a thought to his mortal self. He lived unscathed, as though he had been indestructible, surrendering to all the temptations, weathering many gales. He had panted in sunshine, shivered in the cold; suffered hunger, thirst, debauch; passed through many trials — known all the furies. Old! It seemed to him he was broken at last. And like a man bound treacherously while he sleeps, he woke up fettered by the long chain of disregarded years. He had to take up at once the burden of all his existence, and found it almost too heavy for his strength. Old! He moved his arms, shook his head, felt his limbs. Getting old... and then? He looked upon the immortal sea with the awakened and groping perception of its heartless might; he saw it unchanged, black and foaming under the eternal scrutiny of the stars; he heard its impatient voice calling for him out of a pitiless vastness full of unrest, of turmoil, and of terror. He looked afar upon it, and he saw an immensity tormented and blind, moaning and furious, that claimed all the days of his tenacious life, and, when life was over, would claim the worn-out body of its slave...

This was the last of the breeze. It veered quickly, changed to a black south-easter, and blew itself out, giving the ship a famous shove to the northward into the joyous

sunshine of the trade. Rapid and white she ran homewards in a straight path, under a blue sky and upon the plain of a blue sea. She carried Singleton's completed wisdom, Donkin's delicate susceptibilities, and the conceited folly of us all. The hours of ineffective turmoil were forgotten; the fear and anguish of these dark moments were never mentioned in the glowing peace of fine days. Yet from that time our life seemed to start afresh as though we had died and had been resuscitated. All the first part of the voyage, the Indian Ocean on the other side of the Cape, all that was lost in a haze, like an ineradicable suspicion of some previous existence. It had ended — then there were blank hours: a livid blurr — and again we lived! Singleton was possessed of sinister truth; Mr. Creighton of a damaged leg; the cook of fame — and shamefully abused the opportunities of his distinction. Donkin had an added grievance. He went about repeating with insistence: — "E said 'e would brain me — did yer 'ear? They are goin' to murder us now for the least little thing." We began at last to think it was rather awful. And we were conceited! We boasted of our pluck, of our capacity for work, of our energy. We remembered honourable episodes: our devotion, our indomitable perseverance — and were proud of them as though they had been the outcome of our unaided impulses. We remembered our danger, our toil — and conveniently forgot our horrible scare. We decried our officers — who had done nothing — and listened to the fascinating Donkin. His care for our rights, his disinterested concern for our dignity, were not discouraged by the invariable contumely of our words, by the disdain of our looks. Our contempt for him was unbounded — and we could not but listen with interest to that consummate artist. He told us we were good men — a "bloomin' condemned lot of good men." Who thanked us? Who took any notice of our wrongs? Didn't we lead a "dorg's loife for two poun' ten a month?" Did we think that miserable pay enough to compensate us for the risk to our lives and for the loss of our clothes? "We've lost every rag!" he cried. He made us forget that he, at any rate, had lost nothing of his own. The younger men listened, thinking — this 'ere Donkin's a long-headed chap, though no kind of man, anyhow. The Scandinavians were frightened at his audacities; Wamibo did not understand; and the older seamen thoughtfully nodded their heads making the thin gold earrings glitter in the fleshy lobes of hairy ears. Severe, sunburnt faces were propped meditatively on tattooed forearms. Veined, brown fists held in their knotted grip the dirty white clay of smouldering pipes. They listened, impenetrable, broad-backed, with bent shoulders, and in grim silence. He talked with ardour, despised and irrefutable. His picturesque and filthy loquacity flowed like a troubled stream from a poisoned source. His beady little eyes danced, glancing right and left, ever on the watch for the approach of an officer. Sometimes Mr. Baker going forward to take a look at the head sheets would roll with his uncouth gait through the sudden stillness of the men; or Mr. Creighton limped along, smooth-faced, youthful, and more stern than ever, piercing our short silence with a keen glance of his clear eyes. Behind his back Donkin would begin again darting stealthy, sidelong looks. — "'Ere's one of 'em. Some of yer 'as made 'im fast that day. Much thanks yer got for it. Ain't 'ee a-drivin' yer wusse'n ever?... Let 'im slip overboard... Vy not? It would 'ave been less trouble. Vy not?" He

advanced confidentially, backed away with great effect; he whispered, he screamed, waved his miserable arms no thicker than pipe-stems — stretched his lean neck — spluttered squinted. In the pauses of his impassioned orations the wind sighed quietly aloft, the calm sea unheeded murmured in a warning whisper along the ship's side. We abominated the creature and could not deny the luminous truth of his contentions. It was all so obvious. We were indubitably good men; our deserts were great and our pay small. Through our exertions we had saved the ship and the skipper would get the credit of it. What had he done? we wanted to know. Donkin asked: — "What 'ee could do without hus?" and we could not answer. We were oppressed by the injustice of the world, surprised to perceive how long we had lived under its burden without realising our unfortunate state, annoyed by the uneasy suspicion of our undiscerning stupidity. Donkin assured us it was all our "good 'eartedness," but we would not be consoled by such shallow sophistry. We were men enough to courageously admit to ourselves our intellectual shortcomings; though from that time we refrained from kicking him, tweaking his nose, or from accidentally knocking him about, which last, after we had weathered the Cape, had been rather a popular amusement. Davis ceased to talk at him provokingly about black eyes and flattened noses. Charley, much subdued since the gale, did not jeer at him. Knowles deferentially and with a crafty air propounded questions such as: — "Could we all have the same grub as the mates? Could we all stop ashore till we got it? What would be the next thing to try for if we got that?" He answered readily with contemptuous certitude; he strutted with assurance in clothes that were much too big for him as though he had tried to disguise himself. These were Jimmy's clothes mostly — though he would accept anything from anybody; but nobody, except Jimmy, had anything to spare. His devotion to Jimmy was unbounded. He was for ever dodging in the little cabin, ministering to Jimmy's wants, humouring his whims, submitting to his exacting peevishness, often laughing with him. Nothing could keep him away from the pious work of visiting the sick, especially when there was some heavy hauling to be done on deck. Mr. Baker had on two occasions jerked him out from there by the scruff of the neck to our inexpressible scandal. Was a sick chap to be left without attendance? Were we to be ill-used for attending a shipmate? — "What?" growled Mr. Baker, turning menacingly at the mutter, and the whole half-circle like one man stepped back a pace. "Set the topmast stunsail. Away aloft, Donkin, overhaul the gear," ordered the mate inflexibly. "Fetch the sail along; bend the down-haul clear. Bear a hand." Then, the sail set, he would go slowly aft and stand looking at the compass for a long time, careworn, pensive, and breathing hard as if stifled by the taint of unaccountable ill-will that pervaded the ship. "What's up amongst them?" he thought. "Can't make out this hanging back and growling. A good crowd, too, as they go nowadays." On deck the men exchanged bitter words, suggested by a silly exasperation against something unjust and irremediable that would not be denied, and would whisper into their ears long after Donkin had ceased speaking. Our little world went on its curved and unswerving path carrying a discontented and aspiring population. They found comfort of a gloomy kind in an interminable and conscientious analysis of

their unappreciated worth; and inspired by Donkin's hopeful doctrines they dreamed enthusiastically of the time when every lonely ship would travel over a serene sea, manned by a wealthy and well-fed crew of satisfied skippers.

It looked-as if it would be a long passage. The south-east trades, light and unsteady, were left behind; and then, on the equator and under a low grey sky, the ship, in close heat, floated upon a smooth sea that resembled a sheet of ground glass. Thunder squalls hung on the horizon, circled round the ship, far off and growling angrily, like a troop of wild beasts afraid to charge home. The invisible sun, sweeping above the upright masts, made on the clouds a blurred stain of rayless light, and a similar patch of faded radiance kept pace with it from east to west over the unglittering level of the waters. At night, through the impenetrable darkness of earth and, heaven, broad sheets of flame waved noiselessly; and for half a second the becalmed craft stood out with its masts and rigging, with every sail and every rope distinct and black in the centre of a fiery outburst, like a charred ship enclosed in a globe of fire. And, again, for long hours she remained lost in a vast universe of night and silence where gentle sighs wandering here and there like forlorn souls, made the still sails flutter as in sudden fear, and the ripple of a beshrouded ocean whisper its compassion afar — in a voice mournful, immense, and faint...

When the lamp was put out, and through the door thrown wide open, Jimmy, turning on his pillow, could see vanishing beyond the straight line of top-gallant rail, the quick, repeated visions of a fabulous world made up of leaping fire and sleeping water. The lightning gleamed in his big sad eyes that seemed in a red flicker to burn themselves out in his black face, and then he would lie blinded and invisible in the midst of an intense darkness. He could hear on the quiet deck soft footfalls, the breathing of some man lounging on the doorstep; the low creak of swaying masts; or the calm voice of the watch-officer reverberating aloft, hard and loud, amongst the unstirring sails. He listened with avidity, taking a rest in the attentive perception of the slightest sound from the fatiguing wanderings of his sleeplessness. He was cheered by the rattling of blocks, reassured by the stir and murmur of the watch, soothed by the slow yawn of some sleepy and weary seaman settling himself deliberately for a snooze on the planks. Life seemed an indestructible thing. It went on in darkness, in sunshine, in sleep; tireless, it hovered affectionately round the imposture of his ready death. It was bright, like the twisted flare of lightning, and more full of surprises than the dark night. It made him safe, and the calm of its overpowering darkness was as precious as its restless and dangerous light.

But in the evening, in the dog-watches, and even far into the first night-watch, a knot of men could always be seen congregated before Jimmy's cabin. They leaned on each side of the door peacefully interested and with crossed legs; they stood astride the doorstep discoursing, or sat in silent couples on his sea-chest; while against the bulwark along the spare topmast, three or four in a row stared meditatively; with their simple faces lit up by the projected glare of Jimmy's lamp. The little place, repainted white, had, in the night, the brilliance of a silver shrine where a black idol, reclining stiffly

under a blanket, blinked its weary eyes and received our homage. Donkin officiated. He had the air of a demonstrator showing a phenomenon, a manifestation bizarre, simple, and meritorious that, to the beholders, should be a profound and an everlasting lesson. "Just look at 'im, 'ee knows what's what — never fear!" he exclaimed now and then, flourishing a hand hard and fleshless like the claw of a snipe. Jimmy, on his back, smiled with reserve and without moving a limb. He affected the languor of extreme weakness, so as to make it manifest to us that our delay in hauling him out from his horrible confinement, and then that night spent on the poop among our selfish neglect of his needs, had "done for him." He rather liked to talk about it, and of course we were always interested. He spoke spasmodically, in fast rushes with long pauses between, as a tipsy man walks... "Cook had just given me a pannikin of hot coffee... Slapped it down there, on my chest — banged the door to... I felt a heavy roll coming; tried to save my coffee, burnt my fingers... and fell out of my bunk... She went over so quick... Water came in through the ventilator... I couldn't move the door... dark as a grave... tried to scramble up into the upper berth... Rats... a rat bit my finger as I got up... I could hear him swimming below me... I thought you would never come... I thought you were all gone overboard... of course... Could hear nothing but the wind... Then you came... to look for the corpse, I suppose. A little more and..."

"Man! But ye made a rare lot of noise in here," observed Archie, thoughtfully.

"You chaps kicked up such a confounded row above... Enough to scare any one... I didn't know what you were up to... Bash in the blamed planks... my head... Just what a silly, scary gang of fools would do... Not much good to me anyhow... Just as well... drown... Pah."

He groaned, snapped his big white teeth, and gazed with scorn. Belfast lifted a pair of dolorous eyes, with a broken-hearted smile, clenched his fists stealthily; blue-eyed Archie caressed his red whiskers with a hesitating hand; the boatswain at the door stared a moment, and brusquely went away with a loud guffaw. Wamibo dreamed... Donkin felt all over his sterile chin for the few rare hairs, and said, triumphantly, with a sidelong glance at Jimmy: — "Look at 'im! Wish I was 'arf has 'ealthy as 'ee is — I do." He jerked a short thumb over his shoulder towards the after end of the ship. "That's the blooming way to do 'em!" he yelled, with forced heartiness. Jimmy said: — "Don't be a dam' fool," in a pleasant voice. Knowles, rubbing his shoulder against the doorpost, remarked shrewdly: — "We can't all go an' be took sick — it would be mutiny." — "Mutiny — gawn!" jeered Donkin, "there's no bloomin' law against bein' sick." — "There's six weeks' hard for refoosing dooty," argued Knowles, "I mind I once seed in Cardiff the crew of an overloaded ship — leastways she weren't overloaded, only a fatherly old gentleman with a white beard and an umbreller came along the quay and talked to the hands. Said as how it was crool hard to be drowned in winter just for the sake of a few pounds more for the owner — he said. Nearly cried over them — he did; and he had a square mainsail coat, and a gaff-topsail hat too — all proper. So they chaps they said they wouldn't go to be drowned in winter — depending upon that 'ere Plimsoll man to see 'em through the court. They thought to have a bloomin'

lark and two or three days' spree. And the beak giv' 'em six weeks — coss the ship warn't overloaded. Anyways they made it out in court that she wasn't. There wasn't one overloaded ship in Penarth Dock at all. 'Pears that old coon he was only on pay and allowance from some kind people, under orders to look for overloaded ships, and he couldn't see no further than the length of his umbreller. Some of us in the boarding-house, where I live when I'm looking for a ship in Cardiff, stood by to duck that old weeping spunger in the dock. We kept a good look-out, too — but he topped his boom directly he was outside the court... Yes. They got six weeks' hard..."

They listened, full of curiosity, nodding in the pauses their rough pensive faces. Donkin opened his mouth once or twice, but restrained himself. Jimmy lay still with open eyes and not at all interested. A seaman emitted the opinion that after a verdict of atrocious partiality "the bloomin' beaks go an' drink at the skipper's expense." Others assented. It was clear, of course. Donkin said: — "Well, six weeks ain't much trouble. You sleep all night in, reg'lar, in chokey. Do it on my 'ead." "You are used to it ainch'ee, Donkin?" asked somebody. Jimmy condescended to laugh. It cheered up every one wonderfully. Knowles, with surprising mental agility, shifted his ground. "If we all went sick what would become of the ship? eh?" He posed the problem and grinned all round. — "Let 'er go to 'ell," sneered Donkin. "Damn 'er. She ain't yourn." — "What? Just let her drift?" insisted Knowles in a tone of unbelief. — "Aye! Drift, an' be blowed," affirmed Donkin with fine recklessness. The other did not see it — meditated. — "The stores would run out," he muttered, "and... never get anywhere... and what about payday?" he added with greater assurance. — "Jack likes a good payday," exclaimed a listener on the doorstep. "Aye, because then the girls put one arm round his neck an' t'other in his pocket, and call him ducky. Don't they, Jack?" — "Jack, you're a terror with the gals." — "He takes three of 'em in tow to once, like one of 'em Watkinses two-funnel tugs waddling away with three schooners behind." — "Jack, you're a lame scamp." — "Jack, tell us about that one with a blue eye and a black eye. Do." — "There's plenty of girls with one black eye along the Highway by..."

— "No, that's a speshul one — come, Jack." Donkin looked severe and disgusted; Jimmy very bored; a grey-haired sea-dog shook his head slightly, smiling at the bowl of his pipe, discreetly amused. Knowles turned about bewildered; stammered first at one, then at another. — "No!... I never!... can't talk sensible sense midst you... Always on the kid." He retired bashfully — muttering and pleased. They laughed, hooting in the crude light, around Jimmy's bed, where on a white pillow his hollowed black face moved to and fro restlessly. A puff of wind came, made the flame of the lamp leap, and outside, high up, the sails fluttered, while near by the block of the foresheet struck a ringing blow on the iron bulwark. A voice far off cried, "Helm up!" another, more faint, answered, "Hard-up, sir!" They became silent — waited expectantly. The grey-haired seaman knocked his pipe on the doorstep and stood up. The ship leaned over gently and the sea seemed to wake up, murmuring drowsily. "Here's a little wind comin'," said some one very low. Jimmy turned over slowly to face the breeze. The voice in the night cried loud and commanding: — "Haul the spanker out." The group before the

door vanished out of the light. They could be heard tramping aft while they repeated with varied intonations: — "Spanker out!"... "Out spanker, sir!" Donkin remained alone with Jimmy. There was a silence. Jimmy opened and shut his lips several times as if swallowing draughts of fresher air; Donkin moved the toes of his bare feet and looked at them thoughtfully.

"Ain't you going to give them a hand with the sail?" asked Jimmy.

"No. If six ov 'em ain't 'nough beef to set that blamed, rotten spanker, they ain't fit to live," answered Donkin in a bored, far-away voice, as though he had been talking from the bottom of a hole. Jimmy considered the conical, fowl-like profile with a queer kind of interest; he was leaning out of his bunk with the calculating, uncertain expression of a man who reflects how best to lay hold of some strange creature that looks as though it could sting or bite. But he said only: — "The mate will miss you — and there will be ructions."

Donkin got up to go. "I will do for 'im some dark night; see if I don't," he said over his shoulder.

Jimmy went on quickly: — "You're like a poll-parrot, like a screechin' poll-parrot." Donkin stopped and cocked his head attentively on one side. His big ears stood out, transparent and veined, resembling the thin wings of a bat.

"Yuss?" he said, with his back towards Jimmy.

"Yes! Chatter out all you know — like... like a dirty white cockatoo."

Donkin waited. He could hear the other's breathing, long and slow; the breathing of a man with a hundredweight or so on the breastbone. Then he asked calmly: — "What do I know?"

"What?... What I tell you... not much. What do you want... to talk about my health so..."

"It's a blooming imposyshun. A bloomin', stinkin', first-class imposyshun — but it don't tyke me in. Not it."

Jimmy kept still. Donkin put his hands in his pockets, and in one slouching stride came up to the bunk.

"I talk — what's the odds. They ain't men 'ere — sheep they are. A driven lot of sheep. I 'old you up... Vy not? You're well orf."

"I am... I don't say anything about that..."

"Well. Let 'em see it. Let 'em larn what a man can do. I am a man, I know all about yer..." Jimmy threw himself further away on the pillow; the other stretched out his skinny neck, jerked his bird face down at him as though pecking at the eyes. "I am a man. I've seen the inside of every chokey in the Colonies rather'n give up my rights..."

"You are a jail-prop," said Jimmy, weakly.

"I am... an' proud of it, too. You! You 'aven't the bloomin' nerve — so you inventyd this 'ere dodge..." He paused; then with marked afterthought accentuated slowly: — "Yer ain't sick — are yer?"

"No," said Jimmy, firmly. "Been out of sorts now and again this year," he mumbled with a sudden drop in his voice.

Donkin closed one eye, amicable and confidential. He whispered: — "Ye 'ave done this afore'ven'tchee?" Jimmy smiled — then as if unable to hold back he let himself go: — "Last ship — yes. I was out of sorts on the passage. See? It was easy. They paid me off in Calcutta, and the skipper made no bones about it either... I got my money all right. Laid up fifty-eight days! The fools! O Lord! The fools! Paid right off." He laughed spasmodically. Donkin chimed in giggling. Then Jimmy coughed violently. "I am as well as ever," he said, as soon as he could draw breath.

Donkin made a derisive gesture. "In course," he said, profoundly, "any one can see that." — "They don't," said Jimmy, gasping like a fish. — "They would swallow any yarn," affirmed Donkin. — "Don't you let on too much," admonished Jimmy in an exhausted voice. — "Your little gyme? Eh?" commented Donkin, jovially. Then with sudden disgust: "Yer all for yerself, s'long as ye're right..."

So charged with egoism James Wait pulled the blanket up to his chin and lay still for a while. His heavy lips protruded in an everlasting black pout. "Why are you so hot on making trouble?" he asked without much interest.

"'Cos it's a bloomin' shayme. We are put upon... bad food, bad pay... I want us to kick up a bloomin' row; a blamed 'owling row that would make 'em remember! Knocking people about... brain us indeed! Ain't we men?" His altruistic indignation blazed. Then he said calmly: — "I've been airing yer clothes." — "All right," said Jimmy, languidly, "bring them in." — "Giv' us the key of your chest, I'll put 'em away for yer," said Donkin with friendly eagerness. — "Bring 'em in, I will put them away myself," answered James Wait with severity. Donkin looked down, muttering... "What d'you say? What d'you say?" inquired Wait anxiously. — "Nothink. The night's dry, let 'em 'ang out till the morning," said Donkin, in a strangely trembling voice, as though restraining laughter or rage. Jimmy seemed satisfied. — "Give me a little water for the night in my mug — there," he said. Donkin took a stride over the doorstep. — "Git it yerself," he replied in a surly tone. "You can do it, unless you are sick." — "Of course I can do it," said Wait, "only... " — "Well, then, do it," said Donkin, viciously, "if yer can look after yer clothes, yer can look after yerself." He went on deck without a look back.

Jimmy reached out for the mug. Not a drop. He put it back gently with a faint sigh — and closed his eyes. He thought: — That lunatic Belfast will bring me some water if I ask. Fool. I am very thirsty... It was very hot in the cabin, and it seemed to turn slowly round, detach itself from the ship, and swing out smoothly into a luminous, arid space where a black sun shone, spinning very fast. A place without any water! No water! A policeman with the face of Donkin drank a glass of beer by the side of an empty well, and flew away flapping vigorously. A ship whose mastheads protruded through the sky and could not be seen, was discharging grain, and the wind whirled the dry husks in spirals along the quay of a dock with no water in it. He whirled along with the husks — very tired and light. All his inside was gone. He felt lighter than the husks — and more dry. He expanded his hollow chest. The air streamed in, carrying away in its rush a lot of strange things that resembled houses, trees, people, lamp-posts... No more!

There was no more air — and he had not finished drawing his long breath. But he was in jail! They were locking him up. A door slammed. They turned the key twice, flung a bucket of water over him — Phoo! What for?

He opened his eyes, thinking the fall had been very heavy for an empty man — empty — empty. He was in his cabin. Ah! All right! His face was streaming with perspiration, his arms heavier than lead. He saw the cook standing in the doorway, a brass key in one hand and a bright tin hook-pot in the other.

“I have locked up the galley for the night,” said the cook, beaming benevolently. “Eight bells just gone. I brought you a pot of cold tea for your night’s drinking, Jimmy. I sweetened it with some white cabin sugar, too. Well — it won’t break the ship.”

He came in, hung the pot on the edge of the bunk, asked perfunctorily, “How goes it?” and sat down on the box. — ”H’m,” grunted Wait, inhospitably. The cook wiped his face with a dirty cotton rag, which, afterwards, he tied round his neck. — ”That’s how them firemen do in steamboats,” he said, serenely, and much pleased with himself. “My work is as heavy as theirs — I’m thinking — and longer hours. Did you ever see them down the stokehold? Like fiends they look — firing — firing — firing — down there.”

He pointed his forefinger at the deck. Some gloomy thought darkened his shining face, fleeting, like the shadow of a travelling cloud over the light of a peaceful sea. The relieved watch tramped noisily forward, passing in a body across the sheen of the doorway. Some one cried, “Good-night!” Belfast stopped for a moment and looked at Jimmy, quivering and speechless with repressed emotion. He gave the cook a glance charged with dismal foreboding, and vanished. The cook cleared his throat. Jimmy stared upwards and kept as still as a man in hiding.

The night was clear, with a gentle breeze. Above the mastheads the resplendent curve of the Milky Way spanned the sky like a triumphal arch of eternal light, thrown over the dark pathway of the earth. On the forecastle head a man whistled with loud precision a lively jig, while another could be heard faintly, shuffling and stamping in time. There came from forward a confused murmur of voices, laughter — snatches of song. The cook shook his head, glanced obliquely at Jimmy, and began to mutter. “Aye. Dance and sing. That’s all they think of. I am surprised that Providence don’t get tired... They forget the day that’s sure to come... but you...”

Jimmy drank a gulp of tea, hurriedly, as though he had stolen it, and shrank under his blanket, edging away towards the bulkhead. The cook got up, closed the door, then sat down again and said distinctly: —

“Whenever I poke my galley fire I think of you chaps — swearing, stealing, lying, and worse — as if there was no such thing as another world... Not bad fellows, either, in a way,” he conceded, slowly; then, after a pause of regretful musing, he went on in a resigned tone: — ”Well, well. They will have a hot time of it. Hot! Did I say? The furnaces of one of them White Star boats ain’t nothing to it.”

He kept very quiet for a while. There was a great stir in his brain; an addled vision of bright outlines; an exciting row of rousing songs and groans of pain. He suffered,

enjoyed, admired, approved. He was delighted, frightened, exalted — as on that evening (the only time in his life — twenty-seven years ago; he loved to recall the number of years) when as a young man he had — through keeping bad company — become intoxicated in an East-end music-hall. A tide of sudden feeling swept him clean out of his body. He soared. He contemplated the secret of the hereafter. It commended itself to him. It was excellent; he loved it, himself, all hands, and Jimmy. His heart overflowed with tenderness, with comprehension, with the desire to meddle, with anxiety for the soul of that black man, with the pride of possessed eternity, with the feeling of might. Snatch him up in his arms and pitch him right into the middle of salvation... The black soul — blacker — body — rot — Devil. No! Talk-strength — Samson... There was a great din as of cymbals in his ears; he flashed through an ecstatic jumble of shining faces, lilies, prayer-books, unearthly joy, white skirts, gold harps, black coats, wings. He saw flowing garments, clean shaved faces, a sea of light — a lake of pitch. There were sweet scent, a smell of sulphur — red tongues of flame licking a white mist. An awesome voice thundered!... It lasted three seconds.

“Jimmy!” he cried in an inspired tone. Then he hesitated. A spark of human pity glimmered yet through the infernal fog of his supreme conceit.

“What?” said James Wait, unwillingly. There was a silence. He turned his head just the least bit, and stole a cautious glance. The cook’s lips moved without a sound; his face was rapt, his eyes turned up. He seemed to be mentally imploring deck beams, the brass hook of the lamp, two cockroaches.

“Look here,” said Wait, “I want to go to sleep. I think I could.”

“This is no time for sleep!” exclaimed the cook, very loud. He had prayerfully divested himself of the last vestige of his humanity. He was a voice — a fleshless and sublime thing, as on that memorable night — the night when he went walking over the sea to make coffee for perishing sinners. “This is no time for sleeping,” he repeated with exaltation. “I can’t sleep.”

“Don’t care damn,” said Wait, with factitious energy. “I can. Go an’ turn in.”

“Swear... in the very jaws!... In the very jaws! Don’t you see the everlasting fire... don’t you feel it? Blind, chockfull of sin! Repent, repent! I can’t bear to think of you. I hear the call to save you. Night and day. Jimmy, let me save you!” The words of entreaty and menace broke out of him in a roaring torrent. The cockroaches ran away. Jimmy perspired, wriggling stealthily under his blanket. The cook yelled... “Your days are numbered!... “ — “Get out of this,” boomed Wait, courageously. — “Pray with me!... “ — “I won’t!...” The little cabin was as hot as an oven. It contained an immensity of fear and pain; an atmosphere of shrieks and moans; prayers vociferated like blasphemies and whispered curses. Outside, the men called by Charley, who informed them in tones of delight that there was a holy row going on in Jimmy’s place, crowded before the closed door, too startled to open it. All hands were there. The watch below had jumped out on deck in their shirts, as after a collision. Men running up, asked: — “What is it?” Others said: — “Listen!” The muffled screaming went on: — “On your knees! On your knees!” — “Shut up!” — “Never! You are delivered into my hands... Your life has

been saved... Purpose... Mercy... Repent." — "You are a crazy fool!..." — "Account of you... you... Never sleep in this world, if I..." — "Leave off." — "No!... stokehold... only think!..." Then an impassioned screeching babble where words pattered like hail. — "No!" shouted Wait. — "Yes. You are!... No help... Everybody says so." — "You lie!" — "I see you dying this minnyt... before my eyes... as good as dead already." — "Help!" shouted Jimmy, piercingly. — "Not in this valley... look upwards," howled the other. — "Go away! Murder! Help!" clamoured Jimmy. His voice broke. There were moanings, low mutters, a few sobs.

"What's the matter now?" said a seldom-heard voice. — "Fall back, men! Fall back, there!" repeated Mr. Creighton, sternly, pushing through. — "Here's the old man," whispered some. — "The cook's in there, sir," exclaimed several, backing away. The door clattered open; a broad stream of light darted out on wondering faces; a warm whiff of vitiated air passed. The two mates towered head and shoulders above the spare, grey-haired man who stood revealed between them, in shabby clothes, stiff and angular, like a small carved figure, and with a thin, composed face. The cook got up from his knees. Jimmy sat high in the bunk, clasping his drawn-up legs. The tassel of the blue night-cap almost imperceptibly trembled over his knees. They gazed astonished at his long, curved back, while the white corner of one eye gleamed blindly at them. He was afraid to turn his head, he shrank within himself; and there was an aspect astounding and animal-like in the perfection of his expectant immobility. A thing of instinct — the unthinking stillness of a scared brute. "What are you doing here?" asked Mr. Baker, sharply. — "My duty," said the cook, with ardour. — "Your... what?" began the mate. Captain Allistoun touched his arm lightly. — "I know his caper," he said, in a low voice. "Come out of that, Podmore," he ordered, aloud.

The cook wrung his hands, shook his fists above his head, and his arms dropped as if too heavy. For a moment he stood distracted and speechless. — "Never," he stammered, "I... he I." —

"What — do — you — say?" pronounced Captain Allistoun. "Come out at once — or..." — "I am going," said the cook, with a hasty and sombre resignation. He strode over the doorstep firmly — hesitated — made a few steps. They looked at him in silence. — "I make you responsible!" he cried, desperately, turning half round. "That man is dying. I make you." — "You there yet?" called the master in a threatening tone. — "No, sir," he exclaimed, hurriedly, in a startled voice. The boatswain led him away by the arm; some one laughed; Jimmy lifted his head for a stealthy glance, and in one unexpected leap sprang out of his bunk; Mr. Baker made a clever catch and felt him very limp in his arms; the group at the door grunted with surprise. — "He lies," gasped Wait, "he talked about black devils — he is a devil — a white devil — I am all right." He stiffened himself, and Mr. Baker, experimentally, let him go. He staggered a pace or two; Captain Allistoun watched him with a quiet and penetrating gaze; Belfast ran to his support. He did not appear to be aware of any one near him; he stood silent for a moment, battling single-handed with a legion of nameless terrors, amidst the eager looks of excited men who watched him far off, utterly alone in the

impenetrable solitude of his fear. The sea gurgled through the scuppers as the ship heeled over to a short puff of wind.

“Keep him away from me,” said James Wait at last in his fine baritone voice, and leaning with all his weight on Belfast’s neck. “I’ve been better this last week:... I am well... I was going back to duty... to-morrow — now if you like — Captain.” Belfast hitched his shoulders to keep him upright.

“No,” said the master, looking at him, fixedly. Under Jimmy’s armpit Belfast’s red face moved uneasily. A row of eyes gleaming stared on the edge of light. They pushed one another with elbows, turned their heads, whispered. Wait let his chin fall on his breast and, with lowered eyelids, looked round in a suspicious manner.

“Why not?” cried a voice from the shadows, “the man’s all right, sir.”

“I am all right,” said Wait, with eagerness. “Been sick... better... turn-to now.” He sighed. — “Howly Mother!” exclaimed Belfast with a heave of the shoulders, “stand up, Jimmy.” — “Keep away from me then,” said Wait, giving Belfast a petulant push, and reeling fetched against the doorpost. His cheekbones glistened as though they had been varnished. He snatched off his night-cap, wiped his perspiring face with it, flung it on the deck. “I am coming out,” he declared without stirring.

“No. You don’t,” said the master, curtly. Bare feet shuffled, disapproving voices murmured all round; he went on as if he had not heard: — “You have been skulking nearly all the passage and now you want to come out. You think you are near enough to the pay-table now. Smell the shore, hey?”

“I’ve been sick... now — better,” mumbled Wait, glaring in the light. — “You have been shamming sick,” retorted Captain Allistoun with severity; “Why...” he hesitated for less than half a second. “Why, anybody can see that. There’s nothing the matter with you, but you choose to lie-up to please yourself — and now you shall lie-up to please me. Mr. Baker, my orders are that this man is not to be allowed on deck to the end of the passage.”

There were exclamations of surprise, triumph, indignation. The dark group of men swung across the light. “What for?” “Told you so...” “Bloomin’ shame...” — “We’ve got to say somethink about that,” screeched Donkin from the rear. — “Never mind, Jim — we will see you righted,” cried several together. An elderly seaman stepped to the front. “D’ye mean to say, sir,” he asked, ominously, “that a sick chap ain’t allowed to get well in this ‘ere hooker?” Behind him Donkin whispered excitedly amongst a staring crowd where no one spared him a glance, but Captain Allistoun shook a forefinger at the angry bronzed face of the speaker. — “You — you hold your tongue,” he said, warningly. — “This isn’t the way,” clamoured two or three younger men. — “Are we bloomin’ masheens?” inquired Donkin in a piercing tone, and dived under the elbows of the front rank. — “Soon show ‘im we ain’t boys...” — “The man’s a man if he is black.” — “We ain’t goin’ to work this bloomin’ ship shorthanded if Snowball’s all right...” — “He says he is.” — “Well then, strike, boys, strike!” — “That’s the bloomin’ ticket.” Captain Allistoun said sharply to the second mate: “Keep quiet, Mr. Creighton,” and stood composed in the tumult, listening with profound attention to mixed growls and

screeches, to every exclamation and every curse of the sudden outbreak. Somebody slammed the cabin door to with a kick; the darkness full of menacing mutters leaped with a short clatter over the streak of light, and the men became gesticulating shadows that growled, hissed, laughed excitedly. Mr. Baker whispered: — "Get away from them, sir." The big shape of Mr. Creighton hovered silently about the slight figure of the master. — "We have been hymposed upon all this voyage," said a gruff voice, "but this 'ere fancy takes the cake." — "That man is a shipmate." — "Are we bloomin' kids?" — "The port watch will refuse duty." Charley carried away by his feeling whistled shrilly, then yelped: — "Giv' us our Jimmy!" This seemed to cause a variation in the disturbance. There was a fresh burst of squabbling uproar. A lot of quarrels were set going at once. — "Yes." — "No." — "Never been sick." — "Go for them to once." — "Shut yer mouth, youngster — -this is men's work." — "Is it?" muttered Captain Allistoun, bitterly. Mr. Baker grunted: "Ough! They're gone silly. They've been simmering for the last month." — "I did notice," said the master. — "They have started a row amongst themselves now," said Mr. Creighton with disdain, "better get aft, sir. We will soothe them. — "Keep your temper, Creighton," said the master. And the three men began to move slowly towards the cabin door.

In the shadows of the fore rigging a dark mass stamped, eddied, advanced, retreated. There were words of reproach, encouragement, unbelief, execration. The elder seamen, bewildered and angry, growled their determination to go through with something or other; but the younger school of advanced thought exposed their and Jimmy's wrongs with confused shouts, arguing amongst themselves. They clustered round that moribund carcass, the fit emblem of their aspirations, and encouraging one another they swayed, they tramped on one spot, shouting that they would not be "put upon." Inside the cabin, Belfast, helping Jimmy into his bunk, twitched all over in his desire not to miss all the row, and with difficulty restrained the tears of his facile emotion. James Wait, flat on his back under the blanket, gasped complaints. — "We will back you up, never fear," assured Belfast, busy about his feet. —

"I'll come out to-morrow morning — — — take my chance — — — -you fellows must — — —" mumbled Wait, "I come out to-morrow — — — skipper or no skipper." He lifted one arm with great difficulty, passed the hand over his face; "Don't you let that cook..." he breathed out. — "No, no," said Belfast, turning his back on the bunk, "I will put a head on him if he comes near you." — "I will smash his mug!" exclaimed faintly Wait, enraged and weak; "I don't want to kill a man, but..." He panted fast like a dog after a run in sunshine. Some one just outside the door shouted, "He's as fit as any ov us!" Belfast put his hand on the door-handle. — "Here!" called James Wait, hurriedly, and in such a clear voice that the other spun round with a start. James Wait, stretched out black and deathlike in the dazzling light, turned his head on the pillow. His eyes stared at Belfast, appealing and impudent. "I am rather weak from lying-up so long," he said, distinctly. Belfast nodded. "Getting quite well now," insisted Wait. — "Yes. I noticed you getting better this... last month," said Belfast, looking down. "Hallo! What's this?" he shouted and ran out.

He was flattened directly against the side of the house by two men who lurched against him. A lot of disputes seemed to be going on all round. He got clear and saw three indistinct figures standing along in the fainter darkness under the arched foot of the mainsail, that rose above their heads like a convex wall of a high edifice. Donkin hissed: — "Go for them... it's dark!" The crowd took a short run aft in a body — then there was a check. Donkin, agile and thin, flitted past with his right arm going like a windmill — and then stood still suddenly with his arm pointing rigidly above his head. The hurtling flight of some heavy object was heard; it passed between the heads of the two mates, bounded heavily along the deck, struck the after hatch with a ponderous and deadened blow. The bulky shape of Mr. Baker grew distinct. "Come to your senses, men!" he cried, advancing at the arrested crowd. "Come back, Mr. Baker!" called the master's quiet voice. He obeyed unwillingly. There was a minute of silence, then a deafening hubbub arose. Above it Archie was heard energetically: — "If ye do oot ageen I wull tell!" There were shouts. "Don't!" "Drop it!" — "We ain't that kind!" The black cluster of human forms reeled against the bulwark, back again towards the house. Ringbolts rang under stumbling feet. — "Drop it!" "Let me!" — "No!" — "Curse you... hah!" Then sounds as of some one's face being slapped; a piece of iron fell on the deck; a short scuffle, and some one's shadowy body scuttled rapidly across the main hatch before the shadow of a kick. A raging voice sobbed out a torrent of filthy language... — "Throwing things — good God!" grunted Mr. Baker in dismay. — "That was meant for me," said the master, quietly; "I felt the wind of that thing; what was it — an iron belaying-pin?" — "By Jove!" muttered Mr. Creighton. The confused voices of men talking amidships mingled with the wash of the sea, ascended between the silent and distended sails-seemed to flow away into the night, further than the horizon, higher than the sky. The stars burned steadily over the inclined mastheads. Trails of light lay on the water, broke before the advancing hull, and, after she had passed, trembled for a long time as if in awe of the murmuring sea.

Meantime the helmsman, anxious to know what the row was about, had let go the wheel, and, bent double, ran with long, stealthy footsteps to the break of the poop. The *Narcissus*, left to herself, came up gently in to the wind without any one being aware of it. She gave a slight roll, and the sleeping sails woke suddenly, coming all together with a mighty flap against the masts, then filled again one after another in a quick succession of loud reports that ran down the lofty spars, till the collapsed mainsail flew out last with a violent jerk. The ship trembled from trucks to keel; the sails kept on rattling like a discharge of musketry; the chain sheets and loose shackles jingled aloft in a thin peal; the gin blocks groaned. It was as if an invisible hand had given the ship an angry shake to recall the men that peopled her decks to the sense of reality, vigilance, and duty. — "Helm up!" cried the master, sharply. "Run aft, Mr. Creighton, and see what that fool there is up to." — "Flatten in the head sheets. Stand by the weather fore-braces," growled Mr. Baker. Startled men ran swiftly repeating the orders. The watch below, abandoned all at once by the watch on deck, drifted towards the forecastle in twos and threes, arguing noisily as they went — "We shall

see to-morrow!" cried a loud voice, as if to cover with a menacing hint an inglorious retreat. And then only orders were heard, the falling of heavy coils of rope, the rattling of blocks. Singleton's white head flitted here and there in the night, high above the deck, like the ghost of a bird. — "Going off, sir!" shouted Mr. Creighton from aft. — "Full again." — "All right..." — "Ease off the head sheets. That will do the braces. Coil the ropes up," grunted Mr. Baker, bustling about.

Gradually the tramping noises, the confused sound of voices, died out, and the officers, coming together on the poop, discussed the events. Mr. Baker was bewildered and grunted; Mr. Creighton was calmly furious; but Captain Allistoun was composed and thoughtful. He listened to Mr. Baker's growling argumentation, to Creighton's interjected and severe remarks, while looking down on the deck he weighed in his hand the iron belayingpin — that a moment ago had just missed his head — as if it had been the only tangible fact of the whole transaction. He was one of those commanders who speak little, seem to hear nothing, look at no one — and know everything, hear every whisper, see every fleeting shadow of their ship's life. His two big officers towered above his lean, short figure; they talked over his head; they were dismayed, surprised, and angry, while between them the little quiet man seemed to have found his taciturn serenity in the profound depths of a larger experience. Lights were burning in the fore-castle; now and then a loud gust of babbling chatter came from forward, swept over the decks, and became faint, as if the unconscious ship, gliding gently through the great peace of the sea, had left behind and for ever the foolish noise of turbulent mankind. But it was renewed again and again. Gesticulating arms, profiles of heads with open mouths appeared for a moment in the illuminated squares of doorways; black fists darted — withdrew... "Yes. It was most damnable to have such an unprovoked row sprung on one," assented the master. ... A tumult of yells rose in the light, abruptly ceased... He didn't think there would be any further trouble just then... A bell was struck aft, another, forward, answered in a deeper tone, and the clamour of ringing metal spread round the ship in a circle of wide vibrations that ebbed away into the immeasurable night of an empty sea... Didn't he know them! Didn't he! In past years. Better men, too. Real men to stand by one in a tight place. Worse than devils too sometimes — downright, horned devils. Pah! This — . nothing. A miss as good as a mile... The wheel was being relieved in the usual way. — "Full and by," said, very loud, the man going off. — "Full and by," repeated the other, catching hold of the spokes. — "This head wind is my trouble," exclaimed the master, stamping his foot in sudden anger; "head wind! all the rest is nothing." He was calm again in a moment. "Keep them on the move to-night, gentlemen; just to let them feel we've got hold all the time — quietly, you know. Mind you keep your hands off them, Creighton. To-morrow I will talk to them like a Dutch Uncle. A crazy crowd of tinkers! Yes, tinkers! I could count the real sailors amongst them on the fingers of one hand. Nothing will do but a row — if — you — please." He paused. "Did you think I had gone wrong there, Mr. Baker?" He tapped his forehead, laughed short. "When I saw him standing there, three parts dead and so scared — black amongst that gaping lot — no grit to face what's

coming to us all — the notion came to me all at once, before I could think. Sorry for him — like you would be for a sick brute. If ever creature was in a mortal funk to die! ... I thought I would let him go out in his own way. Kind of impulse. It never came into my head, those fools... H'm! Stand to it now — of course." He stuck the belaying-pin in his pocket, seemed ashamed of himself, then sharply: — "If you see Podmore at his tricks again tell him I will have him put under the pump. Had to do it once before. The fellow breaks out like that now and then. Good cook tho'." He walked away quickly, came back to the companion. The two mates followed him through the starlight with amazed eyes. He went down three steps, and changing his tone, spoke with his head near the deck: — "I shan't turn in to-night, in case of anything; just call out if... Did you see the eyes of that sick nigger, Mr. Baker? I fancied he begged me for something. What? Past all help. One lone black beggar amongst the lot of us, and he seemed to look through me into the very hell. Fancy, this wretched Podmore! Well, let him die in peace. I am master here after all. Let him be. He might have been half a man once... Keep a good look-out." He disappeared down below, leaving his mates facing one another, and more impressed than if they had seen a stone image shed a miraculous tear of compassion over the incertitudes of life and death...

In the blue mist spreading from twisted threads that stood upright in the bowls of pipes, the forecastle appeared as vast as a hall. Between the beams a heavy cloud stagnated; and the lamps surrounded by halos burned each at the core of a purple glow in two lifeless flames without rays. Wreaths drifted in denser wisps. Men sprawled about on the deck, sat in negligent poses, or, bending a knee, drooped with one shoulder against a bulkhead. Lips moved, eyes flashed, waving arms made sudden eddies in the smoke. The murmur of voices seemed to pile itself higher and higher as if unable to run out quick enough through the narrow doors. The watch below in their shirts, and striding on long white legs, resembled raving somnambulists; while now and then one of the watch on deck would rush in, looking strangely over-dressed, listen a moment, fling a rapid sentence into the noise and run out again; but a few remained near the door, fascinated, and with one ear turned to the deck. "Stick together, boys," roared Davis. Belfast tried to make himself heard. Knowles grinned in a slow, dazed way. A short fellow with a thick clipped beard kept on yelling periodically: — "Who's afeard? Who's afeard?" Another one jumped up, excited, with blazing eyes, sent out a string of unattached curses and sat down quietly. Two men discussed familiarly, striking one another's breast in turn, to clinch arguments. Three others, with their heads in a bunch, spoke all together with a confidential air, and at the top of their voices. It was a stormy chaos of speech where intelligible fragments tossing, struck the ear. One could hear: — "In the last ship" — "Who cares? Try it on any one of us if — — — ."

"Knock under" — "Not a hand's turn" — "He says he is all right" — "I always thought" — "Never mind..." Donkin, crouching all in a heap against the bowsprit, hunched his shoulderblades as high as his ears, and hanging a peaked nose, resembled a sick vulture with ruffled plumes. Belfast, straddling his legs, had a face red with yelling, and with arms thrown up, figured a Maltese cross. The two Scandinavians, in a corner, had the

dumbfounded and distracted aspect of men gazing at a cataclysm. And, beyond the light, Singleton stood in the smoke, monumental, indistinct, with his head touching the beam; like a statue of heroic size in the gloom of a crypt.

He stepped forward, impassive and big. The noise subsided like a broken wave: but Belfast cried once more with uplifted arms: — "The man is dying I tell ye!" then sat down suddenly on the hatch and took his head between his hands. All looked at Singleton, gazing upwards from the deck, staring out of dark corners, or turning their heads with curious glances. They were expectant and appeased as if that old man, who looked at no one, had possessed the secret of their uneasy indignations and desires, a sharper vision, a clearer knowledge. And indeed standing there amongst them, he had the uninterested appearance of one who had seen multitudes of ships, had listened many times to voices such as theirs, had already seen all that could happen on the wide seas. They heard his voice rumble in his broad chest as though the words had been rolling towards them out of a rugged past. "What do you want to do?" he asked. No one answered. Only Knowles muttered — "Aye, aye," and somebody said low: — "It's a bloomin' shame." He waited, made a contemptuous gesture. — "I have seen rows aboard ship before some of you were born," he said, slowly, "for something or nothing; but never for such a thing." — "The man is dying, I tell ye," repeated Belfast, woefully, sitting at Singleton's feet. — "And a black fellow, too," went on the old seaman, "I have seen them die like flies." He stopped, thoughtful, as if trying to recollect gruesome things, details of horrors, hecatombs of niggers. They looked at him fascinated. He was old enough to remember slavers, bloody mutinies, pirates perhaps; who could tell through what violences and terrors he had lived! What would he say? He said: — "You can't help him; die he must." He made another pause. His moustache and beard stirred. He chewed words, mumbled behind tangled white hairs; incomprehensible and exciting, like an oracle behind a veil... — "Stop ashore — — — sick. — — — -Instead — — — bringing all this head wind. Afraid. The sea will have her own. — — — Die in sight of land. Always so. They know it — — — long passage — — — more days, more dollars. — — — You — — —"

He seemed to wake up from a dream. "You can't help yourselves," he said, austere, "Skipper's no fool. He has something in his mind. Look out — say! I know 'em!" With eyes fixed in front he turned his head from right to left, from left to right, as if inspecting a long row of astute skippers. — "'Ee said 'ee would brain me!" cried Donkin in a heartrending tone. Singleton peered downwards with puzzled attention, as though he couldn't find him. — "Damn you!" he said, vaguely, giving it up. He radiated unspeakable wisdom, hard unconcern, the chilling air of resignation. Round him all the listeners felt themselves somehow completely enlightened by their disappointment, and mute, they lolled about with the careless ease of men who can discern perfectly the irremediable aspect of their existence. He, profound and unconscious, waved his arm once, and strode out on deck without another word.

Belfast was lost in a round-eyed meditation. One or two vaulted heavily into upper berths, and, once there, sighed; others dived head first inside lower bunks — swift, and

turning round instantly upon themselves, like animals going into lairs. The grating of a knife scraping burnt clay was heard. Knowles grinned no more. Davis said, in a tone of ardent conviction: "Then our skipper's looney." Archie muttered: "My faith! we haven't heard the last of it yet!" Four bells were struck. — "Half our watch below gone!" cried Knowles in alarm, then reflected. "Well, two hours' sleep is something towards a rest," he observed, consolingly. Some already pretended to slumber; and Charley, sound asleep, suddenly said a few slurred words in an arbitrary, blank voice. — "This blamed boy has worrums!" commented Knowles from under a blanket, in a learned manner. Belfast got up and approached Archie's berth. — "We pulled him out," he whispered, sadly. — "What?" said the other, with sleepy discontent. — "And now we will have to chuck him overboard," went on Belfast, whose lower lip trembled. — "Chuck what?" asked Archie. — "Poor Jimmy," breathed out Belfast. — "He be blowed!" said Archie with untruthful brutality, and sat up in his bunk; "It's all through him. If it hadn't been for me, there would have been murder on board this ship!" — "Tain't his fault, is it?" argued Belfast, in a murmur; "I've put him to bed... an' he ain't no heavier than an empty beef-cask," he added, with tears in his eyes. Archie looked at him steadily, then turned his nose to the ship's side with determination. Belfast wandered about as though he had lost his way in the dim forecabin, and nearly fell over Donkin. He contemplated him from on high for a while. "Ain't ye going to turn in?" he asked. Donkin looked up hopelessly. — "That black'earred Scotch son of a thief kicked me!" he whispered from the floor, in a tone of utter desolation. — "And a good job, too!" said Belfast, still very depressed; "You were as near hanging as damn-it to-night, sonny. Don't you play any of your murdering games around my Jimmy! You haven't pulled him out. You just mind! 'Cos if I start to kick you" — he brightened up a bit — "if I start to kick you, it will be Yankee fashion — to break something!" He tapped lightly with his knuckles the top of the bowed head. "You moind that, my bhoy!" he concluded, cheerily. Donkin let it pass. — "Will they split on me?" he asked, with pained anxiety. — "Who — split?" hissed Belfast, coming back a step. "I would split your nose this minyt if I hadn't Jimmy to look after! Who d'ye think we are?" Donkin rose and watched Belfast's back lurch through the doorway. On all sides invisible men slept, breathing calmly. He seemed to draw courage and fury from the peace around him. Venomous and thin-faced, he glared from the ample misfit of borrowed clothes as if looking for something he could smash. His heart leaped wildly in his narrow chest. They slept! He wanted to wring necks, gouge eyes, spit on faces. He shook a dirty pair of meagre fists at the smoking lights. "Ye're no men!" he cried, in a deadened tone. No one moved. "Yer 'aven't the pluck of a mouse!" His voice rose to a husky screech. Wamibo darted out a dishevelled head, and looked at him wildly. "Ye're sweepings ov ships! I 'ope you will all rot before you die!" Wamibo blinked, uncomprehending but interested. Donkin sat down heavily; he blew with force through quivering nostrils, he ground and snapped his teeth, and, with the chin pressed hard against the breast, he seemed busy gnawing his way through it, as if to get at the heart within...

In the morning the ship, beginning another day of her wandering life, had an aspect of sumptuous freshness, like the spring-time of the earth. The washed decks glistened in a long clear stretch; the oblique sunlight struck the yellow brasses in dazzling splashes, darted over the polished rods in lines of gold, and the single drops of salt water forgotten here and there along the rail were as limpid as drops of dew, and sparkled more than scattered diamonds. The sails slept, hushed by a gentle breeze. The sun, rising lonely and splendid in the blue sky, saw a solitary ship gliding close-hauled on the blue sea.

The men pressed three deep abreast of the mainmast and opposite the cabin-door. They shuffled, pushed, had an irresolute mien and stolid faces. At every slight movement Knowles lurched heavily on his short leg. Donkin glided behind backs, restless and anxious, like a man looking for an ambush. Captain Allistoun came out on the quarter-deck suddenly. He walked to and fro before the front. He was grey, slight, alert, shabby in the sunshine, and as hard as adamant. He had his right hand in the side-pocket of his jacket, and also something heavy in there that made folds all down that side. One of the seamen cleared his throat ominously. — "I haven't till now found fault with you men," said the master, stopping short. He faced them with his worn, steely gaze, that by a universal illusion looked straight into every individual pair of the twenty pairs of eyes before his face. At his back Mr. Baker, gloomy and bull-necked, grunted low; Mr. Creighton, fresh as paint, had rosy cheeks and a ready, resolute bearing. "And I don't now," continued the master; "but I am here to drive this ship and keep every man-jack aboard of her up to the mark. If you knew your work as well as I do mine, there would be no trouble. You've been braying in the dark about 'See to-morrow morning!' Well, you see me now. What do you want?" He waited, stepping quickly to and fro, giving them searching glances. What did they want? They shifted from foot to foot, they balanced their bodies; some, pushing back their caps, scratched their heads. What did they want? Jimmy was forgotten; no one thought of him, alone forward in his cabin, fighting great shadows, clinging to brazen lies, chuckling painfully over his transparent deceptions. No, not Jimmy; he was more forgotten than if he had been dead. They wanted great things. And suddenly all the simple words they knew seemed to be lost for ever in the immensity of their vague and burning desire. They knew what they wanted, but they could not find anything worth saying. They stirred on one spot, swinging, at the end of muscular arms, big tarry hands with crooked fingers. A murmur died out. — "What is it — food?" asked the master, "you know the stores have been spoiled off the Cape." — "We know that, sir," said a bearded shell-back in the front rank. — "Work too hard — eh? Too much for your strength?" he asked again. There was an offended silence. — "We don't want to go shorthanded, sir," began at last Davis in a wavering voice, "and this 'ere black..." — "Enough!" cried the master. He stood scanning them for a moment, then walking a few steps this way and that began to storm at them coldly, in gusts violent and cutting like the gales of those icy seas that had known his youth. — "Tell you what's the matter? Too big for your boots. Think yourselves damn good men. Know half your work. Do half your duty. Think it too much. If you did ten times as much it wouldn't be enough." — "We did our best

by her, sir," cried some one with shaky exasperation. — "Your best," stormed on the master; "You hear a lot on shore, don't you? They don't tell you there your best isn't much to boast of. I tell you — your best is no better than bad."

"You can do no more? No, I know, and say nothing. But you stop your caper or I will stop it for you. I am ready for you! Stop it!" He shook a finger at the crowd. "As to that man," he raised his voice very much; "as to that man, if he puts his nose out on deck without my leave I will clap him in irons. There!" The cook heard him forward, ran out of the galley lifting his arms, horrified, unbelieving, amazed, and ran in again. There was a moment of profound silence during which a bow-legged seaman, stepping aside, expectorated decorously into the scupper. "There is another thing," said the master, calmly. He made a quick stride and with a swing took an iron belaying-pin out of his pocket. "This!" His movement was so unexpected and sudden that the crowd stepped back. He gazed fixedly at their faces, and some at once put on a surprised air as though they had never seen a belay-ing-pin before. He held it up. "This is my affair. I don't ask you any questions, but you all know it; it has got to go where it came from." His eyes became angry. The crowd stirred uneasily. They looked away from the piece of iron, they appeared shy, they were embarrassed and shocked as though it had been something horrid, scandalous, or indelicate, that in common decency should not have been flourished like this in broad daylight. The master watched them attentively. "Donkin," he called out in a short, sharp tone.

Donkin dodged behind one, then behind another, but they looked over their shoulders and moved aside. The ranks kept on opening before him, closing behind, till at last he appeared alone before the master as though he had come up through the deck. Captain Allistoun moved close to him. They were much of a size, and at short range the master exchanged a deadly glance with the beady eyes. They wavered. — "You know this?" asked the master. — "No, I don't," answered the other, with cheeky trepidation. — "You are a cur. Take it," ordered the master. Donkin's arms seemed glued to his thighs; he stood, eyes front, as if drawn on parade. "Take it," repeated the master, and stepped closer; they breathed on one another. "Take it," said Captain Allistoun again, making a menacing gesture. Donkin tore away one arm from his side. — "Vy are yer down on me?" he mumbled with effort and as if his mouth had been full of dough. — "If you don't..." began the master. Donkin snatched at the pin as though his intention had been to run away with it, and remained stock still holding it like a candle. "Put it back where you took it from," said Captain Allistoun, looking at him fiercely. Donkin stepped back opening wide eyes. "Go, you blackguard, or I will make you," cried the master, driving him slowly backwards by a menacing advance. He dodged, and with the dangerous iron tried to guard his head from a threatening fist. Mr. Baker ceased grunting for a moment. — "Good! By Jove," murmured appreciatively Mr. Creighton in the tone of a connoisseur. — "Don't tech me," snarled Donkin, backing away. — "Then go. Go faster." — "Don't yer 'it me... I will pull yer up afore the magistryt... I'll show yer up." Captain Allistoun made a long stride, and Donkin, turning his back fairly, ran off a little, then stopped and over his shoulder showed yellow teeth. — "Fur-

ther on, fore-rigging," urged the master, pointing with his arm. — "Are yer goin' to stand by and see me bullied?" screamed Donkin at the silent crowd that watched him. Captain Allistoun walked at him smartly. He started off again with a leap, dashed at the fore-rigging, rammed the pin into its hole violently. "I'll be even with yer yet," he screamed at the ship at large and vanished beyond the foremast. Captain Allistoun spun round and walked back aft with a composed face, as though he had already forgotten the scene. Men moved out of his way. He looked at no one. — "That will do, Mr. Baker. Send the watch below," he said, quietly. "And you men try to walk straight for the future," he added in a calm voice. He looked pensively for a while at the backs of the impressed and retreating crowd. "Breakfast, steward," he called in a tone of relief through the cabin door. — "I didn't like to see you — Ough! — give that pin to that chap, sir," observed Mr. Baker; "he could have bust — Ough! — bust your head like an eggshell with it." — "O! he!" muttered the master, absently. "Queer lot," he went on in a low voice. "I suppose it's all right now. Can never tell tho' nowadays, with such a... Years ago; I was a young master then — one China voyage I had a mutiny; real mutiny, Baker. Different men tho'. I knew what they wanted: they wanted to broach the cargo and get at the liquor. Very simple... We knocked them about for two days, and when they had enough — gentle as lambs. Good crew. And a smart trip I made." He glanced aloft at the yards braced sharp up. "Head wind day after day," he exclaimed, bitterly. "Shall we never get a decent slant this passage?" — "Ready, sir," said the steward, appearing before them as if by magic and with a stained napkin in his hand. — "Ah! All right. Come along, Mr. Baker — it's late — with all this nonsense."

Chapter 5

A heavy atmosphere of oppressive quietude pervaded the ship. In the afternoon men went about washing clothes and hanging them out to dry in the unprosperous breeze with the meditative languor of disenchanted philosophers. Very little was said. The problem of life seemed too voluminous for the narrow limits of human speech, and by common consent it was abandoned to the great sea that had from the beginning enfolded it in its immense grip; to the sea that knew all, and would in time infallibly unveil to each the wisdom hidden in all the errors, the certitude that lurks in doubts, the realm of safety and peace beyond the frontiers of sorrow and fear. And in the confused current of impotent thoughts that set unceasingly this way and that through bodies of men, Jimmy bobbed up upon the surface, compelling attention, like a black buoy chained to the bottom of a muddy stream. Falsehood triumphed. It triumphed through doubt, through stupidity, through pity, through sentimentalism. We set ourselves to bolster it up from compassion, from recklessness, from a sense of fun. Jimmy's steadfastness to his untruthful attitude in the face of the inevitable truth had the proportions of a colossal enigma — of a manifestation grand and incomprehensible that at times inspired a wondering awe; and there was also, to many, something exquisitely droll in fooling him thus to the top of his bent. The latent egoism of tenderness to suffering appeared in the developing anxiety not to see him die. His obstinate non-recognition of the only certitude whose approach we could watch from day to day was as disquieting as the failure of some law of nature. He was so utterly wrong about himself that one could not but suspect him of having access to some source of supernatural knowledge. He was absurd to the point of inspiration. He was unique, and as fascinating as only something inhuman could be; he seemed to shout his denials already from beyond the awful border. He was becoming immaterial like an apparition; his cheekbones rose, the forehead slanted more; the face was all hollows, patches of shade; and the fleshless head resembled a disinterred black skull, fitted with two restless globes of silver in the sockets of eyes. He was demoralising. Through him we were becoming highly humanised, tender, complex, excessively decadent: we understood the subtlety of his fear, sympathised with all his repulsions, shrinkings, evasions, delusions — as though we had been over-civilised, and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning of life. We had the air of being initiated in some infamous mysteries; we had the profound grimaces of conspirators, exchanged meaning glances, significant short words. We were inexpressibly vile and very much pleased with ourselves. We lied to him with gravity, with emotion, with unction, as if performing some moral trick with a view to an eternal reward. We made a chorus of affirmation to his wildest assertions,

as though he had been a millionaire, a politician, or a reformer — and we a crowd of ambitious lubbers. When we ventured to question his statements we did it after the manner of obsequious sycophants, to the end that his glory should be augmented by the flattery of our dissent. He influenced the moral tone of our world as though he had it in his power to distribute honours, treasures, or pain; and he could give us nothing but his contempt. It was immense; it seemed to grow gradually larger, as his body day by day shrank a little more, while we looked. It was the only thing about him — of him — that gave the impression of durability and vigour. It lived within him with an unquenchable life. It spoke through the eternal pout of his black lips; it looked at us through the impertinent mournfulness of his languid and enormous stare. We watched him intently. He seemed unwilling to move, as if distrustful of his own solidity. The slightest gesture must have disclosed to him (it could not surely be otherwise) his bodily weakness, and caused a pang of mental suffering. He was chary of movements. He lay stretched out, chin on blanket, in a kind of sly, cautious immobility. Only his eyes roamed over faces: his eyes disdainful, penetrating and sad.

It was at that time that Belfast's devotion — and also his pugnacity — secured universal respect. He spent every moment of his spare time in Jimmy's cabin. He tended him, talked to him; was as gentle as a woman, as tenderly gay as an old philanthropist, as sentimentally careful of his nigger as a model slave-owner. But outside he was irritable, explosive as gunpowder, sombre, suspicious, and never more brutal than when most sorrowful. With him it was a tear and a blow: a tear for Jimmy, a blow for any one who did not seem to take a scrupulously orthodox view of Jimmy's case. We talked about nothing else. The two Scandinavians, even, discussed the situation — but it was impossible to know in what spirit, because they quarrelled in their own language. Belfast suspected one of them of irreverence, and in this incertitude thought that there was no option but to fight them both. They became very much terrified by his truculence, and henceforth lived amongst us, dejected, like a pair of mutes. Wamibo never spoke intelligibly, but he was as smileless as an animal — seemed to know much less about it all than the cat — and consequently was safe. Moreover, he had belonged to the chosen band of Jimmy's rescuers, and was above suspicion. Archie was silent generally, but often spent an hour or so talking to Jimmy quietly with an air of proprietorship. At any time of the day and often through the night some man could be seen sitting on Jimmy's box. In the evening, between six and eight, the cabin was crowded, and there was an interested group at the door. Every one stared at the nigger.

He basked in the warmth of our interest. His eye gleamed ironically, and in a weak voice he reproached us with our cowardice. He would say, "If you fellows had stuck out for me I would be now on deck." We hung our heads. "Yes, but if you think I am going; to let them put me in irons just to show you sport... Well, no... It ruins my health, this lying-up, it does. You don't care." We were as abashed as if it had been true. His superb impudence carried all before it. We would not have dared to revolt. We didn't want to, really. We wanted to keep him alive till home — to the end of the voyage.

Singleton as usual held aloof, appearing to scorn the insignificant events of an ended life. Once only he came along, and unexpectedly stopped in the doorway. He peered at Jimmy in profound silence, as if desirous to add that black image to the crowd of Shades that peopled his old memory. We kept very quiet, and for a long time Singleton stood there as though he had come by appointment to call for some one, or to see some important event. James Wait lay perfectly still, and apparently not aware of the gaze scrutinising him with a steadiness full of expectation. There was a sense of a contest in the air. We felt the inward strain of men watching a wrestling bout. At last Jimmy with perceptible apprehension turned his head on the pillow. — "Good evening," he said in a conciliating tone. — "H'm," answered the old seaman, grumpily. For a moment longer he looked at Jimmy with severe fixity, then suddenly went away. It was a long time before any one spoke in the little cabin, though we all breathed more freely as men do after an escape from some dangerous situation. We all knew the old man's ideas about Jimmy, and nobody dared to combat them. They were unsettling, they caused pain; and, what was worse, they might have been true for all we knew. Only once did he condescend to explain them fully, but the impression was lasting. He said that Jimmy was the cause of head winds. Mortally sick men — he maintained — linger till the first sight of land, and then die; and Jimmy knew that the very first land would draw his life from him. It is so in every ship. Didn't we know it? He asked us with austere contempt: what did we know? What would we doubt next? Jimmy's desire encouraged by us and aided by Wamibo's (he was a Finn — wasn't he? Very well!) by Wamibo's spells delayed the ship in the open sea. Only lubberly fools couldn't see it. Whoever heard of such a run of calms and head winds? It wasn't natural... We could not deny that it was strange. We felt uneasy. The common saying, "More days, more dollars," did not give the usual comfort because the stores were running short. Much had been spoiled off the Cape, and we were on half allowance of biscuit. Peas, sugar and tea had been finished long ago. Salt meat was giving out. We had plenty of coffee but very little water to make it with. We took up another hole in our belts and went on scraping, polishing, painting the ship from morning to night. And soon she looked as though she had come out of a band-box; but hunger lived on board of her. Not dead starvation, but steady, living hunger that stalked about the decks, slept in the forecabin; the tormentor of waking moments, the disturber of dreams. We looked to windward for signs of change. Every few hours of night and day we put her round with the hope that she would come up on that tack at last! She didn't. She seemed to have forgotten the way home; she rushed to and fro, heading northwest, heading east; she ran backwards and forwards, distracted, like a timid creature at the foot of a wall. Sometimes, as if tired to death, she would wallow languidly for a day in the smooth swell of an unruffled sea. All up the swinging masts the sails thrashed furiously through the hot stillness of the calm. We were weary, hungry, thirsty; we commenced to believe Singleton, but with unshaken fidelity dissembled to Jimmy. We spoke to him with jocose allusiveness, like cheerful accomplices in a clever plot; but we looked to the westward over the rail with longing eyes for a sign of hope, for a sign of fair

wind; even if its first breath should bring death to our reluctant Jimmy. In vain! The universe conspired with James Wait. Light airs from the northward sprang up again; the sky remained clear; and round our weariness the glittering sea, touched by the breeze, basked voluptuously in the great sunshine, as though it had forgotten our life and trouble.

Donkin looked out for a fair wind along with the rest. No one knew the venom of his thoughts now. He was silent, and appeared thinner, as if consumed slowly by an inward rage at the injustice of men and of fate. He was ignored by all and spoke to no one, but his hate for every man dwelt in his furtive eyes. He talked with the cook only, having somehow persuaded the good man that he — Donkin — was a much calumniated and persecuted person. Together they bewailed the immorality of the ship's company. There could be no greater criminals than we, who by our lies conspired to send the unprepared soul of a poor ignorant black man to everlasting perdition. Podmore cooked what there was to cook, remorsefully, and felt all the time that by preparing the food of such sinners he imperilled his own salvation. As to the Captain — he had sailed with him for seven years, now, he said, and would not have believed it possible that such a man... "Well. Well... There it was... Can't get out of it. Judgment capsized all in a minute... Struck in all his pride... More like a sudden visitation than anything else." Donkin, perched sullenly on the coal-locker, swung his legs and concurred. He paid in the coin of spurious assent for the privilege to sit in the galley; he was disheartened and scandalised; he agreed with the cook; could find no words severe enough to criticise our conduct; and when in the heat of reprobation he swore at us, Podmore, who would have liked to swear also if it hadn't been for his principles, pretended not to hear. So Donkin, unrebuked, cursed enough for two, cadged for matches, borrowed tobacco, and loafed for hours, very much at home, before the stove. From there he could hear us on the other side of the bulkhead, talking to Jimmy. The cook knocked the saucepans about, slammed the oven door, muttered prophecies of damnation for all the ship's company; and Donkin, who did not admit of any hereafter (except for purposes of blasphemy) listened, concentrated and angry, gloating fiercely over a called-up image of infinite torment — as men gloat over the accursed images of cruelty and revenge, of greed, and of power...

On clear evenings the silent ship, under the cold sheen of the dead moon, took on a false aspect of passionless repose resembling the winter of the earth. Under her a long band of gold barred the black disc of the sea. Footsteps echoed on her quiet decks. The moonlight clung to her like a frosted mist, and the white sails stood out in dazzling cones as of stainless snow. In the magnificence of the phantom rays the ship appeared pure like a vision of ideal beauty, illusive like a tender dream of serene peace. And nothing in her was real, nothing was distinct and solid but the heavy shadows that filled her decks with their unceasing and noiseless stir: the shadows darker than the night and more restless than the thoughts of men.

Donkin prowled spiteful and alone amongst the shadows, thinking that Jimmy too long delayed to die. That evening land had been reported from aloft, and the master,

while adjusting the tubes of the long glass, had observed with quiet bitterness to Mr. Baker that, after fighting our way inch by inch to the Western Islands, there was nothing to expect now but a spell of calm. The sky was clear and the barometer high. The light breeze dropped with the sun, and an enormous stillness, forerunner of a night without wind, descended upon the heated waters of the ocean. As long as daylight lasted, the hands collected on the fore-castle-head watched on the eastern sky the island of Flores, that rose above the level expanse of the sea with irregular and broken outlines like a sombre ruin upon a vast and deserted plain. It was the first land seen for nearly four months. Charley was excited, and in the midst of general indulgence took liberties with his betters. Men strangely elated without knowing why, talked in groups, and pointed with bared arms. For the first time that voyage Jimmy's sham existence seemed for a moment forgotten in the face of a solid reality. We had got so far anyhow. Belfast discoursed, quoting imaginary examples of short homeward runs from the Islands. "Them smart fruit schooners do it in five days," he affirmed. "What do you want? — only a good little breeze." Archie maintained that seven days was the record passage, and they disputed amicably with insulting words. Knowles declared he could already smell home from there, and with a heavy list on his short leg laughed fit to split his sides. A group of grizzled sea-dogs looked out for a time in silence and with grim absorbed faces. One said suddenly — "Tain't far to London now." — "My first night ashore, blamme if I haven't steak and onions for supper... and a pint of bitter," said another. — "A barrel ye mean," shouted someone. — "Ham an' eggs three times a day. That's the way I live!" cried an excited voice. There was a stir, appreciative murmurs; eyes began to shine; jaws champed; short, nervous laughs were heard. Archie smiled with reserve all to himself. Singleton came up, gave a careless glance, and went down again without saying a word, indifferent, like a man who had seen Flores an incalculable number of times. The night travelling from the East blotted out of the limpid sky the purple stain of the high land. "Dead calm," said somebody quietly. The murmur of lively talk suddenly wavered, died out; the clusters broke up; men began to drift away one by one, descending the ladders slowly and with serious faces as if sobered by that reminder of their dependence upon the invisible. And when the big yellow moon ascended gently above the sharp rim of the clear horizon it found the ship wrapped up in a breathless silence; a fearless ship that seemed to sleep profoundly, dreamlessly on the bosom of the sleeping and terrible sea.

Donkin chafed at the peace — at the ship — at the sea that stretching away on all sides merged into the illimitable silence of all creation. He felt himself pulled up sharp by unrecognised grievances. He had been physically cowed, but his injured dignity remained indomitable, and nothing could heal his lacerated feelings. Here was land already — home very soon — a bad pay-day — no clothes — more hard work. How offensive all this was. Land. The land that draws away life from sick sailors. That nigger there had money — clothes — easy times; and would not die. Land draws life away... He felt tempted to go and see whether it did. Perhaps already.. It would be a bit of luck. There was money in the beggar's chest. He stepped briskly out of the shadows

into the moonlight, and, instantly, his craving, hungry face from sallow became livid. He opened the door of the cabin and had a shock. Sure enough, Jimmy was dead! He moved no more than a recumbent figure with clasped hands, carved on the lid of a stone coffin. Donkin glared with avidity. Then Jimmy, without stirring, blinked his eyelids, and Donkin had another shock. Those eyes were rather startling. He shut the door behind his back with gentle care, looking intently the while at James Wait as though he had come in there at a great risk to tell some secret of startling importance. Jimmy did not move but glanced languidly out of the corners of his eyes. — "Calm?" he asked. — "Yuss," said Donkin, very disappointed, and sat down on the box.

Jimmy was used to such visits at all times of night or day. Men succeeded one another. They spoke in clear voices, pronounced cheerful words, repeated old jokes, listened to him; and each, going out, seemed to leave behind a little of his own vitality, surrender some of his own strength, renew the assurance of life — the indestructible thing! He did not like to be alone in his cabin, because, when he was alone, it seemed to him as if he hadn't been there at all. There was nothing. No pain. Not now. Perfectly right — but he couldn't enjoy his healthful repose unless some one was by to see it. This man would do as well as anybody. Donkin watched him stealthily: — "Soon home now," observed Wait. — "Vy d'yer whisper?" asked Donkin with interest, "can't yer speak up?" Jimmy looked annoyed and said nothing for a while; then in a lifeless, unringing voice: — "Why should I shout? You ain't deaf that I know." — "Oh! I can 'ear right enough," answered Donkin in a low tone, and looked down. He was thinking sadly of going out when Jimmy spoke again. — "Time we did get home... to get something decent to eat... I am always hungry." Donkin felt angry all of a sudden. — "What about me," he hissed, "I am 'ungry too an' got ter work. You, 'ungry!" — "Your work won't kill you," commented Wait, feebly; "there's a couple of biscuits in the lower bunk there — you may have one. I can't eat them." Donkin dived in, groped in the corner and when he came up again his mouth was full. He munched with ardour. Jimmy seemed to doze with open eyes. Donkin finished his hard bread and got up. — "You're not going?" asked Jimmy, staring at the ceiling. — "No," said Donkin, impulsively, and instead of going out leaned his back against the closed door. He looked at James Wait, and saw him long, lean, dried up, as though all his flesh had shrivelled on his bones in the heat of a white furnace; the meagre fingers of one hand moved lightly upon the edge of the bunk playing an endless tune. To look at him was irritating and fatiguing; he could last like this for days; he was outrageous — belonging wholly neither to death nor life, and perfectly invulnerable in his apparent ignorance of both. Donkin felt tempted to enlighten him. — "What are yer thinkin' of?" he asked, surlily. James Wait had a grimacing smile that passed over the deathlike impassiveness of his bony face, incredible and frightful as would, in a dream, have been the sudden smile of a corpse.

"There is a girl," whispered Wait... "Canton Street girl. — — — She chucked a third engineer of a Rennie boat — — — for me. Cooks oysters just as I like... She says — — — she would chuck — — — any toff — — — louder."

Donkin could hardly believe his ears. He was scandalised — "Would she? Yer wouldn't be any good to 'er," he said with unrestrained disgust. Wait was not there to hear him. He was swaggering up the East India Dock Road; saying kindly, "Come along for a treat," pushing glass swing-doors, posing with superb assurance in the gaslight above a mahogany counter. — "D'yer think yer will ever get ashore?" asked Donkin, angrily. Wait came back with a start. — "Ten days," he said, promptly, and returned at once to the regions of memory that know nothing of time. He felt untired, calm, and safely withdrawn within himself beyond the reach of every grave incertitude. There was something of the immutable quality of eternity in the slow moments of his complete restfulness. He was very quiet and easy amongst his vivid reminiscences which he mistook joyfully for images of an undoubted future. He cared for no one. Donkin felt this vaguely like a blind man feeling in his darkness the fatal antagonism of all the surrounding existences, that to him shall for ever remain irrealisable, unseen and enviable. He had a desire to assert his importance, to break, to crush; to be even with everybody for everything; to tear the veil, unmask, expose, leave no refuge — a perfidious desire of truthfulness! He laughed in a mocking splutter and said:

"Ten days. Strike me blind if ever!... You will be dead by this time to-morrow p'r'aps. Ten days!" He waited for a while. "D'ye 'ear me? Blamme if yer don't look dead already."

Wait must have been collecting his strength, for he said almost aloud — "You're a stinking, cadging liar. Every one knows you." And sitting up, against all probability, startled his visitor horribly. But very soon Donkin recovered himself. He blustered, "What? What? Who's a liar? You are — the crowd are — the skipper — everybody. I ain't! Putting on airs! Who's yer?" He nearly choked himself with indignation. "Who's yer to put on airs," he repeated, trembling. "'Ave one — 'ave one, says 'ee — an' cawn't eat 'em 'isself. Now I'll 'ave both. By Gawd — I will! Yer nobody!"

He plunged into the lower bunk, rooted in there and brought to light another dusty biscuit. He held it up before Jimmy — then took a bite defiantly.

"What now?" he asked with feverish impudence. "Yer may take one — says yer. Why not giv' me both? No. I'm a mangy dorg. One fur a mangy dorg. I'll tyke both. Can yer stop me? Try. Come on. Try."

Jimmy was clasping his legs and hiding his face on the knees. His shirt clung to him. Every rib was visible. His emaciated back was shaken in repeated jerks by the panting catches of his breath.

"Yer won't? Yer can't! What did I say?" went on Donkin, fiercely. He swallowed another dry mouthful with a hasty effort. The other's silent helplessness, his weakness, his shrinking attitude exasperated him. "Ye're done!" he cried. "Who's yer to be lied to; to be waited on 'and an' foot like a bloomin' ymperor. Yer nobody. Yer no one at all!" he spluttered with such a strength of unerring conviction that it shook him from head to foot in coming out, and left him vibrating like a released string.

James Wait rallied again. He lifted his head and turned bravely at Donkin, who saw a strange face, an unknown face, a fantastic and grimacing mask of despair and fury. Its lips moved rapidly; and hollow, moaning, whistling sounds filled the cabin with a

vague mutter full of menace, complaint and desolation, like the far-off murmur of a rising wind. Wait shook his head; rolled his eyes; he denied, cursed, threatened — and not a word had the strength to pass beyond the sorrowful pout of those black lips. It was incomprehensible and disturbing; a gibberish of emotions, a frantic dumb show of speech pleading for impossible things, promising a shadowy vengeance. It sobered Donkin into a scrutinising watchfulness.

“Yer can’t oller. See? What did I tell yer?” he said, slowly, after a moment of attentive examination. The other kept on headlong and unheard, nodding passionately, grinning with grotesque and appalling flashes of big white teeth. Donkin, as if fascinated by the dumb eloquence and anger of that black phantom, approached, stretching his neck out with distrustful curiosity; and it seemed to him suddenly that he was looking only at the shadow of a man crouching high in the bunk on the level with his eyes. — ”What? What?” he said. He seemed to catch the shape of some words in the continuous panting hiss. “Yer will tell Belfast! Will yer? Are yer a bloomin’ kid?” He trembled with alarm and rage, “Tell yer gran’mother! Yer afeard! Who’s yer ter be afeard more’n any one?” His passionate sense of his own importance ran away with a last remnant of caution. “Tell an’ be damned! Tell, if yer can!” he cried. “I’ve been treated worsen’n a dorg by your blooming back-lickers. They ‘as set me on, only to turn aginst me. I am the only man ‘ere. They clouted me, kicked me — an’ yer laffed — yer black, rotten incumbrance, you! You will pay fur it. They giv’ yer their grub, their water — yer will pay fur it to me, by Gawd! Who axed me ter ‘ave a drink of water? They put their bloomin’ rags on yer that night, an’ what did they giv’ ter me — a clout on the bloomin’ mouth — blast their... S’elp me!... Yer will pay fur it with yer money. I’m goin’ ter ‘ave it in a minyte; as soon has ye’re dead, yer bloomin’ useless fraud. That’s the man I am. An’ ye’re a thing — a bloody thing. Yah — you corpse!” He flung at Jimmy’s head the biscuit he had been all the time clutching hard, but it only grazed, and striking with a loud crack the bulkhead beyond burst like a hand-grenade into flying pieces. James Wait, as if wounded mortally, fell back on the pillow. His lips ceased to move and the rolling eyes became quiet and stared upwards with an intense and steady persistence. Donkin was surprised; he sat suddenly on the chest, and looked down, exhausted and gloomy. After a moment, he began to mutter to himself, “Die, you beggar — die. Somebody’ll come in... I wish I was drunk... Ten days... oysters...” He looked up and spoke louder. “No... No more for yer... no more bloomin’ gals that cook oysters... Who’s yer? It’s my turn now... I wish I was drunk; I would soon giv’ you a leg up. That’s where yer bound to go. Feet fust, through a port... Splash! Never see yer any more. Overboard! Good ‘nuff fur yer.” Jimmy’s head moved slightly and he turned his eyes to Donkin’s face; a gaze unbelieving, desolated and appealing, of a child frightened by the menace of being shut up alone in the dark. Donkin observed him from the chest with hopeful eyes; then, without rising, tried the lid. Locked. “I wish I was drunk,” he muttered and getting up listened anxiously to the distant sound of footsteps on the deck. They approached — ceased. Some one yawned interminably just outside the door, and the footsteps went away shuffling lazily. Donkin’s fluttering heart eased its pace, and when

he looked towards the bunk again Jimmy was staring as before at the white beam. — "Ow d'yer feel now?" he asked. — "Bad," breathed out Jimmy.

Donkin sat down patient and purposeful. Every half-hour the bells spoke to one another ringing along the whole length of the ship. Jimmy's respiration was so rapid that it couldn't be counted, so faint that it couldn't be heard. His eyes were terrified as though he had been looking at unspeakable horrors; and by his face one could see that he was thinking of abominable things. Suddenly with an incredibly strong and heartbreaking voice he sobbed out:

"Overboard!... I!... My God!" Donkin writhed a little on the box. He looked unwillingly. James Wait was mute. His two long bony hands smoothed the blanket upwards, as though he had wished to gather it all up under his chin. A tear, a big solitary tear, escaped from the corner of his eye and, without touching the hollow cheek, fell on the pillow. His throat rattled faintly.

And Donkin, watching the end of that hateful nigger, felt the anguishing grasp of a great sorrow on his heart at the thought that he himself, some day, would have to go through it all — just like this — perhaps! His eyes became moist. "Poor beggar," he murmured. The night seemed to go by in a flash; it seemed to him he could hear the irremediable rush of precious minutes. How long would this blooming affair last? Too long surely. No luck. He could not restrain himself. He got up and approached the bunk. Wait did not stir. Only his eyes appeared alive and his hands continued their smoothing movement with a horrible and tireless industry. Donkin bent over.

"Jimmy," he called low. There was no answer, but the rattle stopped. "D'yer see me?" he asked, trembling. Jimmy's chest heaved. Donkin, looking away, bent his ear to Jimmy's lips, and heard a sound like the rustle of a single dry leaf driven along the smooth sand of a beach. It shaped itself.

"Light... the lamp... and... go," breathed out Wait.

Donkin, instinctively, glanced over his shoulder at the brilliant flame; then, still looking away, felt under the pillow for a key. He got it at once and for the next few minutes remained on his knees shakily but swiftly busy inside the box. When he got up, his face — for the first time in his life — had a pink flush — perhaps of triumph.

He slipped the key under the pillow again, avoiding to glance at Jimmy, who had not moved. He turned his back squarely from the bunk, and started to the door as though he were going to walk a mile. At his second stride he had his nose against it. He clutched the handle cautiously, but at that moment he received the irresistible impression of something happening behind his back. He spun round as though he had been tapped on the shoulder. He was just in time to see Wait's eyes blaze up and go out at once, like two lamps overturned together by a sweeping blow. Something resembling a scarlet thread hung down his chin out of the corner of his lips — and he had ceased to breathe.

Donkin closed the door behind him gently but firmly. Sleeping men, huddled under jackets, made on the lighted deck shapeless dark mounds that had the appearance of neglected graves. Nothing had been done all through the night and he hadn't been

missed. He stood motionless and perfectly astounded to find the world outside as he had left it; there was the sea, the ship — sleeping men; and he wondered absurdly at it, as though he had expected to find the men dead, familiar things gone for ever: as though, like a wanderer returning after many years, he had expected to see bewildering changes. He shuddered a little in the penetrating freshness of the air, and hugged himself forlornly. The declining moon drooped sadly in the western board as if withered by the cold touch of a pale dawn. The ship slept. And the immortal sea stretched away immense and hazy, like the image of life, with a glittering surface and lightless depths. Donkin gave it a defiant glance and slunk off noiselessly as if judged and cast out by the august silence of its might.

Jimmy's death, after all, came as a tremendous surprise. We did not know till then how much faith we had put in his delusions. We had taken his chances of life so much at his own valuation that his death, like the death of an old belief, shook the foundations of our society. A common bond was gone; the strong, effective and respectable bond of a sentimental lie. All that day we mooned at our work, with suspicious looks and a disabused air. In our hearts we thought that in the matter of his departure Jimmy had acted in a perverse and unfriendly manner. He didn't back us up, as a shipmate should. In going he took away with himself the gloomy and solemn shadow in which our folly had posed, with humane satisfaction, as a tender arbiter of fate. And now we saw it was no such thing. It was just common foolishness; a silly and ineffectual meddling with issues of majestic import — that is, if Podmore was right. Perhaps he was? Doubt survived Jimmy; and, like a community of banded criminals disintegrated by a touch of grace, we were profoundly scandalised with each other. Men spoke unkindly to their best chums. Others refused to speak at all. Singleton only was not surprised. "Dead — is he? Of course," he said, pointing at the island right abeam: for the calm still held the ship spell-bound within sight of Flores. Dead — of course. He wasn't surprised. Here was the land, and there, on the fore-hatch and waiting for the sailmaker — there was that corpse. Cause and effect. And for the first time that voyage, the old seaman became quite cheery and garrulous, explaining and illustrating from the stores of experience how, in sickness, the sight of an island (even a very small one) is generally more fatal than the view of a continent. But he couldn't explain why.

Jimmy was to be buried at five, and it was a long day till then — a day of mental disquiet and even of physical disturbance. We took no interest in our work and, very properly, were rebuked for it. This, in our constant state of hungry irritation, was exasperating. Donkin worked with his brow bound in a dirty rag, and looked so ghastly that Mr. Baker was touched with compassion at the sight of this plucky suffering. — "Ough! You, Donkin! Put down your work and go lay-up this watch. You look ill." — "I am bad, sir — in my 'ead," he said in a subdued voice, and vanished speedily. This annoyed many, and they thought the mate "bloomin' soft to-day." Captain Allistoun could be seen on the poop watching the sky to the southwest, and it soon got to be known about the decks that the barometer had begun to fall in the night, and that a breeze might be expected before long. This, by a subtle association of ideas,

led to violent quarrelling as to the exact moment of Jimmy's death. Was it before or after "that 'ere glass started down?" It was impossible to know, and it caused much contemptuous growling at one another. All of a sudden there was a great tumult forward. Pacific Knowles and good-tempered Davis had come to blows over it. The watch below interfered with spirit, and for ten minutes there was a noisy scrimmage round the hatch, where, in the balancing shade of the sails, Jimmy's body, wrapped up in a white blanket, was watched over by the sorrowful Belfast, who, in his desolation, disdained the fray. When the noise had ceased, and the passions had calmed into surly silence, he stood up at the head of the swathed body, lifting both arms on high, cried with pained indignation: — "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!..." We were.

Belfast took his bereavement very hard. He gave proofs of unextinguishable devotion. It was he, and no other man, who would help the sailmaker to prepare what was left of Jimmy for a solemn surrender to the insatiable sea. He arranged the weights carefully at the feet: two holystones, an old anchor-shackle without its pin, some broken links of a worn-out stream cable. He arranged them this way, then that. "Bless my soul! you aren't afraid he will chafe his heel?" said the sailmaker, who hated the job. He pushed the needle, purring furiously, with his head in a cloud of tobacco smoke; he turned the flaps over, pulled at the stitches, stretched at the canvas. — "Lift his shoulders... Pull to you a bit... So — o — o. Steady." Belfast obeyed, pulled, lifted, overcome with sorrow, dropping tears on the tarred twine. — . "Don't you drag the canvas too taut over his poor face, Sails," he entreated, tearfully. — "What are you fashing yourself for? He will be comfortable enough," assured the sailmaker, cutting the thread after the last stitch, which came about the middle of Jimmy's forehead. He rolled up the remaining canvas, put away the needles. "What makes you take on so?" he asked. Belfast looked down at the long package of grey sailcloth. — "I pulled him out," he whispered, "and he did not want to go. If I had sat up with him last night he would have kept alive for me... but something made me tired." The sailmaker took vigorous draws at his pipe and mumbled: — "When I... West India Station... In the Blanche frigate... Yellow Jack... sewed in twenty men a week... Portsmouth-Devon-port men — townies — knew their fathers, mothers, sisters — the whole boiling of 'em. Thought nothing of it. And these niggers like this one — you don't know where it comes from. Got nobody. No use to nobody. Who will miss him?" — "I do — I pulled him out," mourned Belfast dismally.

On two planks nailed together and apparently resigned and still under the folds of the Union Jack with a white border, James Wait, carried aft by four men, was deposited slowly, with his feet pointing at an open port. A swell had set in from the westward, and following on the roll of the ship, the red ensign, at half-mast, darted out and collapsed again on the grey sky, like a tongue of flickering fire; Charley tolled the bell; and at every swing to starboard the whole vast semi-circle of steely waters visible on that side seemed to come up with a rush to the edge of the port, as if impatient to get at our Jimmy. Every one was there but Donkin, who was too ill to come; the Captain and Mr. Creighton stood bareheaded on the break of the poop; Mr. Baker, directed

by the master, who had said to him gravely: — "You know more about the prayer book than I do," came out of the cabin door quickly and a little embarrassed. All the caps went off. He began to read in a low tone, and with his usual harmlessly menacing utterance, as though he had been for the last time reproving confidentially that dead seaman at his feet. The men listened in scattered groups; they leaned on the fife rail, gazing on the deck; they held their chins in their hands thoughtfully, or, with crossed arms and one knee slightly bent, hung their heads in an attitude of upright meditation. Wamibo dreamed. Mr. Baker read on, grunting reverently at the turn of every page. The words, missing the unsteady hearts of men, rolled out to wander without a home upon the heartless sea; and James Wait, silenced for ever, lay uncritical and passive under the hoarse murmur of despair and hopes.

Two men made ready and waited for those words that send so many of our brothers to their last plunge. Mr. Baker began the passage. "Stand by," muttered the boatswain. Mr. Baker read out: "To the deep," and paused. The men lifted the inboard end of the planks, the boatswain snatched off the Union Jack, and James Wait did not move. — "Higher," muttered the boatswain angrily. All the heads were raised; every man stirred uneasily, but James Wait gave no sign of going. In death and swathed up for all eternity, he yet seemed to cling to the ship with the grip of an undying fear. "Higher! Lift!" whispered the boatswain, fiercely. — "He won't go," stammered one of the men, shakily, and both appeared ready to drop everything. Mr. Baker waited, burying his face in the book, and shuffling his feet nervously. All the men looked profoundly disturbed; from their midst a faint humming noise spread out — growing louder... "Jimmy!" cried Belfast in a wailing tone, and there was a second of shuddering dismay.

"Jimmy, be a man!" he shrieked, passionately. Every mouth was wide open, not an eyelid winked. He stared wildly, twitching all over; he bent his body forward like a man peering at an horror. "Go!" he shouted, and sprang out of the crowd with his arm extended. "Go, Jimmy! — Jimmy, go! Go!" His fingers touched the head of the body, and the grey package started reluctantly to whizz off the lifted planks all at once, with the suddenness of a flash of lightning. The crowd stepped forward like one man; a deep Ah — h — h! came out vibrating from the broad chests. The ship rolled as if relieved of an unfair burden; the sails flapped. Belfast, supported by Archie, gasped hysterically; and Charley, who anxious to see Jimmy's last dive, leaped headlong on the rail, was too late to see anything but the faint circle of a vanishing ripple.

Mr. Baker, perspiring abundantly, read out the last prayer in a deep rumour of excited men and fluttering sails. "Amen!" he said in an unsteady growl, and closed the book.

"Square the yards!" thundered a voice above his head. All hands gave a jump; one or two dropped their caps; Mr. Baker looked up surprised. The master, standing on the break of the poop, pointed to the westward. "Breeze coming," he said, "Man the weather braces." Mr. Baker crammed the book hurriedly into his pocket. "Forward, there — let go the foretack!" he hailed joyfully, bareheaded and brisk; "Square the foreyard, you port-watch!" — "Fair wind — fair wind," muttered the men going to the

braces. — "What did I tell you?" mumbled old Singleton, flinging down coil after coil with hasty energy; "I knowed it — he's gone, and here it comes."

It came with the sound of a lofty and powerful sigh. The sails filled, the ship gathered way, and the waking sea began to murmur sleepily of home to the ears of men.

That night, while the ship rushed foaming to the Northward before a freshening gale, the boatswain unbosomed himself to the petty officers' berth: — "The chap was nothing but trouble," he said, "from the moment he came aboard — d'ye remember — that night in Bombay? Been bullying all that softy crowd — cheeked the old man — we had to go fooling all over a half-drowned ship to save him. Dam' nigh a mutiny all for him — and now the mate abused me like a pickpocket for forgetting to dab a lump of grease on them planks. So I did, but you ought to have known better, too, than to leave a nail sticking up — hey, Chips?"

"And you ought to have known better than to chuck all my tools overboard for 'im, like a skeary greenhorn," retorted the morose carpenter. "Well — he's gone after 'em now," he added in an unforgiving tone. — "On the China Station, I remember once, the Admiral he says to me..." began the sailmaker.

A week afterwards the *Narcissus* entered the chops of the Channel.

Under white wings she skimmed low over the blue sea like a great tired bird speeding to its nest. The clouds raced with her mastheads; they rose astern enormous and white, soared to the zenith, flew past, and falling down the wide curve of the sky, seemed to dash headlong into the sea — the clouds swifter than the ship, more free, but without a home. The coast to welcome her stepped out of space into the sunshine. The lofty headlands trod masterfully into the sea; the wide bays smiled in the light; the shadows of homeless clouds ran along the sunny plains, leaped over valleys, without a check darted up the hills, rolled down the slopes; and the sunshine pursued them with patches of running brightness. On the brows of dark cliffs white lighthouses shone in pillars of light. The Channel glittered like a blue mantle shot with gold and starred by the silver of the capping seas. The *Narcissus* rushed past the headlands and the bays. Outward-bound vessels crossed her track, lying over, and with their masts stripped for a slogging fight with the hard sou'wester. And, inshore, a string of smoking steamboats waddled, hugging the coast, like migrating and amphibious monsters, distrustful of the restless waves.

At night the headlands retreated, the bays advanced into one unbroken line of gloom. The lights of the earth mingled with the lights of heaven; and above the tossing lanterns of a trawling fleet a great lighthouse shone steadily, like an enormous riding light burning above a vessel of fabulous dimensions. Below its steady glow, the coast, stretching away straight and black, resembled the high side of an indestructible craft riding motionless upon the immortal and unresting sea. The dark land lay alone in the midst of waters, like a mighty ship bestarred with vigilant lights — a ship carrying the burden of millions of lives — a ship freighted with dross and with jewels, with gold and with steel. She towered up immense and strong, guarding priceless traditions and untold suffering, sheltering glorious memories and base forgetfulness, ignoble virtues

and splendid transgressions. A great ship! For ages had the ocean battered in vain her enduring sides; she was there when the world was vaster and darker, when the sea was great and mysterious, and ready to surrender the prize of fame to audacious men. A ship mother of fleets and nations! The great flagship of the race; stronger than the storms! and anchored in the open sea.

The *Narcissus*, heeling over to off-shore gusts, rounded the South Foreland, passed through the Downs, and, in tow, entered the river. Shorn of the glory of her white wings, she wound obediently after the tug through the maze of invisible channels. As she passed them the red-painted light-vessels, swung at their moorings, seemed for an instant to sail with great speed in the rush of tide, and the next moment were left hopelessly behind. The big buoys on the tails of banks slipped past her sides very low, and, dropping in her wake, tugged at their chains like fierce watchdogs. The reach narrowed; from both sides the land approached the ship. She went steadily up the river. On the riverside slopes the houses appeared in groups — seemed to stream down the declivities at a run to see her pass, and, checked by the mud of the foreshore, crowded on the banks. Further on, the tall factory chimneys appeared in insolent bands and watched her go by, like a straggling crowd of slim giants, swaggering and upright under the black plummets of smoke, cavalierly aslant. She swept round the bends; an impure breeze shrieked a welcome between her stripped spars; and the land, closing in, stepped between the ship and the sea.

A low cloud hung before her — a great opalescent and tremulous cloud, that seemed to rise from the steaming brows of millions of men. Long drifts of smoky vapours soiled it with livid trails; it throbbed to the beat of millions of hearts, and from it came an immense and lamentable murmur — the murmur of millions of lips praying, cursing, sighing, jeering — the undying murmur of folly, regret, and hope exhaled by the crowds of the anxious earth. The *Narcissus* entered the cloud; the shadows deepened; on all sides there was the clang of iron, the sound of mighty blows, shrieks, yells. Black barges drifted stealthily on the murky stream. A mad jumble of begrimed walls loomed up vaguely in the smoke, bewildering and mournful, like a vision of disaster. The tugs backed and filled in the stream, to hold the ship steady at the dock-gates; from her bows two lines went through the air whistling, and struck at the land viciously, like a pair of snakes. A bridge broke in two before her, as if by enchantment; big hydraulic capstans began to turn all by themselves, as though animated by a mysterious and unholy spell. She moved through a narrow lane of water between two low walls of granite, and men with check-ropes in their hands kept pace with her, walking on the broad flagstones. A group waited impatiently on each side of the vanished bridge: rough heavy men in caps; sallow-faced men in high hats; two bareheaded women; ragged children, fascinated, and with wide eyes. A cart coming at a jerky trot pulled up sharply. One of the women screamed at the silent ship — "Hallo, Jack!" without looking at any one in particular, and all hands looked at her from the fore-castle head. — "Stand clear! Stand clear of that rope!" cried the dockmen, bending over stone posts. The crowd murmured, stamped where they stood. — "Let go your quarter-checks! Let

go!" sang out a ruddy-faced old man on the quay. The ropes splashed heavily falling in the water, and the *Narcissus* entered the dock.

The stony shores ran away right and left in straight lines, enclosing a sombre and rectangular pool. Brick walls rose high above the water! — soulless walls, staring through hundreds of windows as troubled and dull as the eyes of over-fed brutes. At their base monstrous iron cranes crouched, with chains hanging from their long necks, balancing cruel-looking hooks over the decks of lifeless ships. A noise of wheels rolling over stones, the thump of heavy things falling, the racket of feverish winches, the grinding of strained chains, floated on the air. Between high buildings the dust of all the continents soared in short flights; and a penetrating smell of perfumes and dirt, of spices and hides, of things costly and of things filthy, pervaded the space, made for it an atmosphere precious and disgusting. The *Narcissus* came gently into her berth; the shadows of soulless walls fell upon her, the dust of all the continents leaped upon her deck, and a swarm of strange men, clambering up her sides, took possession of her in the name of the sordid earth. She had ceased to live.

A toff in a black coat and high hat scrambled with agility, came up to the second mate, shook hands, and said: — "Hallo, Herbert." It was his brother. A lady appeared suddenly. A real lady, in a black dress and with a parasol. She looked extremely elegant in the midst of us, and as strange as if she had fallen there from the sky. Mr. Baker touched his cap to her. It was the master's wife. And very soon the Captain, dressed very smartly and in a white shirt, went with her over the side. We didn't recognise him at all till, turning on the quay, he called to Mr. Baker: — "Don't forget to wind up the chronometers to-morrow morning." An underhand lot of seedy-looking chaps with shifty eyes wandered in and out of the fore-castle looking for a job — they said. — "More likely for something to steal," commented Knowles, cheerfully. Poor beggars. Who cared? Weren't we home! But Mr. Baker went for one of them who had given him some cheek, and we were delighted. Everything was delightful. — "I've finished aft, sir," called out Mr. Creighton. — "No water in the well, sir," reported for the last time the carpenter, sounding-rod in hand. Mr. Baker glanced along the decks at the expectant group of sailors, glanced aloft at the yards. — "Ough! That will do, men," he grunted. The group broke up. The voyage was ended.

Rolled-up beds went flying over the rail; lashed chests went sliding down the gangway — mighty few of both at that. "The rest is having a cruise off the Cape," explained Knowles enigmatically to a dock-loafer with whom he had struck a sudden friendship. Men ran, calling to one another, hailing utter strangers to "lend a hand with the dunnage," then with sudden decorum approached the mate to shake hands before going ashore. — "Good-bye, sir," they repeated in various tones. Mr. Baker grasped hard palms, grunted in a friendly manner at every one, his eyes twinkled. — "Take care of your money, Knowles. Ough! Soon get a nice wife if you do." The lame man was delighted. — "Good-bye, sir," said Belfast, with emotion, wringing the mate's hand, and looked up with swimming eyes. "I thought I would take 'im ashore with me," he

went on, plaintively. Mr. Baker did not understand, but said kindly: — "Take care of yourself, Craik," and the bereaved Belfast went over the rail mourning and alone.

Mr. Baker, in the sudden peace of the ship, moved about solitary and grunting, trying door-handles, peering into dark places, never done — a model chief mate! No one waited for him ashore. Mother dead; father and two brothers, Yarmouth fishermen, drowned together on the Dogger Bank; sister married and unfriendly. Quite a lady. Married to the leading tailor of a little town, and its leading politician, who did not think his sailor brother-in-law quite respectable enough for him. Quite a lady, quite a lady, he thought, sitting down for a moment's rest on the quarter-hatch. Time enough to go ashore and get a bite and sup, and a bed somewhere. He didn't like to part with a ship. No one to think about then. The darkness of a misty evening fell, cold and damp, upon the deserted deck; and Mr. Baker sat smoking, thinking of all the successive ships to whom through many long years he had given the best of a seaman's care. And never a command in sight. Not once! — "I haven't somehow the cut of a skipper about me," he meditated, placidly, while the shipkeeper (who had taken possession of the galley), a wizened old man with bleared eyes, cursed him in whispers for "hanging about so." — "Now, Creighton," he pursued the unenvious train of thought, "quite a gentleman... swell friends... will get on. Fine young fellow... a little more experience." He got up and shook himself. "I'll be back first thing to-morrow morning for the hatches. Don't you let them touch anything before I come, shipkeeper," he called out. Then, at last, he also went ashore — a model chief mate!

The men scattered by the dissolving contact of the land came together once more in the shipping office. — "The Narcissus pays off," shouted outside a glazed door a brass-bound old fellow with a crown and the capitals B. T. on his cap. A lot trooped in at once but many were late. The room was large, white-washed, and bare; a counter surmounted by a brass-wire grating fenced off a third of the dusty space, and behind the grating a pasty-faced clerk, with his hair parted in the middle, had the quick, glittering eyes and the vivacious, jerky movements of a caged bird. Poor Captain Allistoun also in there, and sitting before a little table with piles of gold and notes on it, appeared subdued by his captivity. Another Board of Trade bird was perching on a high stool near the door: an old bird that did not mind the chaff of elated sailors. The crew of the Narcissus, broken up into knots, pushed in the corners. They had new shore togs, smart jackets that looked as if they had been shaped with an axe, glossy trousers that seemed made of crumpled sheet-iron, collarless flannel shirts, shiny new boots. They tapped on shoulders, button-holed one another, asked: — > "Where did you sleep last night?" whispered gaily, slapped their thighs with bursts of subdued laughter. Most had clean, radiant faces; only one or two turned up dishevelled and sad; the two-young Norwegians looked tidy, meek, and altogether of a promising material for the kind ladies who patronise the Scandinavian Home. Wamibo, still in his working clothes, dreamed, upright and burly in the middle of the room, and, when Archie came in, woke up for a smile. But the wide-awake clerk called out a name, and the paying-off business began.

One by one they came up to the pay-table to get the wages of their glorious and obscure toil. They swept the money with care into broad palms, rammed it trustfully into trousers' pockets, or, turning their backs on the table, reckoned with difficulty in the hollow of their stiff hands. — "Money right? Sign the release. There — there," repeated the clerk, impatiently. "How stupid those sailors are!" he thought. Singleton came up, venerable — and uncertain as to daylight; brown drops of tobacco juice hung in his white beard; his hands, that never hesitated in the great light of the open sea, could hardly find the small pile of gold in the profound darkness of the shore. "Can't write?" said the clerk, shocked. "Make a mark, then." Singleton painfully sketched in a heavy cross, blotted the page. "What a disgusting old brute," muttered the clerk. Somebody opened the door for him, and the patriarchal seaman passed through unsteadily, without as much as a glance at any of us.

Archie displayed a pocket-book. He was chaffed. Belfast, who looked wild, as though he had already luffed up through a public-house or two, gave signs of emotion and wanted to speak to the Captain privately. The master was surprised. They spoke through the wires, and we could hear the Captain saying: — "I've given it up to the Board of Trade." "I should 've liked to get something of his," mumbled Belfast. "But you can't, my man. It's given up, locked and sealed, to the Marine Office," expostulated the master; and Belfast stood back, with drooping mouth and troubled eyes. In a pause of the business we heard the master and the clerk talking. We caught: "James Wait — deceased — found no papers of any kind — no relations — no trace — the Office must hold his wages then." Donkin entered. He seemed out of breath, was grave, full of business. He went straight to the desk, talked with animation to the clerk, who thought him an intelligent man. They discussed the account, dropping h's against one another as if for a wager — very friendly. Captain Allistoun paid. "I give you a bad discharge," he said, quietly. Donkin raised his voice: — "I don't want your bloomin' discharge — keep it. I'm goin' ter 'ave a job ashore." He turned to us. "No more bloomin' sea fur me," he said, aloud. All looked at him. He had better clothes, had an easy air, appeared more at home than any of us; he stared with assurance, enjoying the effect of his declaration. "Yuss. I 'ave friends well off. That's more'n you got. But I am a man. Yer shipmates for all that. Who's comin fur a drink?"

No one moved. There was a silence; a silence of blank faces and stony looks. He waited a moment, smiled bitterly, and went to the door. There he faced round once more. "You won't? You bloomin' lot of yrpocrits. No? What 'ave I done to yer? Did I bully yer? Did I 'urt yer? Did I?... You won't drink?... No!... Then may ye die of thirst, every mother's son of yer! Not one of yer 'as the sperrit of a bug. Ye're the scum of the world. Work and starve!"

He went out, and slammed the door with such violence that the old Board of Trade bird nearly fell off his perch.

"He's mad," declared Archie. "No! No! He's drunk," insisted Belfast, lurching about, and in a maudlin tone. Captain Allistoun sat smiling thoughtfully at the cleared pay-table.

Outside, on Tower Hill, they blinked, hesitated clumsily, as if blinded by the strange quality of the hazy light, as if discomposed by the view of so many men; and they who could hear one another in the howl of gales seemed deafened and distracted by the dull roar of the busy earth. — "To the Black Horse! To the Black Horse!" cried some. "Let us have a drink together before we part." They crossed the road, clinging to one another. Only Charley and Belfast wandered off alone. As I came up I saw a red-faced, blowsy woman, in a grey shawl, and with dusty, fluffy hair, fall on Charley's neck. It was his mother. She slobbered over him: — "O, my boy! My boy!" — "Leggo of me," said Charley, "Leggo, mother!" I was passing him at the time, and over the untidy head of the blubbering woman he gave me a humorous smile and a glance ironic, courageous, and profound, that seemed to put all my knowledge of life to shame. I nodded and passed on, but heard him say again, good-naturedly: — "If you leggo of me this minyt — ye shall 'ave a bob for a drink out of my pay." In the next few steps I came upon Belfast. He caught my arm with tremulous enthusiasm. — "I couldn't go wi' 'em," he stammered, indicating by a nod our noisy crowd, that drifted slowly along the other sidewalk. "When I think of Jimmy... Poor Jim! When I think of him I have no heart for drink. You were his chum, too... but I pulled him out... didn't I? Short wool he had... Yes. And I stole the blooming pie... He wouldn't go... He wouldn't go for nobody." He burst into tears. "I never touched him — never — never!" he sobbed. "He went for me like... like ... a lamb."

I disengaged myself gently. Belfast's crying fits generally ended in a fight with some one, and I wasn't anxious to stand the brunt of his inconsolable sorrow. Moreover, two bulky policemen stood near by, looking at us with a disapproving and incorruptible gaze. — "So long!" I said, and went on my way.

But at the corner I stopped to take my last look at the crew of the *Narcissus*. They were swaying irresolute and noisy on the broad flagstones before the Mint. They were bound for the Black Horse, where men, in fur caps with brutal faces and in shirt sleeves, dispense out of varnished barrels the illusions of strength, mirth, happiness; the illusion of splendour and poetry of life, to the paid-off crews of southern-going ships. From afar I saw them discoursing, with jovial eyes and clumsy gestures, while the sea of life thundered into their ears ceaseless and unheeded. And swaying about there on the white stones, surrounded by the hurry and clamour of men, they appeared to be creatures of another kind — lost, alone, forgetful, and doomed; they were like castaways, like reckless and joyous castaways, like mad castaways making merry in the storm and upon an insecure ledge of a treacherous rock. The roar of the town resembled the roar of topping breakers, merciless and strong, with a loud voice and cruel purpose; but overhead the clouds broke; a flood of sunshine streamed down the walls of grimy houses. The dark knot of seamen drifted in sunshine. To the left of them the trees in Tower Gardens sighed, the stones of the Tower gleaming, seemed to stir in the play of light, as if remembering suddenly all the great joys and sorrows of the past, the fighting prototypes of these men; press-gangs; mutinous cries; the wailing of women by the riverside, and the shouts of men welcoming victories. The sunshine of

heaven fell like a gift of grace on the mud of the earth, on the remembering and mute stones, on greed, selfishness; on the anxious faces of forgetful men. And to the right of the dark group the stained front of the Mint, cleansed by the flood of light, stood out for a moment dazzling and white like a marble palace in a fairy tale. The crew of the Narcissus drifted out of sight.

I never saw them again. The sea took some, the steamers took others, the graveyards of the earth will account for the rest. Singleton has no doubt taken with him the long record of his faithful work into the peaceful depths of an hospitable sea. And Donkin, who never did a decent day's work in his life, no doubt earns his living by discoursing with filthy eloquence upon the right of labour to live. So be it! Let the earth and the sea each have its own.

A gone shipmate, like any other man, is gone for ever; and I never met one of them again. But at times the spring-flood of memory sets with force up the dark River of the Nine Bends. Then on the waters of the forlorn stream drifts a ship — a shadowy ship manned by a crew of Shades. They pass and make a sign, in a shadowy hail. Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives? Good-bye, brothers! You were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fisted with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell for yell to a westerly gale.

The End

Lord Jim

Lord Jim was originally published as a serial in Blackwood's Magazine from October 1899 to November 1900. It tells the story of Jim's abandonment of a ship in distress on which he is serving as a mate and his later attempts at coming to terms with his actions. The novel is now widely regarded as one of the best pieces of fiction of the 20th century.

A serial part of Blackwood's Magazine
Conrad, close to the time of publication

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The first edition

Author's Note

When this novel first appeared in book form a notion got about that I had been bolted away with. Some reviewers maintained that the work starting as a short story had got beyond the writer's control. One or two discovered internal evidence of the fact, which seemed to amuse them. They pointed out the limitations of the narrative form. They argued that no man could have been expected to talk all that time, and other men to listen so long. It was not, they said, very credible.

After thinking it over for something like sixteen years, I am not so sure about that. Men have been known, both in the tropics and in the temperate zone, to sit up half the night 'swapping yarns'. This, however, is but one yarn, yet with interruptions affording some measure of relief; and in regard to the listeners' endurance, the postulate must be accepted that the story was interesting. It is the necessary preliminary assumption. If I hadn't believed that it was interesting I could never have begun to write it. As to the mere physical possibility we all know that some speeches in Parliament have taken nearer six than three hours in delivery; whereas all that part of the book which is Marlow's narrative can be read through aloud, I should say, in less than three hours. Besides — though I have kept strictly all such insignificant details out of the tale — we may presume that there must have been refreshments on that night, a glass of mineral water of some sort to help the narrator on.

But, seriously, the truth of the matter is, that my first thought was of a short story, concerned only with the pilgrim ship episode; nothing more. And that was a legitimate conception. After writing a few pages, however, I became for some reason discontented and I laid them aside for a time. I didn't take them out of the drawer till the late Mr. William Blackwood suggested I should give something again to his magazine.

It was only then that I perceived that the pilgrim ship episode was a good starting-point for a free and wandering tale; that it was an event, too, which could conceivably colour the whole 'sentiment of existence' in a simple and sensitive character. But all these preliminary moods and stirrings of spirit were rather obscure at the time, and they do not appear clearer to me now after the lapse of so many years.

The few pages I had laid aside were not without their weight in the choice of subject. But the whole was re-written deliberately. When I sat down to it I knew it would be a long book, though I didn't foresee that it would spread itself over thirteen numbers of *Maga*.

I have been asked at times whether this was not the book of mine I liked best. I am a great foe to favouritism in public life, in private life, and even in the delicate relationship of an author to his works. As a matter of principle I will have no favourites;

but I don't go so far as to feel grieved and annoyed by the preference some people give to my Lord Jim. I won't even say that I 'fail to understand . . .' No! But once I had occasion to be puzzled and surprised.

A friend of mine returning from Italy had talked with a lady there who did not like the book. I regretted that, of course, but what surprised me was the ground of her dislike. 'You know,' she said, 'it is all so morbid.'

The pronouncement gave me food for an hour's anxious thought. Finally I arrived at the conclusion that, making due allowances for the subject itself being rather foreign to women's normal sensibilities, the lady could not have been an Italian. I wonder whether she was European at all? In any case, no Latin temperament would have perceived anything morbid in the acute consciousness of lost honour. Such a consciousness may be wrong, or it may be right, or it may be condemned as artificial; and, perhaps, my Jim is not a type of wide commonness. But I can safely assure my readers that he is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He's not a figure of Northern Mists either. One sunny morning, in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by — appealing — significant — under a cloud — perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was 'one of us'.

J.C.

1917

Chapter 1

He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull. His voice was deep, loud, and his manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion which had nothing aggressive in it. It seemed a necessity, and it was directed apparently as much at himself as at anybody else. He was spotlessly neat, apparelled in immaculate white from shoes to hat, and in the various Eastern ports where he got his living as ship-chandler's water-clerk he was very popular.

A water-clerk need not pass an examination in anything under the sun, but he must have Ability in the abstract and demonstrate it practically. His work consists in racing under sail, steam, or oars against other water-clerks for any ship about to anchor, greeting her captain cheerily, forcing upon him a card — the business card of the ship-chandler — and on his first visit on shore piloting him firmly but without ostentation to a vast, cavern-like shop which is full of things that are eaten and drunk on board ship; where you can get everything to make her seaworthy and beautiful, from a set of chain-hooks for her cable to a book of gold-leaf for the carvings of her stern; and where her commander is received like a brother by a ship-chandler he has never seen before. There is a cool parlour, easy-chairs, bottles, cigars, writing implements, a copy of harbour regulations, and a warmth of welcome that melts the salt of a three months' passage out of a seaman's heart. The connection thus begun is kept up, as long as the ship remains in harbour, by the daily visits of the water-clerk. To the captain he is faithful like a friend and attentive like a son, with the patience of Job, the unselfish devotion of a woman, and the jollity of a boon companion. Later on the bill is sent in. It is a beautiful and humane occupation. Therefore good water-clerks are scarce. When a water-clerk who possesses Ability in the abstract has also the advantage of having been brought up to the sea, he is worth to his employer a lot of money and some humouring. Jim had always good wages and as much humouring as would have bought the fidelity of a fiend. Nevertheless, with black ingratitude he would throw up the job suddenly and depart. To his employers the reasons he gave were obviously inadequate. They said 'Confounded fool!' as soon as his back was turned. This was their criticism on his exquisite sensibility.

To the white men in the waterside business and to the captains of ships he was just Jim — nothing more. He had, of course, another name, but he was anxious that it should not be pronounced. His incognito, which had as many holes as a sieve, was not meant to hide a personality but a fact. When the fact broke through the incognito

he would leave suddenly the seaport where he happened to be at the time and go to another — generally farther east. He kept to seaports because he was a seaman in exile from the sea, and had Ability in the abstract, which is good for no other work but that of a water-clerk. He retreated in good order towards the rising sun, and the fact followed him casually but inevitably. Thus in the course of years he was known successively in Bombay, in Calcutta, in Rangoon, in Penang, in Batavia — and in each of these halting-places was just Jim the water-clerk. Afterwards, when his keen perception of the Intolerable drove him away for good from seaports and white men, even into the virgin forest, the Malays of the jungle village, where he had elected to conceal his deplorable faculty, added a word to the monosyllable of his incognito. They called him Tuan Jim: as one might say — Lord Jim.

Originally he came from a parsonage. Many commanders of fine merchant-ships come from these abodes of piety and peace. Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions. The little church on a hill had the mossy greyness of a rock seen through a ragged screen of leaves. It had stood there for centuries, but the trees around probably remembered the laying of the first stone. Below, the red front of the rectory gleamed with a warm tint in the midst of grass-plots, flower-beds, and fir-trees, with an orchard at the back, a paved stable-yard to the left, and the sloping glass of greenhouses tacked along a wall of bricks. The living had belonged to the family for generations; but Jim was one of five sons, and when after a course of light holiday literature his vocation for the sea had declared itself, he was sent at once to a 'training-ship for officers of the mercantile marine.'

He learned there a little trigonometry and how to cross top-gallant yards. He was generally liked. He had the third place in navigation and pulled stroke in the first cutter. Having a steady head with an excellent physique, he was very smart aloft. His station was in the fore-top, and often from there he looked down, with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of dangers, at the peaceful multitude of roofs cut in two by the brown tide of the stream, while scattered on the outskirts of the surrounding plain the factory chimneys rose perpendicular against a grimy sky, each slender like a pencil, and belching out smoke like a volcano. He could see the big ships departing, the broad-beamed ferries constantly on the move, the little boats floating far below his feet, with the hazy splendour of the sea in the distance, and the hope of a stirring life in the world of adventure.

On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the

hearts of despairing men — always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.

‘Something’s up. Come along.’

He leaped to his feet. The boys were streaming up the ladders. Above could be heard a great scurrying about and shouting, and when he got through the hatchway he stood still — as if confounded.

It was the dusk of a winter’s day. The gale had freshened since noon, stopping the traffic on the river, and now blew with the strength of a hurricane in fitful bursts that boomed like salvos of great guns firing over the ocean. The rain slanted in sheets that flicked and subsided, and between whiles Jim had threatening glimpses of the tumbling tide, the small craft jumbled and tossing along the shore, the motionless buildings in the driving mist, the broad ferry-boats pitching ponderously at anchor, the vast landing-stages heaving up and down and smothered in sprays. The next gust seemed to blow all this away. The air was full of flying water. There was a fierce purpose in the gale, a furious earnestness in the screech of the wind, in the brutal tumult of earth and sky, that seemed directed at him, and made him hold his breath in awe. He stood still. It seemed to him he was whirled around.

He was jostled. ‘Man the cutter!’ Boys rushed past him. A coaster running in for shelter had crashed through a schooner at anchor, and one of the ship’s instructors had seen the accident. A mob of boys clambered on the rails, clustered round the davits. ‘Collision. Just ahead of us. Mr. Symons saw it.’ A push made him stagger against the mizzen-mast, and he caught hold of a rope. The old training-ship chained to her moorings quivered all over, bowing gently head to wind, and with her scanty rigging humming in a deep bass the breathless song of her youth at sea. ‘Lower away!’ He saw the boat, manned, drop swiftly below the rail, and rushed after her. He heard a splash. ‘Let go; clear the falls!’ He leaned over. The river alongside seethed in frothy streaks. The cutter could be seen in the falling darkness under the spell of tide and wind, that for a moment held her bound, and tossing abreast of the ship. A yelling voice in her reached him faintly: ‘Keep stroke, you young whelps, if you want to save anybody! Keep stroke!’ And suddenly she lifted high her bow, and, leaping with raised oars over a wave, broke the spell cast upon her by the wind and tide.

Jim felt his shoulder gripped firmly. ‘Too late, youngster.’ The captain of the ship laid a restraining hand on that boy, who seemed on the point of leaping overboard, and Jim looked up with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes. The captain smiled sympathetically. ‘Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart.’

A shrill cheer greeted the cutter. She came dancing back half full of water, and with two exhausted men washing about on her bottom boards. The tumult and the menace of wind and sea now appeared very contemptible to Jim, increasing the regret of his awe at their inefficient menace. Now he knew what to think of it. It seemed to him he cared nothing for the gale. He could affront greater perils. He would do so — better than anybody. Not a particle of fear was left. Nevertheless he brooded apart that evening while the bowman of the cutter — a boy with a face like a girl’s and big

grey eyes — was the hero of the lower deck. Eager questioners crowded round him. He narrated: ‘I just saw his head bobbing, and I dashed my boat-hook in the water. It caught in his breeches and I nearly went overboard, as I thought I would, only old Symons let go the tiller and grabbed my legs — the boat nearly swamped. Old Symons is a fine old chap. I don’t mind a bit him being grumpy with us. He swore at me all the time he held my leg, but that was only his way of telling me to stick to the boat-hook. Old Symons is awfully excitable — isn’t he? No — not the little fair chap — the other, the big one with a beard. When we pulled him in he groaned, “Oh, my leg! oh, my leg!” and turned up his eyes. Fancy such a big chap fainting like a girl. Would any of you fellows faint for a jab with a boat-hook? — I wouldn’t. It went into his leg so far.’ He showed the boat-hook, which he had carried below for the purpose, and produced a sensation. ‘No, silly! It was not his flesh that held him — his breeches did. Lots of blood, of course.’

Jim thought it a pitiful display of vanity. The gale had ministered to a heroism as spurious as its own pretence of terror. He felt angry with the brutal tumult of earth and sky for taking him unawares and checking unfairly a generous readiness for narrow escapes. Otherwise he was rather glad he had not gone into the cutter, since a lower achievement had served the turn. He had enlarged his knowledge more than those who had done the work. When all men flinched, then — he felt sure — he alone would know how to deal with the spurious menace of wind and seas. He knew what to think of it. Seen dispassionately, it seemed contemptible. He could detect no trace of emotion in himself, and the final effect of a staggering event was that, unnoticed and apart from the noisy crowd of boys, he exulted with fresh certitude in his avidity for adventure, and in a sense of many-sided courage.

Chapter 2

After two years of training he went to sea, and entering the regions so well known to his imagination, found them strangely barren of adventure. He made many voyages. He knew the magic monotony of existence between sky and water: he had to bear the criticism of men, the exactions of the sea, and the prosaic severity of the daily task that gives bread — but whose only reward is in the perfect love of the work. This reward eluded him. Yet he could not go back, because there is nothing more enticing, disenchanting, and enslaving than the life at sea. Besides, his prospects were good. He was gentlemanly, steady, tractable, with a thorough knowledge of his duties; and in time, when yet very young, he became chief mate of a fine ship, without ever having been tested by those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man, the edge of his temper, and the fibre of his stuff; that reveal the quality of his resistance and the secret truth of his pretences, not only to others but also to himself.

Only once in all that time he had again a glimpse of the earnestness in the anger of the sea. That truth is not so often made apparent as people might think. There are many shades in the danger of adventures and gales, and it is only now and then that there appears on the face of facts a sinister violence of intention — that indefinable something which forces it upon the mind and the heart of a man, that this complication of accidents or these elemental furies are coming at him with a purpose of malice, with a strength beyond control, with an unbridled cruelty that means to tear out of him his hope and his fear, the pain of his fatigue and his longing for rest: which means to smash, to destroy, to annihilate all he has seen, known, loved, enjoyed, or hated; all that is priceless and necessary — the sunshine, the memories, the future; which means to sweep the whole precious world utterly away from his sight by the simple and appalling act of taking his life.

Jim, disabled by a falling spar at the beginning of a week of which his Scottish captain used to say afterwards, ‘Man! it’s a pairfect meeracle to me how she lived through it!’ spent many days stretched on his back, dazed, battered, hopeless, and tormented as if at the bottom of an abyss of unrest. He did not care what the end would be, and in his lucid moments overvalued his indifference. The danger, when not seen, has the imperfect vagueness of human thought. The fear grows shadowy; and Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all terrors, unstimulated, sinks to rest in the dullness of exhausted emotion. Jim saw nothing but the disorder of his tossed cabin. He lay there battened down in the midst of a small devastation, and felt secretly glad he had not to go on deck. But now and again an uncontrollable rush of anguish would grip him bodily, make him gasp and writhe under the blankets, and then the

unintelligent brutality of an existence liable to the agony of such sensations filled him with a despairing desire to escape at any cost. Then fine weather returned, and he thought no more about It.

His lameness, however, persisted, and when the ship arrived at an Eastern port he had to go to the hospital. His recovery was slow, and he was left behind.

There were only two other patients in the white men's ward: the purser of a gunboat, who had broken his leg falling down a hatchway; and a kind of railway contractor from a neighbouring province, afflicted by some mysterious tropical disease, who held the doctor for an ass, and indulged in secret debaucheries of patent medicine which his Tamil servant used to smuggle in with unwearied devotion. They told each other the story of their lives, played cards a little, or, yawning and in pyjamas, lounged through the day in easy-chairs without saying a word. The hospital stood on a hill, and a gentle breeze entering through the windows, always flung wide open, brought into the bare room the softness of the sky, the languor of the earth, the bewitching breath of the Eastern waters. There were perfumes in it, suggestions of infinite repose, the gift of endless dreams. Jim looked every day over the thickets of gardens, beyond the roofs of the town, over the fronds of palms growing on the shore, at that roadstead which is a thoroughfare to the East, — at the roadstead dotted by garlanded islets, lighted by festal sunshine, its ships like toys, its brilliant activity resembling a holiday pageant, with the eternal serenity of the Eastern sky overhead and the smiling peace of the Eastern seas possessing the space as far as the horizon.

Directly he could walk without a stick, he descended into the town to look for some opportunity to get home. Nothing offered just then, and, while waiting, he associated naturally with the men of his calling in the port. These were of two kinds. Some, very few and seen there but seldom, led mysterious lives, had preserved an undefaced energy with the temper of buccaneers and the eyes of dreamers. They appeared to live in a crazy maze of plans, hopes, dangers, enterprises, ahead of civilisation, in the dark places of the sea; and their death was the only event of their fantastic existence that seemed to have a reasonable certitude of achievement. The majority were men who, like himself, thrown there by some accident, had remained as officers of country ships. They had now a horror of the home service, with its harder conditions, severer view of duty, and the hazard of stormy oceans. They were attuned to the eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea. They loved short passages, good deck-chairs, large native crews, and the distinction of being white. They shuddered at the thought of hard work, and led precariously easy lives, always on the verge of dismissal, always on the verge of engagement, serving Chinamen, Arabs, half-castes — would have served the devil himself had he made it easy enough. They talked everlastingly of turns of luck: how So-and-so got charge of a boat on the coast of China — a soft thing; how this one had an easy billet in Japan somewhere, and that one was doing well in the Siamese navy; and in all they said — in their actions, in their looks, in their persons — could be detected the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence.

To Jim that gossiping crowd, viewed as seamen, seemed at first more unsubstantial than so many shadows. But at length he found a fascination in the sight of those men, in their appearance of doing so well on such a small allowance of danger and toil. In time, beside the original disdain there grew up slowly another sentiment; and suddenly, giving up the idea of going home, he took a berth as chief mate of the Patna.

The Patna was a local steamer as old as the hills, lean like a greyhound, and eaten up with rust worse than a condemned water-tank. She was owned by a Chinaman, chartered by an Arab, and commanded by a sort of renegade New South Wales German, very anxious to curse publicly his native country, but who, apparently on the strength of Bismarck's victorious policy, brutalised all those he was not afraid of, and wore a 'blood-and-iron' air,' combined with a purple nose and a red moustache. After she had been painted outside and whitewashed inside, eight hundred pilgrims (more or less) were driven on board of her as she lay with steam up alongside a wooden jetty.

They streamed aboard over three gangways, they streamed in urged by faith and the hope of paradise, they streamed in with a continuous tramp and shuffle of bare feet, without a word, a murmur, or a look back; and when clear of confining rails spread on all sides over the deck, flowed forward and aft, overflowed down the yawning hatchways, filled the inner recesses of the ship — like water filling a cistern, like water flowing into crevices and crannies, like water rising silently even with the rim. Eight hundred men and women with faith and hopes, with affections and memories, they had collected there, coming from north and south and from the outskirts of the East, after treading the jungle paths, descending the rivers, coasting in praus along the shallows, crossing in small canoes from island to island, passing through suffering, meeting strange sights, beset by strange fears, upheld by one desire. They came from solitary huts in the wilderness, from populous campongs, from villages by the sea. At the call of an idea they had left their forests, their clearings, the protection of their rulers, their prosperity, their poverty, the surroundings of their youth and the graves of their fathers. They came covered with dust, with sweat, with grime, with rags — the strong men at the head of family parties, the lean old men pressing forward without hope of return; young boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls with tumbled long hair; the timid women muffled up and clasping to their breasts, wrapped in loose ends of soiled head-cloths, their sleeping babies, the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief.

'Look at dese cattle,' said the German skipper to his new chief mate.

An Arab, the leader of that pious voyage, came last. He walked slowly aboard, handsome and grave in his white gown and large turban. A string of servants followed, loaded with his luggage; the Patna cast off and backed away from the wharf.

She was headed between two small islets, crossed obliquely the anchoring-ground of sailing-ships, swung through half a circle in the shadow of a hill, then ranged close to a ledge of foaming reefs. The Arab, standing up aft, recited aloud the prayer of travellers by sea. He invoked the favour of the Most High upon that journey, implored His blessing on men's toil and on the secret purposes of their hearts; the steamer

pounded in the dusk the calm water of the Strait; and far astern of the pilgrim ship a screw-pile lighthouse, planted by unbelievers on a treacherous shoal, seemed to wink at her its eye of flame, as if in derision of her errand of faith.

She cleared the Strait, crossed the bay, continued on her way through the 'One-degree' passage. She held on straight for the Red Sea under a serene sky, under a sky scorching and unclouded, enveloped in a fulgor of sunshine that killed all thought, oppressed the heart, withered all impulses of strength and energy. And under the sinister splendour of that sky the sea, blue and profound, remained still, without a stir, without a ripple, without a wrinkle — viscous, stagnant, dead. The Patna, with a slight hiss, passed over that plain, luminous and smooth, unrolled a black ribbon of smoke across the sky, left behind her on the water a white ribbon of foam that vanished at once, like the phantom of a track drawn upon a lifeless sea by the phantom of a steamer.

Every morning the sun, as if keeping pace in his revolutions with the progress of the pilgrimage, emerged with a silent burst of light exactly at the same distance astern of the ship, caught up with her at noon, pouring the concentrated fire of his rays on the pious purposes of the men, glided past on his descent, and sank mysteriously into the sea evening after evening, preserving the same distance ahead of her advancing bows. The five whites on board lived amidships, isolated from the human cargo. The awnings covered the deck with a white roof from stem to stern, and a faint hum, a low murmur of sad voices, alone revealed the presence of a crowd of people upon the great blaze of the ocean. Such were the days, still, hot, heavy, disappearing one by one into the past, as if falling into an abyss for ever open in the wake of the ship; and the ship, lonely under a wisp of smoke, held on her steadfast way black and smouldering in a luminous immensity, as if scorched by a flame flicked at her from a heaven without pity.

The nights descended on her like a benediction.

Chapter 3

A marvellous stillness pervaded the world, and the stars, together with the serenity of their rays, seemed to shed upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security. The young moon recurved, and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold, and the Arabian Sea, smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of ice, extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of a dark horizon. The propeller turned without a check, as though its beat had been part of the scheme of a safe universe; and on each side of the Patna two deep folds of water, permanent and sombre on the unwrinkled shimmer, enclosed within their straight and diverging ridges a few white swirls of foam bursting in a low hiss, a few wavelets, a few ripples, a few undulations that, left behind, agitated the surface of the sea for an instant after the passage of the ship, subsided splashing gently, calmed down at last into the circular stillness of water and sky with the black speck of the moving hull remaining everlastingly in its centre.

Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face. Below the roof of awnings, surrendered to the wisdom of white men and to their courage, trusting the power of their unbelief and the iron shell of their fire-ship, the pilgrims of an exacting faith slept on mats, on blankets, on bare planks, on every deck, in all the dark corners, wrapped in dyed cloths, muffled in soiled rags, with their heads resting on small bundles, with their faces pressed to bent forearms: the men, the women, the children; the old with the young, the decrepit with the lusty — all equal before sleep, death's brother.

A draught of air, fanned from forward by the speed of the ship, passed steadily through the long gloom between the high bulwarks, swept over the rows of prone bodies; a few dim flames in globe-lamps were hung short here and there under the ridge-poles, and in the blurred circles of light thrown down and trembling slightly to the unceasing vibration of the ship appeared a chin upturned, two closed eyelids, a dark hand with silver rings, a meagre limb draped in a torn covering, a head bent back, a naked foot, a throat bared and stretched as if offering itself to the knife. The well-to-do had made for their families shelters with heavy boxes and dusty mats; the poor reposed side by side with all they had on earth tied up in a rag under their heads; the lone old men slept, with drawn-up legs, upon their prayer-carpets, with their hands over their ears and one elbow on each side of the face; a father, his shoulders up and his knees under his forehead, dozed dejectedly by a boy who slept on his back with tousled hair and one arm commandingly extended; a woman covered from head to foot, like a corpse, with a piece of white sheeting, had a naked child in the hollow

of each arm; the Arab's belongings, piled right aft, made a heavy mound of broken outlines, with a cargo-lamp swung above, and a great confusion of vague forms behind: gleams of paunchy brass pots, the foot-rest of a deck-chair, blades of spears, the straight scabbard of an old sword leaning against a heap of pillows, the spout of a tin coffee-pot. The patent log on the taffrail periodically rang a single tinkling stroke for every mile traversed on an errand of faith. Above the mass of sleepers a faint and patient sigh at times floated, the exhalation of a troubled dream; and short metallic clangs bursting out suddenly in the depths of the ship, the harsh scrape of a shovel, the violent slam of a furnace-door, exploded brutally, as if the men handling the mysterious things below had their breasts full of fierce anger: while the slim high hull of the steamer went on evenly ahead, without a sway of her bare masts, cleaving continuously the great calm of the waters under the inaccessible serenity of the sky.

Jim paced athwart, and his footsteps in the vast silence were loud to his own ears, as if echoed by the watchful stars: his eyes, roaming about the line of the horizon, seemed to gaze hungrily into the unattainable, and did not see the shadow of the coming event. The only shadow on the sea was the shadow of the black smoke pouring heavily from the funnel its immense streamer, whose end was constantly dissolving in the air. Two Malays, silent and almost motionless, steered, one on each side of the wheel, whose brass rim shone fragmentarily in the oval of light thrown out by the binnacle. Now and then a hand, with black fingers alternately letting go and catching hold of revolving spokes, appeared in the illumined part; the links of wheel-chains ground heavily in the grooves of the barrel. Jim would glance at the compass, would glance around the unattainable horizon, would stretch himself till his joints cracked, with a leisurely twist of the body, in the very excess of well-being; and, as if made audacious by the invincible aspect of the peace, he felt he cared for nothing that could happen to him to the end of his days. From time to time he glanced idly at a chart pegged out with four drawing-pins on a low three-legged table abaft the steering-gear case. The sheet of paper portraying the depths of the sea presented a shiny surface under the light of a bull's-eye lamp lashed to a stanchion, a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters. Parallel rulers with a pair of dividers reposed on it; the ship's position at last noon was marked with a small black cross, and the straight pencil-line drawn firmly as far as Perim figured the course of the ship — the path of souls towards the holy place, the promise of salvation, the reward of eternal life — while the pencil with its sharp end touching the Somali coast lay round and still like a naked ship's spar floating in the pool of a sheltered dock. 'How steady she goes,' thought Jim with wonder, with something like gratitude for this high peace of sea and sky. At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with an heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face. He was so pleased with the idea that he smiled, keeping

perfunctorily his eyes ahead; and when he happened to glance back he saw the white streak of the wake drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart.

The ash-buckets racketed, clanking up and down the stoke-hold ventilators, and this tin-pot clatter warned him the end of his watch was near. He sighed with content, with regret as well at having to part from that serenity which fostered the adventurous freedom of his thoughts. He was a little sleepy too, and felt a pleasurable languor running through every limb as though all the blood in his body had turned to warm milk. His skipper had come up noiselessly, in pyjamas and with his sleeping-jacket flung wide open. Red of face, only half awake, the left eye partly closed, the right staring stupid and glassy, he hung his big head over the chart and scratched his ribs sleepily. There was something obscene in the sight of his naked flesh. His bared breast glistened soft and greasy as though he had sweated out his fat in his sleep. He pronounced a professional remark in a voice harsh and dead, resembling the rasping sound of a wood-file on the edge of a plank; the fold of his double chin hung like a bag triced up close under the hinge of his jaw. Jim started, and his answer was full of deference; but the odious and fleshy figure, as though seen for the first time in a revealing moment, fixed itself in his memory for ever as the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world we love: in our own hearts we trust for our salvation, in the men that surround us, in the sights that fill our eyes, in the sounds that fill our ears, and in the air that fills our lungs.

The thin gold shaving of the moon floating slowly downwards had lost itself on the darkened surface of the waters, and the eternity beyond the sky seemed to come down nearer to the earth, with the augmented glitter of the stars, with the more profound sombreness in the lustre of the half-transparent dome covering the flat disc of an opaque sea. The ship moved so smoothly that her onward motion was imperceptible to the senses of men, as though she had been a crowded planet speeding through the dark spaces of ether behind the swarm of suns, in the appalling and calm solitudes awaiting the breath of future creations. 'Hot is no name for it down below,' said a voice.

Jim smiled without looking round. The skipper presented an unmoved breadth of back: it was the renegade's trick to appear pointedly unaware of your existence unless it suited his purpose to turn at you with a devouring glare before he let loose a torrent of foamy, abusive jargon that came like a gush from a sewer. Now he emitted only a sulky grunt; the second engineer at the head of the bridge-ladder, kneading with damp palms a dirty sweat-rag, unabashed, continued the tale of his complaints. The sailors had a good time of it up here, and what was the use of them in the world he would be blowed if he could see. The poor devils of engineers had to get the ship along anyhow, and they could very well do the rest too; by gosh they — 'Shut up!' growled the German stolidly. 'Oh yes! Shut up — and when anything goes wrong you fly to us, don't you?' went on the other. He was more than half cooked, he expected; but anyway, now, he did not mind how much he sinned, because these last three days he had passed through a fine course of training for the place where the bad boys go when they die —

b'gosh, he had — besides being made jolly well deaf by the blasted racket below. The durned, compound, surface-condensing, rotten scrap-heap rattled and banged down there like an old deck-winch, only more so; and what made him risk his life every night and day that God made amongst the refuse of a breaking-up yard flying round at fifty-seven revolutions, was more than he could tell. He must have been born reckless, b'gosh. He . . . 'Where did you get drink?' inquired the German, very savage; but motionless in the light of the binnacle, like a clumsy effigy of a man cut out of a block of fat. Jim went on smiling at the retreating horizon; his heart was full of generous impulses, and his thought was contemplating his own superiority. 'Drink!' repeated the engineer with amiable scorn: he was hanging on with both hands to the rail, a shadowy figure with flexible legs. 'Not from you, captain. You're far too mean, b'gosh. You would let a good man die sooner than give him a drop of schnapps. That's what you Germans call economy. Penny wise, pound foolish.' He became sentimental. The chief had given him a four-finger nip about ten o'clock — 'only one, s'elp me!' — good old chief; but as to getting the old fraud out of his bunk — a five-ton crane couldn't do it. Not it. Not to-night anyhow. He was sleeping sweetly like a little child, with a bottle of prime brandy under his pillow. From the thick throat of the commander of the Patna came a low rumble, on which the sound of the word schwein fluttered high and low like a capricious feather in a faint stir of air. He and the chief engineer had been cronies for a good few years — serving the same jovial, crafty, old Chinaman, with horn-rimmed goggles and strings of red silk plaited into the venerable grey hairs of his pigtail. The quay-side opinion in the Patna's home-port was that these two in the way of brazen speculation 'had done together pretty well everything you can think of.' Outwardly they were badly matched: one dull-eyed, malevolent, and of soft fleshy curves; the other lean, all hollows, with a head long and bony like the head of an old horse, with sunken cheeks, with sunken temples, with an indifferent glazed glance of sunken eyes. He had been stranded out East somewhere — in Canton, in Shanghai, or perhaps in Yokohama; he probably did not care to remember himself the exact locality, nor yet the cause of his shipwreck. He had been, in mercy to his youth, kicked quietly out of his ship twenty years ago or more, and it might have been so much worse for him that the memory of the episode had in it hardly a trace of misfortune. Then, steam navigation expanding in these seas and men of his craft being scarce at first, he had 'got on' after a sort. He was eager to let strangers know in a dismal mumble that he was 'an old stager out here.' When he moved, a skeleton seemed to sway loose in his clothes; his walk was mere wandering, and he was given to wander thus around the engine-room skylight, smoking, without relish, doctored tobacco in a brass bowl at the end of a cherrywood stem four feet long, with the imbecile gravity of a thinker evolving a system of philosophy from the hazy glimpse of a truth. He was usually anything but free with his private store of liquor; but on that night he had departed from his principles, so that his second, a weak-headed child of Wapping, what with the unexpectedness of the treat and the strength of the stuff, had become very happy, cheeky, and talkative. The fury of the New South Wales German was extreme;

he puffed like an exhaust-pipe, and Jim, faintly amused by the scene, was impatient for the time when he could get below: the last ten minutes of the watch were irritating like a gun that hangs fire; those men did not belong to the world of heroic adventure; they weren't bad chaps though. Even the skipper himself . . . His gorge rose at the mass of panting flesh from which issued gurgling mutters, a cloudy trickle of filthy expressions; but he was too pleurably languid to dislike actively this or any other thing. The quality of these men did not matter; he rubbed shoulders with them, but they could not touch him; he shared the air they breathed, but he was different. . . . Would the skipper go for the engineer? . . . The life was easy and he was too sure of himself — too sure of himself to . . . The line dividing his meditation from a surreptitious doze on his feet was thinner than a thread in a spider's web.

The second engineer was coming by easy transitions to the consideration of his finances and of his courage.

'Who's drunk? I? No, no, captain! That won't do. You ought to know by this time the chief ain't free-hearted enough to make a sparrow drunk, b'gosh. I've never been the worse for liquor in my life; the stuff ain't made yet that would make me drunk. I could drink liquid fire against your whisky peg for peg, b'gosh, and keep as cool as a cucumber. If I thought I was drunk I would jump overboard — do away with myself, b'gosh. I would! Straight! And I won't go off the bridge. Where do you expect me to take the air on a night like this, eh? On deck amongst that vermin down there? Likely — ain't it! And I am not afraid of anything you can do.'

The German lifted two heavy fists to heaven and shook them a little without a word.

'I don't know what fear is,' pursued the engineer, with the enthusiasm of sincere conviction. 'I am not afraid of doing all the bloomin' work in this rotten hooker, b'gosh! And a jolly good thing for you that there are some of us about the world that aren't afraid of their lives, or where would you be — you and this old thing here with her plates like brown paper — brown paper, s'elp me? It's all very fine for you — you get a power of pieces out of her one way and another; but what about me — what do I get? A measly hundred and fifty dollars a month and find yourself. I wish to ask you respectfully — respectfully, mind — who wouldn't chuck a dratted job like this? 'Tain't safe, s'elp me, it ain't! Only I am one of them fearless fellows . . .'

He let go the rail and made ample gestures as if demonstrating in the air the shape and extent of his valour; his thin voice darted in prolonged squeaks upon the sea, he tiptoed back and forth for the better emphasis of utterance, and suddenly pitched down head-first as though he had been clubbed from behind. He said 'Damn!' as he tumbled; an instant of silence followed upon his screeching: Jim and the skipper staggered forward by common accord, and catching themselves up, stood very stiff and still gazing, amazed, at the undisturbed level of the sea. Then they looked upwards at the stars.

What had happened? The wheezy thump of the engines went on. Had the earth been checked in her course? They could not understand; and suddenly the calm sea,

the sky without a cloud, appeared formidably insecure in their immobility, as if poised on the brow of yawning destruction. The engineer rebounded vertically full length and collapsed again into a vague heap. This heap said 'What's that?' in the muffled accents of profound grief. A faint noise as of thunder, of thunder infinitely remote, less than a sound, hardly more than a vibration, passed slowly, and the ship quivered in response, as if the thunder had growled deep down in the water. The eyes of the two Malays at the wheel glittered towards the white men, but their dark hands remained closed on the spokes. The sharp hull driving on its way seemed to rise a few inches in succession through its whole length, as though it had become pliable, and settled down again rigidly to its work of cleaving the smooth surface of the sea. Its quivering stopped, and the faint noise of thunder ceased all at once, as though the ship had steamed across a narrow belt of vibrating water and of humming air.

Chapter 4

A month or so afterwards, when Jim, in answer to pointed questions, tried to tell honestly the truth of this experience, he said, speaking of the ship: 'She went over whatever it was as easy as a snake crawling over a stick.' The illustration was good: the questions were aiming at facts, and the official Inquiry was being held in the police court of an Eastern port. He stood elevated in the witness-box, with burning cheeks in a cool lofty room: the big framework of punkahs moved gently to and fro high above his head, and from below many eyes were looking at him out of dark faces, out of white faces, out of red faces, out of faces attentive, spellbound, as if all these people sitting in orderly rows upon narrow benches had been enslaved by the fascination of his voice. It was very loud, it rang startling in his own ears, it was the only sound audible in the world, for the terribly distinct questions that extorted his answers seemed to shape themselves in anguish and pain within his breast, — came to him poignant and silent like the terrible questioning of one's conscience. Outside the court the sun blazed — within was the wind of great punkahs that made you shiver, the shame that made you burn, the attentive eyes whose glance stabbed. The face of the presiding magistrate, clean shaved and impassible, looked at him deadly pale between the red faces of the two nautical assessors. The light of a broad window under the ceiling fell from above on the heads and shoulders of the three men, and they were fiercely distinct in the half-light of the big court-room where the audience seemed composed of staring shadows. They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!

'After you had concluded you had collided with something floating awash, say a water-logged wreck, you were ordered by your captain to go forward and ascertain if there was any damage done. Did you think it likely from the force of the blow?' asked the assessor sitting to the left. He had a thin horseshoe beard, salient cheek-bones, and with both elbows on the desk clasped his rugged hands before his face, looking at Jim with thoughtful blue eyes; the other, a heavy, scornful man, thrown back in his seat, his left arm extended full length, drummed delicately with his finger-tips on a blotting-pad: in the middle the magistrate upright in the roomy arm-chair, his head inclined slightly on the shoulder, had his arms crossed on his breast and a few flowers in a glass vase by the side of his inkstand.

'I did not,' said Jim. 'I was told to call no one and to make no noise for fear of creating a panic. I thought the precaution reasonable. I took one of the lamps that were hung under the awnings and went forward. After opening the forepeak hatch I heard splashing in there. I lowered then the lamp the whole drift of its lanyard, and

saw that the forepeak was more than half full of water already. I knew then there must be a big hole below the water-line.' He paused.

'Yes,' said the big assessor, with a dreamy smile at the blotting-pad; his fingers played incessantly, touching the paper without noise.

'I did not think of danger just then. I might have been a little startled: all this happened in such a quiet way and so very suddenly. I knew there was no other bulkhead in the ship but the collision bulkhead separating the forepeak from the forehold. I went back to tell the captain. I came upon the second engineer getting up at the foot of the bridge-ladder: he seemed dazed, and told me he thought his left arm was broken; he had slipped on the top step when getting down while I was forward. He exclaimed, "My God! That rotten bulkhead'll give way in a minute, and the damned thing will go down under us like a lump of lead." He pushed me away with his right arm and ran before me up the ladder, shouting as he climbed. His left arm hung by his side. I followed up in time to see the captain rush at him and knock him down flat on his back. He did not strike him again: he stood bending over him and speaking angrily but quite low. I fancy he was asking him why the devil he didn't go and stop the engines, instead of making a row about it on deck. I heard him say, "Get up! Run! fly!" He swore also. The engineer slid down the starboard ladder and bolted round the skylight to the engine-room companion which was on the port side. He moaned as he ran. . . .'

He spoke slowly; he remembered swiftly and with extreme vividness; he could have reproduced like an echo the moaning of the engineer for the better information of these men who wanted facts. After his first feeling of revolt he had come round to the view that only a meticulous precision of statement would bring out the true horror behind the appalling face of things. The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time, requiring for their existence a fourteen-hundred-ton steamer and twenty-seven minutes by the watch; they made a whole that had features, shades of expression, a complicated aspect that could be remembered by the eye, and something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body. He was anxious to make this clear. This had not been a common affair, everything in it had been of the utmost importance, and fortunately he remembered everything. He wanted to go on talking for truth's sake, perhaps for his own sake also; and while his utterance was deliberate, his mind positively flew round and round the serried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind: it was like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round, distracted in the night, trying to find a weak spot, a crevice, a place to scale, some opening through which it may squeeze itself and escape. This awful activity of mind made him hesitate at times in his speech. . . .

'The captain kept on moving here and there on the bridge; he seemed calm enough, only he stumbled several times; and once as I stood speaking to him he walked right into me as though he had been stone-blind. He made no definite answer to what I had

to tell. He mumbled to himself; all I heard of it were a few words that sounded like “confounded steam!” and “infernal steam!” — something about steam. I thought . . .’

He was becoming irrelevant; a question to the point cut short his speech, like a pang of pain, and he felt extremely discouraged and weary. He was coming to that, he was coming to that — and now, checked brutally, he had to answer by yes or no. He answered truthfully by a curt ‘Yes, I did’; and fair of face, big of frame, with young, gloomy eyes, he held his shoulders upright above the box while his soul writhed within him. He was made to answer another question so much to the point and so useless, then waited again. His mouth was tastelessly dry, as though he had been eating dust, then salt and bitter as after a drink of sea-water. He wiped his damp forehead, passed his tongue over parched lips, felt a shiver run down his back. The big assessor had dropped his eyelids, and drummed on without a sound, careless and mournful; the eyes of the other above the sunburnt, clasped fingers seemed to glow with kindness; the magistrate had swayed forward; his pale face hovered near the flowers, and then dropping sideways over the arm of his chair, he rested his temple in the palm of his hand. The wind of the punkahs eddied down on the heads, on the dark-faced natives wound about in voluminous draperies, on the Europeans sitting together very hot and in drill suits that seemed to fit them as close as their skins, and holding their round pith hats on their knees; while gliding along the walls the court peons, buttoned tight in long white coats, flitted rapidly to and fro, running on bare toes, red-sashed, red turban on head, as noiseless as ghosts, and on the alert like so many retrievers.

Jim’s eyes, wandering in the intervals of his answers, rested upon a white man who sat apart from the others, with his face worn and clouded, but with quiet eyes that glanced straight, interested and clear. Jim answered another question and was tempted to cry out, ‘What’s the good of this! what’s the good!’ He tapped with his foot slightly, bit his lip, and looked away over the heads. He met the eyes of the white man. The glance directed at him was not the fascinated stare of the others. It was an act of intelligent volition. Jim between two questions forgot himself so far as to find leisure for a thought. This fellow — ran the thought — looks at me as though he could see somebody or something past my shoulder. He had come across that man before — in the street perhaps. He was positive he had never spoken to him. For days, for many days, he had spoken to no one, but had held silent, incoherent, and endless converse with himself, like a prisoner alone in his cell or like a wayfarer lost in a wilderness. At present he was answering questions that did not matter though they had a purpose, but he doubted whether he would ever again speak out as long as he lived. The sound of his own truthful statements confirmed his deliberate opinion that speech was of no use to him any longer. That man there seemed to be aware of his hopeless difficulty. Jim looked at him, then turned away resolutely, as after a final parting.

And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly.

Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk

of each cane-chair harboured a silent listener. Now and then a small red glow would move abruptly, and expanding light up the fingers of a languid hand, part of a face in profound repose, or flash a crimson gleam into a pair of pensive eyes overshadowed by a fragment of an unruffled forehead; and with the very first word uttered Marlow's body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past.

Chapter 5

‘Oh yes. I attended the inquiry,’ he would say, ‘and to this day I haven’t left off wondering why I went. I am willing to believe each of us has a guardian angel, if you fellows will concede to me that each of us has a familiar devil as well. I want you to own up, because I don’t like to feel exceptional in any way, and I know I have him — the devil, I mean. I haven’t seen him, of course, but I go upon circumstantial evidence. He is there right enough, and, being malicious, he lets me in for that kind of thing. What kind of thing, you ask? Why, the inquiry thing, the yellow-dog thing — you wouldn’t think a mangy, native tyke would be allowed to trip up people in the verandah of a magistrate’s court, would you? — the kind of thing that by devious, unexpected, truly diabolical ways causes me to run up against men with soft spots, with hard spots, with hidden plague spots, by Jove! and loosens their tongues at the sight of me for their infernal confidences; as though, forsooth, I had no confidences to make to myself, as though — God help me! — I didn’t have enough confidential information about myself to harrow my own soul till the end of my appointed time. And what I have done to be thus favoured I want to know. I declare I am as full of my own concerns as the next man, and I have as much memory as the average pilgrim in this valley, so you see I am not particularly fit to be a receptacle of confessions. Then why? Can’t tell — unless it be to make time pass away after dinner. Charley, my dear chap, your dinner was extremely good, and in consequence these men here look upon a quiet rubber as a tumultuous occupation. They wallow in your good chairs and think to themselves, “Hang exertion. Let that Marlow talk.”’

‘Talk? So be it. And it’s easy enough to talk of Master Jim, after a good spread, two hundred feet above the sea-level, with a box of decent cigars handy, on a blessed evening of freshness and starlight that would make the best of us forget we are only on sufferance here and got to pick our way in cross lights, watching every precious minute and every irremediable step, trusting we shall manage yet to go out decently in the end — but not so sure of it after all — and with dashed little help to expect from those we touch elbows with right and left. Of course there are men here and there to whom the whole of life is like an after-dinner hour with a cigar; easy, pleasant, empty, perhaps enlivened by some fable of strife to be forgotten before the end is told — before the end is told — even if there happens to be any end to it.

‘My eyes met his for the first time at that inquiry. You must know that everybody connected in any way with the sea was there, because the affair had been notorious for days, ever since that mysterious cable message came from Aden to start us all cackling. I say mysterious, because it was so in a sense though it contained a naked fact, about

as naked and ugly as a fact can well be. The whole waterside talked of nothing else. First thing in the morning as I was dressing in my state-room, I would hear through the bulkhead my Parsee Dubash jabbering about the Patna with the steward, while he drank a cup of tea, by favour, in the pantry. No sooner on shore I would meet some acquaintance, and the first remark would be, "Did you ever hear of anything to beat this?" and according to his kind the man would smile cynically, or look sad, or let out a swear or two. Complete strangers would accost each other familiarly, just for the sake of easing their minds on the subject: every confounded loafer in the town came in for a harvest of drinks over this affair: you heard of it in the harbour office, at every ship-broker's, at your agent's, from whites, from natives, from half-castes, from the very boatmen squatting half naked on the stone steps as you went up — by Jove! There was some indignation, not a few jokes, and no end of discussions as to what had become of them, you know. This went on for a couple of weeks or more, and the opinion that whatever was mysterious in this affair would turn out to be tragic as well, began to prevail, when one fine morning, as I was standing in the shade by the steps of the harbour office, I perceived four men walking towards me along the quay. I wondered for a while where that queer lot had sprung from, and suddenly, I may say, I shouted to myself, "Here they are!"

'There they were, sure enough, three of them as large as life, and one much larger of girth than any living man has a right to be, just landed with a good breakfast inside of them from an outward-bound Dale Line steamer that had come in about an hour after sunrise. There could be no mistake; I spotted the jolly skipper of the Patna at the first glance: the fattest man in the whole blessed tropical belt clear round that good old earth of ours. Moreover, nine months or so before, I had come across him in Samarang. His steamer was loading in the Roads, and he was abusing the tyrannical institutions of the German empire, and soaking himself in beer all day long and day after day in De Jongh's back-shop, till De Jongh, who charged a guilder for every bottle without as much as the quiver of an eyelid, would beckon me aside, and, with his little leathery face all puckered up, declare confidentially, "Business is business, but this man, captain, he make me very sick. Tfui!"

'I was looking at him from the shade. He was hurrying on a little in advance, and the sunlight beating on him brought out his bulk in a startling way. He made me think of a trained baby elephant walking on hind-legs. He was extravagantly gorgeous too — got up in a soiled sleeping-suit, bright green and deep orange vertical stripes, with a pair of ragged straw slippers on his bare feet, and somebody's cast-off pith hat, very dirty and two sizes too small for him, tied up with a manilla rope-yarn on the top of his big head. You understand a man like that hasn't the ghost of a chance when it comes to borrowing clothes. Very well. On he came in hot haste, without a look right or left, passed within three feet of me, and in the innocence of his heart went on pelting upstairs into the harbour office to make his deposition, or report, or whatever you like to call it.

‘It appears he addressed himself in the first instance to the principal shipping-master. Archie Ruthvel had just come in, and, as his story goes, was about to begin his arduous day by giving a dressing-down to his chief clerk. Some of you might have known him — an obliging little Portuguese half-caste with a miserably skinny neck, and always on the hop to get something from the shipmasters in the way of eatables — a piece of salt pork, a bag of biscuits, a few potatoes, or what not. One voyage, I recollect, I tipped him a live sheep out of the remnant of my sea-stock: not that I wanted him to do anything for me — he couldn’t, you know — but because his childlike belief in the sacred right to perquisites quite touched my heart. It was so strong as to be almost beautiful. The race — the two races rather — and the climate . . . However, never mind. I know where I have a friend for life.

‘Well, Ruthvel says he was giving him a severe lecture — on official morality, I suppose — when he heard a kind of subdued commotion at his back, and turning his head he saw, in his own words, something round and enormous, resembling a sixteen-hundred-weight sugar-hogshead wrapped in striped flannelette, up-ended in the middle of the large floor space in the office. He declares he was so taken aback that for quite an appreciable time he did not realise the thing was alive, and sat still wondering for what purpose and by what means that object had been transported in front of his desk. The archway from the ante-room was crowded with punkah-pullers, sweepers, police peons, the coxswain and crew of the harbour steam-launch, all craning their necks and almost climbing on each other’s backs. Quite a riot. By that time the fellow had managed to tug and jerk his hat clear of his head, and advanced with slight bows at Ruthvel, who told me the sight was so discomposing that for some time he listened, quite unable to make out what that apparition wanted. It spoke in a voice harsh and lugubrious but intrepid, and little by little it dawned upon Archie that this was a development of the Patna case. He says that as soon as he understood who it was before him he felt quite unwell — Archie is so sympathetic and easily upset — but pulled himself together and shouted “Stop! I can’t listen to you. You must go to the Master Attendant. I can’t possibly listen to you. Captain Elliot is the man you want to see. This way, this way.” He jumped up, ran round that long counter, pulled, shoved: the other let him, surprised but obedient at first, and only at the door of the private office some sort of animal instinct made him hang back and snort like a frightened bullock. “Look here! what’s up? Let go! Look here!” Archie flung open the door without knocking. “The master of the Patna, sir,” he shouts. “Go in, captain.” He saw the old man lift his head from some writing so sharp that his nose-nippers fell off, banged the door to, and fled to his desk, where he had some papers waiting for his signature: but he says the row that burst out in there was so awful that he couldn’t collect his senses sufficiently to remember the spelling of his own name. Archie’s the most sensitive shipping-master in the two hemispheres. He declares he felt as though he had thrown a man to a hungry lion. No doubt the noise was great. I heard it down below, and I have every reason to believe it was heard clear across the Esplanade as far as the band-stand. Old father Elliot had a great stock of words and could shout — and didn’t mind who he shouted

at either. He would have shouted at the Viceroy himself. As he used to tell me: "I am as high as I can get; my pension is safe. I've a few pounds laid by, and if they don't like my notions of duty I would just as soon go home as not. I am an old man, and I have always spoken my mind. All I care for now is to see my girls married before I die." He was a little crazy on that point. His three daughters were awfully nice, though they resembled him amazingly, and on the mornings he woke up with a gloomy view of their matrimonial prospects the office would read it in his eye and tremble, because, they said, he was sure to have somebody for breakfast. However, that morning he did not eat the renegade, but, if I may be allowed to carry on the metaphor, chewed him up very small, so to speak, and — ah! ejected him again.

'Thus in a very few moments I saw his monstrous bulk descend in haste and stand still on the outer steps. He had stopped close to me for the purpose of profound meditation: his large purple cheeks quivered. He was biting his thumb, and after a while noticed me with a sidelong vexed look. The other three chaps that had landed with him made a little group waiting at some distance. There was a sallow-faced, mean little chap with his arm in a sling, and a long individual in a blue flannel coat, as dry as a chip and no stouter than a broomstick, with drooping grey moustaches, who looked about him with an air of jaunty imbecility. The third was an upstanding, broad-shouldered youth, with his hands in his pockets, turning his back on the other two who appeared to be talking together earnestly. He stared across the empty Esplanade. A ramshackle gharry, all dust and venetian blinds, pulled up short opposite the group, and the driver, throwing up his right foot over his knee, gave himself up to the critical examination of his toes. The young chap, making no movement, not even stirring his head, just stared into the sunshine. This was my first view of Jim. He looked as unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young can look. There he stood, clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet, as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on; and, looking at him, knowing all he knew and a little more too, I was as angry as though I had detected him trying to get something out of me by false pretences. He had no business to look so sound. I thought to myself — well, if this sort can go wrong like that . . . and I felt as though I could fling down my hat and dance on it from sheer mortification, as I once saw the skipper of an Italian barque do because his duffer of a mate got into a mess with his anchors when making a flying moor in a roadstead full of ships. I asked myself, seeing him there apparently so much at ease — is he silly? is he callous? He seemed ready to start whistling a tune. And note, I did not care a rap about the behaviour of the other two. Their persons somehow fitted the tale that was public property, and was going to be the subject of an official inquiry. "That old mad rogue upstairs called me a hound," said the captain of the Patna. I can't tell whether he recognised me — I rather think he did; but at any rate our glances met. He glared — I smiled; hound was the very mildest epithet that had reached me through the open window. "Did he?" I said from some strange inability to hold my tongue. He nodded, bit his thumb again, swore under his breath: then lifting his head and looking at me with sullen and passionate impudence — "Bah! the Pacific is big, my friendt. You damned

Englishmen can do your worst; I know where there's plenty room for a man like me: I am well aguaindt in Apia, in Honolulu, in . . ." He paused reflectively, while without effort I could depict to myself the sort of people he was "aguaindt" with in those places. I won't make a secret of it that I had been "aguaindt" with not a few of that sort myself. There are times when a man must act as though life were equally sweet in any company. I've known such a time, and, what's more, I shan't now pretend to pull a long face over my necessity, because a good many of that bad company from want of moral — moral — what shall I say? — posture, or from some other equally profound cause, were twice as instructive and twenty times more amusing than the usual respectable thief of commerce you fellows ask to sit at your table without any real necessity — from habit, from cowardice, from good-nature, from a hundred sneaking and inadequate reasons.

"You Englishmen are all rogues," went on my patriotic Flensburg or Stettin Australian. I really don't recollect now what decent little port on the shores of the Baltic was defiled by being the nest of that precious bird. "What are you to shout? Eh? You tell me? You no better than other people, and that old rogue he make Gottam fuss with me." His thick carcass trembled on its legs that were like a pair of pillars; it trembled from head to foot. "That's what you English always make — make a tam' fuss — for any little thing, because I was not born in your tam' country. Take away my certificate. Take it. I don't want the certificate. A man like me don't want your verfluchte certificate. I shpit on it." He spat. "I vill an Amerigan citizen begome," he cried, fretting and fuming and shuffling his feet as if to free his ankles from some invisible and mysterious grasp that would not let him get away from that spot. He made himself so warm that the top of his bullet head positively smoked. Nothing mysterious prevented me from going away: curiosity is the most obvious of sentiments, and it held me there to see the effect of a full information upon that young fellow who, hands in pockets, and turning his back upon the sidewalk, gazed across the grass-plots of the Esplanade at the yellow portico of the Malabar Hotel with the air of a man about to go for a walk as soon as his friend is ready. That's how he looked, and it was odious. I waited to see him overwhelmed, confounded, pierced through and through, squirming like an impaled beetle — and I was half afraid to see it too — if you understand what I mean. Nothing more awful than to watch a man who has been found out, not in a crime but in a more than criminal weakness. The commonest sort of fortitude prevents us from becoming criminals in a legal sense; it is from weakness unknown, but perhaps suspected, as in some parts of the world you suspect a deadly snake in every bush — from weakness that may lie hidden, watched or unwatched, prayed against or manfully scorned, repressed or maybe ignored more than half a lifetime, not one of us is safe. We are snared into doing things for which we get called names, and things for which we get hanged, and yet the spirit may well survive — survive the condemnation, survive the halter, by Jove! And there are things — they look small enough sometimes too — by which some of us are totally and completely undone. I watched the youngster there. I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; he came from the right place; he was one of us. He stood there for all the parentage of his kind, for men and women by

no means clever or amusing, but whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct of courage. I don't mean military courage, or civil courage, or any special kind of courage. I mean just that inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face — a readiness unintellectual enough, goodness knows, but without pose — a power of resistance, don't you see, ungracious if you like, but priceless — an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature and the seductive corruption of men — backed by a faith invulnerable to the strength of facts, to the contagion of example, to the solicitation of ideas. Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back-door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy!

'This has nothing to do with Jim, directly; only he was outwardly so typical of that good, stupid kind we like to feel marching right and left of us in life, of the kind that is not disturbed by the vagaries of intelligence and the perversions of — of nerves, let us say. He was the kind of fellow you would, on the strength of his looks, leave in charge of the deck — figuratively and professionally speaking. I say I would, and I ought to know. Haven't I turned out youngsters enough in my time, for the service of the Red Rag, to the craft of the sea, to the craft whose whole secret could be expressed in one short sentence, and yet must be driven afresh every day into young heads till it becomes the component part of every waking thought — till it is present in every dream of their young sleep! The sea has been good to me, but when I remember all these boys that passed through my hands, some grown up now and some drowned by this time, but all good stuff for the sea, I don't think I have done badly by it either. Were I to go home to-morrow, I bet that before two days passed over my head some sunburnt young chief mate would overtake me at some dock gateway or other, and a fresh deep voice speaking above my hat would ask: "Don't you remember me, sir? Why! little So-and-so. Such and such a ship. It was my first voyage." And I would remember a bewildered little shaver, no higher than the back of this chair, with a mother and perhaps a big sister on the quay, very quiet but too upset to wave their handkerchiefs at the ship that glides out gently between the pier-heads; or perhaps some decent middle-aged father who had come early with his boy to see him off, and stays all the morning, because he is interested in the windlass apparently, and stays too long, and has got to scramble ashore at last with no time at all to say good-bye. The mud pilot on the poop sings out to me in a drawl, "Hold her with the check line for a moment, Mister Mate. There's a gentleman wants to get ashore. . . . Up with you, sir. Nearly got carried off to Talcahuano, didn't you? Now's your time; easy does it. . . . All right. Slack away again forward there." The tugs, smoking like the pit of perdition, get hold and churn the old river into fury; the gentleman ashore is dusting his knees — the benevolent steward has shied his umbrella after him. All very proper. He has offered his bit of sacrifice to the sea, and now he may go home pretending he thinks nothing of it; and the little willing victim shall be very sea-sick before next morning. By-and-by, when he has learned all the little mysteries and the one great secret of the

craft, he shall be fit to live or die as the sea may decree; and the man who had taken a hand in this fool game, in which the sea wins every toss, will be pleased to have his back slapped by a heavy young hand, and to hear a cheery sea-puppy voice: "Do you remember me, sir? The little So-and-so."

'I tell you this is good; it tells you that once in your life at least you had gone the right way to work. I have been thus slapped, and I have winced, for the slap was heavy, and I have glowed all day long and gone to bed feeling less lonely in the world by virtue of that hearty thump. Don't I remember the little So-and-so's! I tell you I ought to know the right kind of looks. I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes — and, by Jove! it wouldn't have been safe. There are depths of horror in that thought. He looked as genuine as a new sovereign, but there was some infernal alloy in his metal. How much? The least thing — the least drop of something rare and accursed; the least drop! — but he made you — standing there with his don't-care-hang air — he made you wonder whether perchance he were nothing more rare than brass.

'I couldn't believe it. I tell you I wanted to see him squirm for the honour of the craft. The other two no-account chaps spotted their captain, and began to move slowly towards us. They chatted together as they strolled, and I did not care any more than if they had not been visible to the naked eye. They grinned at each other — might have been exchanging jokes, for all I know. I saw that with one of them it was a case of a broken arm; and as to the long individual with grey moustaches he was the chief engineer, and in various ways a pretty notorious personality. They were nobodies. They approached. The skipper gazed in an inanimate way between his feet: he seemed to be swollen to an unnatural size by some awful disease, by the mysterious action of an unknown poison. He lifted his head, saw the two before him waiting, opened his mouth with an extraordinary, sneering contortion of his puffed face — to speak to them, I suppose — and then a thought seemed to strike him. His thick, purplish lips came together without a sound, he went off in a resolute waddle to the gharry and began to jerk at the door-handle with such a blind brutality of impatience that I expected to see the whole concern overturned on its side, pony and all. The driver, shaken out of his meditation over the sole of his foot, displayed at once all the signs of intense terror, and held with both hands, looking round from his box at this vast carcass forcing its way into his conveyance. The little machine shook and rocked tumultuously, and the crimson nape of that lowered neck, the size of those straining thighs, the immense heaving of that dingy, striped green-and-orange back, the whole burrowing effort of that gaudy and sordid mass, troubled one's sense of probability with a droll and fearsome effect, like one of those grotesque and distinct visions that scare and fascinate one in a fever. He disappeared. I half expected the roof to split in two, the little box on wheels to burst open in the manner of a ripe cotton-pod — but it only sank with a click of flattened springs, and suddenly one venetian blind rattled down. His shoulders reappeared, jammed in the small opening; his head hung out, distended and tossing like a captive balloon, perspiring, furious, spluttering. He reached for the

gharry-wallah with vicious flourishes of a fist as dumpy and red as a lump of raw meat. He roared at him to be off, to go on. Where? Into the Pacific, perhaps. The driver lashed; the pony snorted, reared once, and darted off at a gallop. Where? To Apia? To Honolulu? He had 6000 miles of tropical belt to disport himself in, and I did not hear the precise address. A snorting pony snatched him into "Ewigkeit" in the twinkling of an eye, and I never saw him again; and, what's more, I don't know of anybody that ever had a glimpse of him after he departed from my knowledge sitting inside a ramshackle little gharry that fled round the corner in a white smother of dust. He departed, disappeared, vanished, absconded; and absurdly enough it looked as though he had taken that gharry with him, for never again did I come across a sorrel pony with a slit ear and a lackadaisical Tamil driver afflicted by a sore foot. The Pacific is indeed big; but whether he found a place for a display of his talents in it or not, the fact remains he had flown into space like a witch on a broomstick. The little chap with his arm in a sling started to run after the carriage, bleating, "Captain! I say, Captain! I sa-a-ay!" — but after a few steps stopped short, hung his head, and walked back slowly. At the sharp rattle of the wheels the young fellow spun round where he stood. He made no other movement, no gesture, no sign, and remained facing in the new direction after the gharry had swung out of sight.

'All this happened in much less time than it takes to tell, since I am trying to interpret for you into slow speech the instantaneous effect of visual impressions. Next moment the half-caste clerk, sent by Archie to look a little after the poor castaways of the Patna, came upon the scene. He ran out eager and bareheaded, looking right and left, and very full of his mission. It was doomed to be a failure as far as the principal person was concerned, but he approached the others with fussy importance, and, almost immediately, found himself involved in a violent altercation with the chap that carried his arm in a sling, and who turned out to be extremely anxious for a row. He wasn't going to be ordered about — "not he, b'gosh." He wouldn't be terrified with a pack of lies by a cocky half-bred little quill-driver. He was not going to be bullied by "no object of that sort," if the story were true "ever so"! He bawled his wish, his desire, his determination to go to bed. "If you weren't a God-forsaken Portuguese," I heard him yell, "you would know that the hospital is the right place for me." He pushed the fist of his sound arm under the other's nose; a crowd began to collect; the half-caste, flustered, but doing his best to appear dignified, tried to explain his intentions. I went away without waiting to see the end.

'But it so happened that I had a man in the hospital at the time, and going there to see about him the day before the opening of the Inquiry, I saw in the white men's ward that little chap tossing on his back, with his arm in splints, and quite light-headed. To my great surprise the other one, the long individual with drooping white moustache, had also found his way there. I remembered I had seen him slinking away during the quarrel, in a half prance, half shuffle, and trying very hard not to look scared. He was no stranger to the port, it seems, and in his distress was able to make tracks straight for Mariani's billiard-room and grog-shop near the bazaar. That unspeakable vagabond,

Mariani, who had known the man and had ministered to his vices in one or two other places, kissed the ground, in a manner of speaking, before him, and shut him up with a supply of bottles in an upstairs room of his infamous hovel. It appears he was under some hazy apprehension as to his personal safety, and wished to be concealed. However, Mariani told me a long time after (when he came on board one day to dun my steward for the price of some cigars) that he would have done more for him without asking any questions, from gratitude for some unholy favour received very many years ago — as far as I could make out. He thumped twice his brawny chest, rolled enormous black-and-white eyes glistening with tears: “Antonio never forget — Antonio never forget!” What was the precise nature of the immoral obligation I never learned, but be it what it may, he had every facility given him to remain under lock and key, with a chair, a table, a mattress in a corner, and a litter of fallen plaster on the floor, in an irrational state of funk, and keeping up his pecker with such tonics as Mariani dispensed. This lasted till the evening of the third day, when, after letting out a few horrible screams, he found himself compelled to seek safety in flight from a legion of centipedes. He burst the door open, made one leap for dear life down the crazy little stairway, landed bodily on Mariani’s stomach, picked himself up, and bolted like a rabbit into the streets. The police plucked him off a garbage-heap in the early morning. At first he had a notion they were carrying him off to be hanged, and fought for liberty like a hero, but when I sat down by his bed he had been very quiet for two days. His lean bronzed head, with white moustaches, looked fine and calm on the pillow, like the head of a war-worn soldier with a child-like soul, had it not been for a hint of spectral alarm that lurked in the blank glitter of his glance, resembling a nondescript form of a terror crouching silently behind a pane of glass. He was so extremely calm, that I began to indulge in the eccentric hope of hearing something explanatory of the famous affair from his point of view. Why I longed to go grubbing into the deplorable details of an occurrence which, after all, concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct, I can’t explain. You may call it an unhealthy curiosity if you like; but I have a distinct notion I wished to find something. Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped I would find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible — for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man’s creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death — the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct. It is the hardest thing to stumble against; it is the thing that breeds yelling panics and good little quiet villainies; it’s the true shadow of calamity. Did I believe in a miracle? and why did I desire it so ardently? Was it for my own sake that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I had never seen before, but whose appearance alone added a touch of personal concern to the thoughts suggested by the knowledge of his weakness — made it a thing of mystery and terror — like a hint of a destructive fate ready for us all whose youth

— in its day — had resembled his youth? I fear that such was the secret motive of my prying. I was, and no mistake, looking for a miracle. The only thing that at this distance of time strikes me as miraculous is the extent of my imbecility. I positively hoped to obtain from that battered and shady invalid some exorcism against the ghost of doubt. I must have been pretty desperate too, for, without loss of time, after a few indifferent and friendly sentences which he answered with languid readiness, just as any decent sick man would do, I produced the word Patna wrapped up in a delicate question as in a wisp of floss silk. I was delicate selfishly; I did not want to startle him; I had no solicitude for him; I was not furious with him and sorry for him: his experience was of no importance, his redemption would have had no point for me. He had grown old in minor iniquities, and could no longer inspire aversion or pity. He repeated Patna? interrogatively, seemed to make a short effort of memory, and said: “Quite right. I am an old stager out here. I saw her go down.” I made ready to vent my indignation at such a stupid lie, when he added smoothly, “She was full of reptiles.”

‘This made me pause. What did he mean? The unsteady phantom of terror behind his glassy eyes seemed to stand still and look into mine wistfully. “They turned me out of my bunk in the middle watch to look at her sinking,” he pursued in a reflective tone. His voice sounded alarmingly strong all at once. I was sorry for my folly. There was no snowy-winged coif of a nursing sister to be seen flitting in the perspective of the ward; but away in the middle of a long row of empty iron bedsteads an accident case from some ship in the Roads sat up brown and gaunt with a white bandage set rakishly on the forehead. Suddenly my interesting invalid shot out an arm thin like a tentacle and clawed my shoulder. “Only my eyes were good enough to see. I am famous for my eyesight. That’s why they called me, I expect. None of them was quick enough to see her go, but they saw that she was gone right enough, and sang out together — like this.” . . . A wolfish howl searched the very recesses of my soul. “Oh! make ‘im dry up,” whined the accident case irritably. “You don’t believe me, I suppose,” went on the other, with an air of ineffable conceit. “I tell you there are no such eyes as mine this side of the Persian Gulf. Look under the bed.”

‘Of course I stooped instantly. I defy anybody not to have done so. “What can you see?” he asked. “Nothing,” I said, feeling awfully ashamed of myself. He scrutinised my face with wild and withering contempt. “Just so,” he said, “but if I were to look I could see — there’s no eyes like mine, I tell you.” Again he clawed, pulling at me downwards in his eagerness to relieve himself by a confidential communication. “Millions of pink toads. There’s no eyes like mine. Millions of pink toads. It’s worse than seeing a ship sink. I could look at sinking ships and smoke my pipe all day long. Why don’t they give me back my pipe? I would get a smoke while I watched these toads. The ship was full of them. They’ve got to be watched, you know.” He winked facetiously. The perspiration dripped on him off my head, my drill coat clung to my wet back: the afternoon breeze swept impetuously over the row of bedsteads, the stiff folds of curtains stirred perpendicularly, rattling on brass rods, the covers of empty beds blew about noiselessly near the bare floor all along the line, and I shivered to the very marrow.

The soft wind of the tropics played in that naked ward as bleak as a winter's gale in an old barn at home. "Don't you let him start his hollering, mister," hailed from afar the accident case in a distressed angry shout that came ringing between the walls like a quavering call down a tunnel. The clawing hand hauled at my shoulder; he leered at me knowingly. "The ship was full of them, you know, and we had to clear out on the strict Q.T.," he whispered with extreme rapidity. "All pink. All pink — as big as mastiffs, with an eye on the top of the head and claws all round their ugly mouths. Ough! Ough!" Quick jerks as of galvanic shocks disclosed under the flat coverlet the outlines of meagre and agitated legs; he let go my shoulder and reached after something in the air; his body trembled tensely like a released harp-string; and while I looked down, the spectral horror in him broke through his glassy gaze. Instantly his face of an old soldier, with its noble and calm outlines, became decomposed before my eyes by the corruption of stealthy cunning, of an abominable caution and of desperate fear. He restrained a cry — "Ssh! what are they doing now down there?" he asked, pointing to the floor with fantastic precautions of voice and gesture, whose meaning, borne upon my mind in a lurid flash, made me very sick of my cleverness. "They are all asleep," I answered, watching him narrowly. That was it. That's what he wanted to hear; these were the exact words that could calm him. He drew a long breath. "Ssh! Quiet, steady. I am an old stager out here. I know them brutes. Bash in the head of the first that stirs. There's too many of them, and she won't swim more than ten minutes." He panted again. "Hurry up," he yelled suddenly, and went on in a steady scream: "They are all awake — millions of them. They are trampling on me! Wait! Oh, wait! I'll smash them in heaps like flies. Wait for me! Help! H-e-elp!" An interminable and sustained howl completed my discomfiture. I saw in the distance the accident case raise deplorably both his hands to his bandaged head; a dresser, aproned to the chin showed himself in the vista of the ward, as if seen in the small end of a telescope. I confessed myself fairly routed, and without more ado, stepping out through one of the long windows, escaped into the outside gallery. The howl pursued me like a vengeance. I turned into a deserted landing, and suddenly all became very still and quiet around me, and I descended the bare and shiny staircase in a silence that enabled me to compose my distracted thoughts. Down below I met one of the resident surgeons who was crossing the courtyard and stopped me. "Been to see your man, Captain? I think we may let him go to-morrow. These fools have no notion of taking care of themselves, though. I say, we've got the chief engineer of that pilgrim ship here. A curious case. D.T.'s of the worst kind. He has been drinking hard in that Greek's or Italian's grog-shop for three days. What can you expect? Four bottles of that kind of brandy a day, I am told. Wonderful, if true. Sheeted with boiler-iron inside I should think. The head, ah! the head, of course, gone, but the curious part is there's some sort of method in his raving. I am trying to find out. Most unusual — that thread of logic in such a delirium. Traditionally he ought to see snakes, but he doesn't. Good old tradition's at a discount nowadays. Eh! His — er — visions are batrachian. Ha! ha! No, seriously, I never remember being so interested in a case of jim-jams before. He ought to be dead,

don't you know, after such a festive experiment. Oh! he is a tough object. Four-and-twenty years of the tropics too. You ought really to take a peep at him. Noble-looking old boozier. Most extraordinary man I ever met — medically, of course. Won't you?"

'I have been all along exhibiting the usual polite signs of interest, but now assuming an air of regret I murmured of want of time, and shook hands in a hurry. "I say," he cried after me; "he can't attend that inquiry. Is his evidence material, you think?"

"Not in the least," I called back from the gateway.'

Chapter 6

‘The authorities were evidently of the same opinion. The inquiry was not adjourned. It was held on the appointed day to satisfy the law, and it was well attended because of its human interest, no doubt. There was no incertitude as to facts — as to the one material fact, I mean. How the Patna came by her hurt it was impossible to find out; the court did not expect to find out; and in the whole audience there was not a man who cared. Yet, as I’ve told you, all the sailors in the port attended, and the waterside business was fully represented. Whether they knew it or not, the interest that drew them here was purely psychological — the expectation of some essential disclosure as to the strength, the power, the horror, of human emotions. Naturally nothing of the kind could be disclosed. The examination of the only man able and willing to face it was beating futilely round the well-known fact, and the play of questions upon it was as instructive as the tapping with a hammer on an iron box, were the object to find out what’s inside. However, an official inquiry could not be any other thing. Its object was not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair.

‘The young chap could have told them, and, though that very thing was the thing that interested the audience, the questions put to him necessarily led him away from what to me, for instance, would have been the only truth worth knowing. You can’t expect the constituted authorities to inquire into the state of a man’s soul — or is it only of his liver? Their business was to come down upon the consequences, and frankly, a casual police magistrate and two nautical assessors are not much good for anything else. I don’t mean to imply these fellows were stupid. The magistrate was very patient. One of the assessors was a sailing-ship skipper with a reddish beard, and of a pious disposition. Brierly was the other. Big Brierly. Some of you must have heard of Big Brierly — the captain of the crack ship of the Blue Star line. That’s the man.

‘He seemed consumedly bored by the honour thrust upon him. He had never in his life made a mistake, never had an accident, never a mishap, never a check in his steady rise, and he seemed to be one of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, much less of self-mistrust. At thirty-two he had one of the best commands going in the Eastern trade — and, what’s more, he thought a lot of what he had. There was nothing like it in the world, and I suppose if you had asked him point-blank he would have confessed that in his opinion there was not such another commander. The choice had fallen upon the right man. The rest of mankind that did not command the sixteen-knot steel steamer Ossa were rather poor creatures. He had saved lives at sea, had rescued ships in distress, had a gold chronometer presented to him by the underwriters, and a pair of binoculars with a suitable inscription from some foreign

Government, in commemoration of these services. He was acutely aware of his merits and of his rewards. I liked him well enough, though some I know — meek, friendly men at that — couldn't stand him at any price. I haven't the slightest doubt he considered himself vastly my superior — indeed, had you been Emperor of East and West, you could not have ignored your inferiority in his presence — but I couldn't get up any real sentiment of offence. He did not despise me for anything I could help, for anything I was — don't you know? I was a negligible quantity simply because I was not the fortunate man of the earth, not Montague Brierly in command of the *Ossa*, not the owner of an inscribed gold chronometer and of silver-mounted binoculars testifying to the excellence of my seamanship and to my indomitable pluck; not possessed of an acute sense of my merits and of my rewards, besides the love and worship of a black retriever, the most wonderful of its kind — for never was such a man loved thus by such a dog. No doubt, to have all this forced upon you was exasperating enough; but when I reflected that I was associated in these fatal disadvantages with twelve hundred millions of other more or less human beings, I found I could bear my share of his good-natured and contemptuous pity for the sake of something indefinite and attractive in the man. I have never defined to myself this attraction, but there were moments when I envied him. The sting of life could do no more to his complacent soul than the scratch of a pin to the smooth face of a rock. This was enviable. As I looked at him, flanking on one side the unassuming pale-faced magistrate who presided at the inquiry, his self-satisfaction presented to me and to the world a surface as hard as granite. He committed suicide very soon after.

'No wonder Jim's case bored him, and while I thought with something akin to fear of the immensity of his contempt for the young man under examination, he was probably holding silent inquiry into his own case. The verdict must have been of unmitigated guilt, and he took the secret of the evidence with him in that leap into the sea. If I understand anything of men, the matter was no doubt of the gravest import, one of those trifles that awaken ideas — start into life some thought with which a man unused to such a companionship finds it impossible to live. I am in a position to know that it wasn't money, and it wasn't drink, and it wasn't woman. He jumped overboard at sea barely a week after the end of the inquiry, and less than three days after leaving port on his outward passage; as though on that exact spot in the midst of waters he had suddenly perceived the gates of the other world flung open wide for his reception.

'Yet it was not a sudden impulse. His grey-headed mate, a first-rate sailor and a nice old chap with strangers, but in his relations with his commander the surliest chief officer I've ever seen, would tell the story with tears in his eyes. It appears that when he came on deck in the morning Brierly had been writing in the chart-room. "It was ten minutes to four," he said, "and the middle watch was not relieved yet of course. He heard my voice on the bridge speaking to the second mate, and called me in. I was loth to go, and that's the truth, Captain Marlow — I couldn't stand poor Captain Brierly, I tell you with shame; we never know what a man is made of. He had been promoted over too many heads, not counting my own, and he had a damnable trick of making

you feel small, nothing but by the way he said ‘Good morning.’ I never addressed him, sir, but on matters of duty, and then it was as much as I could do to keep a civil tongue in my head.” (He flattered himself there. I often wondered how Brierly could put up with his manners for more than half a voyage.) “I’ve a wife and children,” he went on, “and I had been ten years in the Company, always expecting the next command — more fool I. Says he, just like this: ‘Come in here, Mr. Jones,’ in that swagger voice of his — ‘Come in here, Mr. Jones.’ In I went. ‘We’ll lay down her position,’ says he, stooping over the chart, a pair of dividers in hand. By the standing orders, the officer going off duty would have done that at the end of his watch. However, I said nothing, and looked on while he marked off the ship’s position with a tiny cross and wrote the date and the time. I can see him this moment writing his neat figures: seventeen, eight, four A.M. The year would be written in red ink at the top of the chart. He never used his charts more than a year, Captain Brierly didn’t. I’ve the chart now. When he had done he stands looking down at the mark he had made and smiling to himself, then looks up at me. ‘Thirty-two miles more as she goes,’ says he, ‘and then we shall be clear, and you may alter the course twenty degrees to the southward.’

“‘We were passing to the north of the Hector Bank that voyage. I said, ‘All right, sir,’ wondering what he was fussing about, since I had to call him before altering the course anyhow. Just then eight bells were struck: we came out on the bridge, and the second mate before going off mentions in the usual way — ‘Seventy-one on the log.’ Captain Brierly looks at the compass and then all round. It was dark and clear, and all the stars were out as plain as on a frosty night in high latitudes. Suddenly he says with a sort of a little sigh: ‘I am going aft, and shall set the log at zero for you myself, so that there can be no mistake. Thirty-two miles more on this course and then you are safe. Let’s see — the correction on the log is six per cent. additive; say, then, thirty by the dial to run, and you may come twenty degrees to starboard at once. No use losing any distance — is there?’ I had never heard him talk so much at a stretch, and to no purpose as it seemed to me. I said nothing. He went down the ladder, and the dog, that was always at his heels whenever he moved, night or day, followed, sliding nose first, after him. I heard his boot-heels tap, tap on the after-deck, then he stopped and spoke to the dog — ‘Go back, Rover. On the bridge, boy! Go on — get.’ Then he calls out to me from the dark, ‘Shut that dog up in the chart-room, Mr. Jones — will you?’

“‘This was the last time I heard his voice, Captain Marlow. These are the last words he spoke in the hearing of any living human being, sir.’” At this point the old chap’s voice got quite unsteady. “He was afraid the poor brute would jump after him, don’t you see?” he pursued with a quaver. “Yes, Captain Marlow. He set the log for me; he — would you believe it? — he put a drop of oil in it too. There was the oil-feeder where he left it near by. The boat-swain’s mate got the hose along aft to wash down at half-past five; by-and-by he knocks off and runs up on the bridge — ‘Will you please come aft, Mr. Jones,’ he says. ‘There’s a funny thing. I don’t like to touch it.’ It was Captain Brierly’s gold chronometer watch carefully hung under the rail by its chain.

“As soon as my eyes fell on it something struck me, and I knew, sir. My legs got soft under me. It was as if I had seen him go over; and I could tell how far behind he was left too. The taffrail-log marked eighteen miles and three-quarters, and four iron belaying-pins were missing round the mainmast. Put them in his pockets to help him down, I suppose; but, Lord! what’s four iron pins to a powerful man like Captain Brierly. Maybe his confidence in himself was just shook a bit at the last. That’s the only sign of fluster he gave in his whole life, I should think; but I am ready to answer for him, that once over he did not try to swim a stroke, the same as he would have had pluck enough to keep up all day long on the bare chance had he fallen overboard accidentally. Yes, sir. He was second to none — if he said so himself, as I heard him once. He had written two letters in the middle watch, one to the Company and the other to me. He gave me a lot of instructions as to the passage — I had been in the trade before he was out of his time — and no end of hints as to my conduct with our people in Shanghai, so that I should keep the command of the Ossa. He wrote like a father would to a favourite son, Captain Marlow, and I was five-and-twenty years his senior and had tasted salt water before he was fairly breeched. In his letter to the owners — it was left open for me to see — he said that he had always done his duty by them — up to that moment — and even now he was not betraying their confidence, since he was leaving the ship to as competent a seaman as could be found — meaning me, sir, meaning me! He told them that if the last act of his life didn’t take away all his credit with them, they would give weight to my faithful service and to his warm recommendation, when about to fill the vacancy made by his death. And much more like this, sir. I couldn’t believe my eyes. It made me feel queer all over,” went on the old chap, in great perturbation, and squashing something in the corner of his eye with the end of a thumb as broad as a spatula. “You would think, sir, he had jumped overboard only to give an unlucky man a last show to get on. What with the shock of him going in this awful rash way, and thinking myself a made man by that chance, I was nearly off my chump for a week. But no fear. The captain of the Pelion was shifted into the Ossa — came aboard in Shanghai — a little popinjay, sir, in a grey check suit, with his hair parted in the middle. ‘Aw — I am — aw — your new captain, Mister — Mister — aw — Jones.’ He was drowned in scent — fairly stunk with it, Captain Marlow. I dare say it was the look I gave him that made him stammer. He mumbled something about my natural disappointment — I had better know at once that his chief officer got the promotion to the Pelion — he had nothing to do with it, of course — supposed the office knew best — sorry. . . . Says I, ‘Don’t you mind old Jones, sir; dam’ his soul, he’s used to it.’ I could see directly I had shocked his delicate ear, and while we sat at our first tiffin together he began to find fault in a nasty manner with this and that in the ship. I never heard such a voice out of a Punch and Judy show. I set my teeth hard, and glued my eyes to my plate, and held my peace as long as I could; but at last I had to say something. Up he jumps tiptoeing, ruffling all his pretty plumes, like a little fighting-cock. ‘You’ll find you have a different person to deal with than the late Captain Brierly.’ ‘I’ve found it,’ says I, very glum, but pretending to be

mighty busy with my steak. 'You are an old ruffian, Mister — aw — Jones; and what's more, you are known for an old ruffian in the employ,' he squeaks at me. The damned bottle-washers stood about listening with their mouths stretched from ear to ear. 'I may be a hard case,' answers I, 'but I ain't so far gone as to put up with the sight of you sitting in Captain Brierly's chair.' With that I lay down my knife and fork. 'You would like to sit in it yourself — that's where the shoe pinches,' he sneers. I left the saloon, got my rags together, and was on the quay with all my dunnage about my feet before the stevedores had turned to again. Yes. Adrift — on shore — after ten years' service — and with a poor woman and four children six thousand miles off depending on my half-pay for every mouthful they ate. Yes, sir! I chucked it rather than hear Captain Brierly abused. He left me his night-glasses — here they are; and he wished me to take care of the dog — here he is. Hallo, Rover, poor boy. Where's the captain, Rover?" The dog looked up at us with mournful yellow eyes, gave one desolate bark, and crept under the table.

'All this was taking place, more than two years afterwards, on board that nautical ruin the Fire-Queen this Jones had got charge of — quite by a funny accident, too — from Matherson — mad Matherson they generally called him — the same who used to hang out in Hai-phong, you know, before the occupation days. The old chap snuffled on —

"Ay, sir, Captain Brierly will be remembered here, if there's no other place on earth. I wrote fully to his father and did not get a word in reply — neither Thank you, nor Go to the devil! — nothing! Perhaps they did not want to know."

'The sight of that watery-eyed old Jones mopping his bald head with a red cotton handkerchief, the sorrowing yelp of the dog, the squalor of that fly-blown cuddy which was the only shrine of his memory, threw a veil of inexpressibly mean pathos over Brierly's remembered figure, the posthumous revenge of fate for that belief in his own splendour which had almost cheated his life of its legitimate terrors. Almost! Perhaps wholly. Who can tell what flattering view he had induced himself to take of his own suicide?

"Why did he commit the rash act, Captain Marlow — can you think?" asked Jones, pressing his palms together. "Why? It beats me! Why?" He slapped his low and wrinkled forehead. "If he had been poor and old and in debt — and never a show — or else mad. But he wasn't of the kind that goes mad, not he. You trust me. What a mate don't know about his skipper isn't worth knowing. Young, healthy, well off, no cares. . . . I sit here sometimes thinking, thinking, till my head fairly begins to buzz. There was some reason."

"You may depend on it, Captain Jones," said I, "it wasn't anything that would have disturbed much either of us two," I said; and then, as if a light had been flashed into the muddle of his brain, poor old Jones found a last word of amazing profundity. He blew his nose, nodding at me dolefully: "Ay, ay! neither you nor I, sir, had ever thought so much of ourselves."

‘Of course the recollection of my last conversation with Brierly is tinged with the knowledge of his end that followed so close upon it. I spoke with him for the last time during the progress of the inquiry. It was after the first adjournment, and he came up with me in the street. He was in a state of irritation, which I noticed with surprise, his usual behaviour when he condescended to converse being perfectly cool, with a trace of amused tolerance, as if the existence of his interlocutor had been a rather good joke. “They caught me for that inquiry, you see,” he began, and for a while enlarged complainingly upon the inconveniences of daily attendance in court. “And goodness knows how long it will last. Three days, I suppose.” I heard him out in silence; in my then opinion it was a way as good as another of putting on side. “What’s the use of it? It is the stupidest set-out you can imagine,” he pursued hotly. I remarked that there was no option. He interrupted me with a sort of pent-up violence. “I feel like a fool all the time.” I looked up at him. This was going very far — for Brierly — when talking of Brierly. He stopped short, and seizing the lapel of my coat, gave it a slight tug. “Why are we tormenting that young chap?” he asked. This question chimed in so well to the tolling of a certain thought of mine that, with the image of the absconding renegade in my eye, I answered at once, “Hanged if I know, unless it be that he lets you.” I was astonished to see him fall into line, so to speak, with that utterance, which ought to have been tolerably cryptic. He said angrily, “Why, yes. Can’t he see that wretched skipper of his has cleared out? What does he expect to happen? Nothing can save him. He’s done for.” We walked on in silence a few steps. “Why eat all that dirt?” he exclaimed, with an oriental energy of expression — about the only sort of energy you can find a trace of east of the fiftieth meridian. I wondered greatly at the direction of his thoughts, but now I strongly suspect it was strictly in character: at bottom poor Brierly must have been thinking of himself. I pointed out to him that the skipper of the Patna was known to have feathered his nest pretty well, and could procure almost anywhere the means of getting away. With Jim it was otherwise: the Government was keeping him in the Sailors’ Home for the time being, and probably he hadn’t a penny in his pocket to bless himself with. It costs some money to run away. “Does it? Not always,” he said, with a bitter laugh, and to some further remark of mine — “Well, then, let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there! By heavens! I would.” I don’t know why his tone provoked me, and I said, “There is a kind of courage in facing it out as he does, knowing very well that if he went away nobody would trouble to run after him.” “Courage be hanged!” growled Brierly. “That sort of courage is of no use to keep a man straight, and I don’t care a snap for such courage. If you were to say it was a kind of cowardice now — of softness. I tell you what, I will put up two hundred rupees if you put up another hundred and undertake to make the beggar clear out early to-morrow morning. The fellow’s a gentleman if he ain’t fit to be touched — he will understand. He must! This infernal publicity is too shocking: there he sits while all these confounded natives, serangs, lascars, quartermasters, are giving evidence that’s enough to burn a man to ashes with shame. This is abominable. Why, Marlow, don’t you think, don’t you feel, that this is abominable; don’t you now —

come — as a seaman? If he went away all this would stop at once.” Brierly said these words with a most unusual animation, and made as if to reach after his pocket-book. I restrained him, and declared coldly that the cowardice of these four men did not seem to me a matter of such great importance. “And you call yourself a seaman, I suppose,” he pronounced angrily. I said that’s what I called myself, and I hoped I was too. He heard me out, and made a gesture with his big arm that seemed to deprive me of my individuality, to push me away into the crowd. “The worst of it,” he said, “is that all you fellows have no sense of dignity; you don’t think enough of what you are supposed to be.”

‘We had been walking slowly meantime, and now stopped opposite the harbour office, in sight of the very spot from which the immense captain of the Patna had vanished as utterly as a tiny feather blown away in a hurricane. I smiled. Brierly went on: “This is a disgrace. We’ve got all kinds amongst us — some anointed scoundrels in the lot; but, hang it, we must preserve professional decency or we become no better than so many tinkers going about loose. We are trusted. Do you understand? — trusted! Frankly, I don’t care a snap for all the pilgrims that ever came out of Asia, but a decent man would not have behaved like this to a full cargo of old rags in bales. We aren’t an organised body of men, and the only thing that holds us together is just the name for that kind of decency. Such an affair destroys one’s confidence. A man may go pretty near through his whole sea-life without any call to show a stiff upper lip. But when the call comes . . . Aha! . . . If I . . .”

‘He broke off, and in a changed tone, “I’ll give you two hundred rupees now, Marlow, and you just talk to that chap. Confound him! I wish he had never come out here. Fact is, I rather think some of my people know his. The old man’s a parson, and I remember now I met him once when staying with my cousin in Essex last year. If I am not mistaken, the old chap seemed rather to fancy his sailor son. Horrible. I can’t do it myself — but you . . .”

‘Thus, apropos of Jim, I had a glimpse of the real Brierly a few days before he committed his reality and his sham together to the keeping of the sea. Of course I declined to meddle. The tone of this last “but you” (poor Brierly couldn’t help it), that seemed to imply I was no more noticeable than an insect, caused me to look at the proposal with indignation, and on account of that provocation, or for some other reason, I became positive in my mind that the inquiry was a severe punishment to that Jim, and that his facing it — practically of his own free will — was a redeeming feature in his abominable case. I hadn’t been so sure of it before. Brierly went off in a huff. At the time his state of mind was more of a mystery to me than it is now.

‘Next day, coming into court late, I sat by myself. Of course I could not forget the conversation I had with Brierly, and now I had them both under my eyes. The demeanour of one suggested gloomy impudence and of the other a contemptuous boredom; yet one attitude might not have been truer than the other, and I was aware that one was not true. Brierly was not bored — he was exasperated; and if so, then Jim might not have been impudent. According to my theory he was not. I imagined

he was hopeless. Then it was that our glances met. They met, and the look he gave me was discouraging of any intention I might have had to speak to him. Upon either hypothesis — insolence or despair — I felt I could be of no use to him. This was the second day of the proceedings. Very soon after that exchange of glances the inquiry was adjourned again to the next day. The white men began to troop out at once. Jim had been told to stand down some time before, and was able to leave amongst the first. I saw his broad shoulders and his head outlined in the light of the door, and while I made my way slowly out talking with some one — some stranger who had addressed me casually — I could see him from within the court-room resting both elbows on the balustrade of the verandah and turning his back on the small stream of people trickling down the few steps. There was a murmur of voices and a shuffle of boots.

‘The next case was that of assault and battery committed upon a money-lender, I believe; and the defendant — a venerable villager with a straight white beard — sat on a mat just outside the door with his sons, daughters, sons-in-law, their wives, and, I should think, half the population of his village besides, squatting or standing around him. A slim dark woman, with part of her back and one black shoulder bared, and with a thin gold ring in her nose, suddenly began to talk in a high-pitched, shrewish tone. The man with me instinctively looked up at her. We were then just through the door, passing behind Jim’s burly back.

‘Whether those villagers had brought the yellow dog with them, I don’t know. Anyhow, a dog was there, weaving himself in and out amongst people’s legs in that mute stealthy way native dogs have, and my companion stumbled over him. The dog leaped away without a sound; the man, raising his voice a little, said with a slow laugh, “Look at that wretched cur,” and directly afterwards we became separated by a lot of people pushing in. I stood back for a moment against the wall while the stranger managed to get down the steps and disappeared. I saw Jim spin round. He made a step forward and barred my way. We were alone; he glared at me with an air of stubborn resolution. I became aware I was being held up, so to speak, as if in a wood. The verandah was empty by then, the noise and movement in court had ceased: a great silence fell upon the building, in which, somewhere far within, an oriental voice began to whine abjectly. The dog, in the very act of trying to sneak in at the door, sat down hurriedly to hunt for fleas.

“Did you speak to me?” asked Jim very low, and bending forward, not so much towards me but at me, if you know what I mean. I said “No” at once. Something in the sound of that quiet tone of his warned me to be on my defence. I watched him. It was very much like a meeting in a wood, only more uncertain in its issue, since he could possibly want neither my money nor my life — nothing that I could simply give up or defend with a clear conscience. “You say you didn’t,” he said, very sombre. “But I heard.” “Some mistake,” I protested, utterly at a loss, and never taking my eyes off him. To watch his face was like watching a darkening sky before a clap of thunder, shade upon shade imperceptibly coming on, the doom growing mysteriously intense in the calm of maturing violence.

“As far as I know, I haven’t opened my lips in your hearing,” I affirmed with perfect truth. I was getting a little angry, too, at the absurdity of this encounter. It strikes me now I have never in my life been so near a beating — I mean it literally; a beating with fists. I suppose I had some hazy prescience of that eventuality being in the air. Not that he was actively threatening me. On the contrary, he was strangely passive — don’t you know? but he was lowering, and, though not exceptionally big, he looked generally fit to demolish a wall. The most reassuring symptom I noticed was a kind of slow and ponderous hesitation, which I took as a tribute to the evident sincerity of my manner and of my tone. We faced each other. In the court the assault case was proceeding. I caught the words: “Well — buffalo — stick — in the greatness of my fear. . . .”

“What did you mean by staring at me all the morning?” said Jim at last. He looked up and looked down again. “Did you expect us all to sit with downcast eyes out of regard for your susceptibilities?” I retorted sharply. I was not going to submit meekly to any of his nonsense. He raised his eyes again, and this time continued to look me straight in the face. “No. That’s all right,” he pronounced with an air of deliberating with himself upon the truth of this statement — “that’s all right. I am going through with that. Only” — and there he spoke a little faster — “I won’t let any man call me names outside this court. There was a fellow with you. You spoke to him — oh yes — I know; ‘tis all very fine. You spoke to him, but you meant me to hear. . . .”

‘I assured him he was under some extraordinary delusion. I had no conception how it came about. “You thought I would be afraid to resent this,” he said, with just a faint tinge of bitterness. I was interested enough to discern the slightest shades of expression, but I was not in the least enlightened; yet I don’t know what in these words, or perhaps just the intonation of that phrase, induced me suddenly to make all possible allowances for him. I ceased to be annoyed at my unexpected predicament. It was some mistake on his part; he was blundering, and I had an intuition that the blunder was of an odious, of an unfortunate nature. I was anxious to end this scene on grounds of decency, just as one is anxious to cut short some unprovoked and abominable confidence. The funniest part was, that in the midst of all these considerations of the higher order I was conscious of a certain trepidation as to the possibility — nay, likelihood — of this encounter ending in some disreputable brawl which could not possibly be explained, and would make me ridiculous. I did not hanker after a three days’ celebrity as the man who got a black eye or something of the sort from the mate of the Patna. He, in all probability, did not care what he did, or at any rate would be fully justified in his own eyes. It took no magician to see he was amazingly angry about something, for all his quiet and even torpid demeanour. I don’t deny I was extremely desirous to pacify him at all costs, had I only known what to do. But I didn’t know, as you may well imagine. It was a blackness without a single gleam. We confronted each other in silence. He hung fire for about fifteen seconds, then made a step nearer, and I made ready to ward off a blow, though I don’t think I moved a muscle. “If you were as big as two men and as strong as six,” he said very softly, “I would tell you what I think

of you. You . . .” “Stop!” I exclaimed. This checked him for a second. “Before you tell me what you think of me,” I went on quickly, “will you kindly tell me what it is I’ve said or done?” During the pause that ensued he surveyed me with indignation, while I made supernatural efforts of memory, in which I was hindered by the oriental voice within the court-room expostulating with impassioned volubility against a charge of falsehood. Then we spoke almost together. “I will soon show you I am not,” he said, in a tone suggestive of a crisis. “I declare I don’t know,” I protested earnestly at the same time. He tried to crush me by the scorn of his glance. “Now that you see I am not afraid you try to crawl out of it,” he said. “Who’s a cur now — hey?” Then, at last, I understood.

‘He had been scanning my features as though looking for a place where he would plant his fist. “I will allow no man,” . . . he mumbled threateningly. It was, indeed, a hideous mistake; he had given himself away utterly. I can’t give you an idea how shocked I was. I suppose he saw some reflection of my feelings in my face, because his expression changed just a little. “Good God!” I stammered, “you don’t think I . . .” “But I am sure I’ve heard,” he persisted, raising his voice for the first time since the beginning of this deplorable scene. Then with a shade of disdain he added, “It wasn’t you, then? Very well; I’ll find the other.” “Don’t be a fool,” I cried in exasperation; “it wasn’t that at all.” “I’ve heard,” he said again with an unshaken and sombre perseverance.

‘There may be those who could have laughed at his pertinacity; I didn’t. Oh, I didn’t! There had never been a man so mercilessly shown up by his own natural impulse. A single word had stripped him of his discretion — of that discretion which is more necessary to the decencies of our inner being than clothing is to the decorum of our body. “Don’t be a fool,” I repeated. “But the other man said it, you don’t deny that?” he pronounced distinctly, and looking in my face without flinching. “No, I don’t deny,” said I, returning his gaze. At last his eyes followed downwards the direction of my pointing finger. He appeared at first uncomprehending, then confounded, and at last amazed and scared as though a dog had been a monster and he had never seen a dog before. “Nobody dreamt of insulting you,” I said.

‘He contemplated the wretched animal, that moved no more than an effigy: it sat with ears pricked and its sharp muzzle pointed into the doorway, and suddenly snapped at a fly like a piece of mechanism.

‘I looked at him. The red of his fair sunburnt complexion deepened suddenly under the down of his cheeks, invaded his forehead, spread to the roots of his curly hair. His ears became intensely crimson, and even the clear blue of his eyes was darkened many shades by the rush of blood to his head. His lips pouted a little, trembling as though he had been on the point of bursting into tears. I perceived he was incapable of pronouncing a word from the excess of his humiliation. From disappointment too — who knows? Perhaps he looked forward to that hammering he was going to give me for rehabilitation, for appeasement? Who can tell what relief he expected from this chance of a row? He was naive enough to expect anything; but he had given himself away for nothing in this case. He had been frank with himself — let alone with me —

in the wild hope of arriving in that way at some effective refutation, and the stars had been ironically unpropitious. He made an inarticulate noise in his throat like a man imperfectly stunned by a blow on the head. It was pitiful.

‘I didn’t catch up again with him till well outside the gate. I had even to trot a bit at the last, but when, out of breath at his elbow, I taxed him with running away, he said, “Never!” and at once turned at bay. I explained I never meant to say he was running away from me. “From no man — from not a single man on earth,” he affirmed with a stubborn mien. I forbore to point out the one obvious exception which would hold good for the bravest of us; I thought he would find out by himself very soon. He looked at me patiently while I was thinking of something to say, but I could find nothing on the spur of the moment, and he began to walk on. I kept up, and anxious not to lose him, I said hurriedly that I couldn’t think of leaving him under a false impression of my — of my — I stammered. The stupidity of the phrase appalled me while I was trying to finish it, but the power of sentences has nothing to do with their sense or the logic of their construction. My idiotic mumble seemed to please him. He cut it short by saying, with courteous placidity that argued an immense power of self-control or else a wonderful elasticity of spirits — “Altogether my mistake.” I marvelled greatly at this expression: he might have been alluding to some trifling occurrence. Hadn’t he understood its deplorable meaning? “You may well forgive me,” he continued, and went on a little moodily, “All these staring people in court seemed such fools that — that it might have been as I supposed.”

‘This opened suddenly a new view of him to my wonder. I looked at him curiously and met his unabashed and impenetrable eyes. “I can’t put up with this kind of thing,” he said, very simply, “and I don’t mean to. In court it’s different; I’ve got to stand that — and I can do it too.”

‘I don’t pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog — bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. They fed one’s curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation. Upon the whole he was misleading. That’s how I summed him up to myself after he left me late in the evening. I had been staying at the Malabar House for a few days, and on my pressing invitation he dined with me there.’

Chapter 7

‘An outward-bound mail-boat had come in that afternoon, and the big dining-room of the hotel was more than half full of people with a-hundred-pounds-round-the-world tickets in their pockets. There were married couples looking domesticated and bored with each other in the midst of their travels; there were small parties and large parties, and lone individuals dining solemnly or feasting boisterously, but all thinking, conversing, joking, or scowling as was their wont at home; and just as intelligently receptive of new impressions as their trunks upstairs. Henceforth they would be labelled as having passed through this and that place, and so would be their luggage. They would cherish this distinction of their persons, and preserve the gummed tickets on their portmanteaus as documentary evidence, as the only permanent trace of their improving enterprise. The dark-faced servants tripped without noise over the vast and polished floor; now and then a girl’s laugh would be heard, as innocent and empty as her mind, or, in a sudden hush of crockery, a few words in an affected drawl from some wit embroidering for the benefit of a grinning tableful the last funny story of shipboard scandal. Two nomadic old maids, dressed up to kill, worked acrimoniously through the bill of fare, whispering to each other with faded lips, wooden-faced and bizarre, like two sumptuous scarecrows. A little wine opened Jim’s heart and loosened his tongue. His appetite was good, too, I noticed. He seemed to have buried somewhere the opening episode of our acquaintance. It was like a thing of which there would be no more question in this world. And all the time I had before me these blue, boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair, this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies: this frank aspect, the artless smile, the youthful seriousness. He was of the right sort; he was one of us. He talked soberly, with a sort of composed unreserve, and with a quiet bearing that might have been the outcome of manly self-control, of impudence, of callousness, of a colossal unconsciousness, of a gigantic deception. Who can tell! From our tone we might have been discussing a third person, a football match, last year’s weather. My mind floated in a sea of conjectures till the turn of the conversation enabled me, without being offensive, to remark that, upon the whole, this inquiry must have been pretty trying to him. He darted his arm across the tablecloth, and clutching my hand by the side of my plate, glared fixedly. I was startled. “It must be awfully hard,” I stammered, confused by this display of speechless feeling. “It is — hell,” he burst out in a muffled voice.

‘This movement and these words caused two well-groomed male globe-trotters at a neighbouring table to look up in alarm from their iced pudding. I rose, and we passed into the front gallery for coffee and cigars.

‘On little octagon tables candles burned in glass globes; clumps of stiff-leaved plants separated sets of cosy wicker chairs; and between the pairs of columns, whose reddish shafts caught in a long row the sheen from the tall windows, the night, glittering and sombre, seemed to hang like a splendid drapery. The riding lights of ships winked afar like setting stars, and the hills across the roadstead resembled rounded black masses of arrested thunder-clouds.

‘“I couldn’t clear out,” Jim began. “The skipper did — that’s all very well for him. I couldn’t, and I wouldn’t. They all got out of it in one way or another, but it wouldn’t do for me.”

‘I listened with concentrated attention, not daring to stir in my chair; I wanted to know — and to this day I don’t know, I can only guess. He would be confident and depressed all in the same breath, as if some conviction of innate blamelessness had checked the truth writhing within him at every turn. He began by saying, in the tone in which a man would admit his inability to jump a twenty-foot wall, that he could never go home now; and this declaration recalled to my mind what Brierly had said, “that the old parson in Essex seemed to fancy his sailor son not a little.”

‘I can’t tell you whether Jim knew he was especially “fancied,” but the tone of his references to “my Dad” was calculated to give me a notion that the good old rural dean was about the finest man that ever had been worried by the cares of a large family since the beginning of the world. This, though never stated, was implied with an anxiety that there should be no mistake about it, which was really very true and charming, but added a poignant sense of lives far off to the other elements of the story. “He has seen it all in the home papers by this time,” said Jim. “I can never face the poor old chap.” I did not dare to lift my eyes at this till I heard him add, “I could never explain. He wouldn’t understand.” Then I looked up. He was smoking reflectively, and after a moment, rousing himself, began to talk again. He discovered at once a desire that I should not confound him with his partners in — in crime, let us call it. He was not one of them; he was altogether of another sort. I gave no sign of dissent. I had no intention, for the sake of barren truth, to rob him of the smallest particle of any saving grace that would come in his way. I didn’t know how much of it he believed himself. I didn’t know what he was playing up to — if he was playing up to anything at all — and I suspect he did not know either; for it is my belief no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge. I made no sound all the time he was wondering what he had better do after “that stupid inquiry was over.”

‘Apparently he shared Brierly’s contemptuous opinion of these proceedings ordained by law. He would not know where to turn, he confessed, clearly thinking aloud rather than talking to me. Certificate gone, career broken, no money to get away, no work that he could obtain as far as he could see. At home he could perhaps get something; but

it meant going to his people for help, and that he would not do. He saw nothing for it but ship before the mast — could get perhaps a quartermaster's billet in some steamer. Would do for a quartermaster. . . . "Do you think you would?" I asked pitilessly. He jumped up, and going to the stone balustrade looked out into the night. In a moment he was back, towering above my chair with his youthful face clouded yet by the pain of a conquered emotion. He had understood very well I did not doubt his ability to steer a ship. In a voice that quavered a bit he asked me why did I say that? I had been "no end kind" to him. I had not even laughed at him when — here he began to mumble — "that mistake, you know — made a confounded ass of myself." I broke in by saying rather warmly that for me such a mistake was not a matter to laugh at. He sat down and drank deliberately some coffee, emptying the small cup to the last drop. "That does not mean I admit for a moment the cap fitted," he declared distinctly. "No?" I said. "No," he affirmed with quiet decision. "Do you know what you would have done? Do you? And you don't think yourself" . . . he gulped something . . . "you don't think yourself a — a — cur?"

'And with this — upon my honour! — he looked up at me inquisitively. It was a question it appears — a bona fide question! However, he didn't wait for an answer. Before I could recover he went on, with his eyes straight before him, as if reading off something written on the body of the night. "It is all in being ready. I wasn't; not — not then. I don't want to excuse myself; but I would like to explain — I would like somebody to understand — somebody — one person at least! You! Why not you?"

'It was solemn, and a little ridiculous too, as they always are, those struggles of an individual trying to save from the fire his idea of what his moral identity should be, this precious notion of a convention, only one of the rules of the game, nothing more, but all the same so terribly effective by its assumption of unlimited power over natural instincts, by the awful penalties of its failure. He began his story quietly enough. On board that Dale Line steamer that had picked up these four floating in a boat upon the discreet sunset glow of the sea, they had been after the first day looked askance upon. The fat skipper told some story, the others had been silent, and at first it had been accepted. You don't cross-examine poor castaways you had the good luck to save, if not from cruel death, then at least from cruel suffering. Afterwards, with time to think it over, it might have struck the officers of the Avondale that there was "something fishy" in the affair; but of course they would keep their doubts to themselves. They had picked up the captain, the mate, and two engineers of the steamer Patna sunk at sea, and that, very properly, was enough for them. I did not ask Jim about the nature of his feelings during the ten days he spent on board. From the way he narrated that part I was at liberty to infer he was partly stunned by the discovery he had made — the discovery about himself — and no doubt was at work trying to explain it away to the only man who was capable of appreciating all its tremendous magnitude. You must understand he did not try to minimise its importance. Of that I am sure; and therein lies his distinction. As to what sensations he experienced when he got ashore

and heard the unforeseen conclusion of the tale in which he had taken such a pitiful part, he told me nothing of them, and it is difficult to imagine.

‘I wonder whether he felt the ground cut from under his feet? I wonder? But no doubt he managed to get a fresh foothold very soon. He was ashore a whole fortnight waiting in the Sailors’ Home, and as there were six or seven men staying there at the time, I had heard of him a little. Their languid opinion seemed to be that, in addition to his other shortcomings, he was a sulky brute. He had passed these days on the verandah, buried in a long chair, and coming out of his place of sepulture only at meal-times or late at night, when he wandered on the quays all by himself, detached from his surroundings, irresolute and silent, like a ghost without a home to haunt. “I don’t think I’ve spoken three words to a living soul in all that time,” he said, making me very sorry for him; and directly he added, “One of these fellows would have been sure to blurt out something I had made up my mind not to put up with, and I didn’t want a row. No! Not then. I was too — too . . . I had no heart for it.” “So that bulkhead held out after all,” I remarked cheerfully. “Yes,” he murmured, “it held. And yet I swear to you I felt it bulge under my hand.” “It’s extraordinary what strains old iron will stand sometimes,” I said. Thrown back in his seat, his legs stiffly out and arms hanging down, he nodded slightly several times. You could not conceive a sadder spectacle. Suddenly he lifted his head; he sat up; he slapped his thigh. “Ah! what a chance missed! My God! what a chance missed!” he blazed out, but the ring of the last “missed” resembled a cry wrung out by pain.

‘He was silent again with a still, far-away look of fierce yearning after that missed distinction, with his nostrils for an instant dilated, sniffing the intoxicating breath of that wasted opportunity. If you think I was either surprised or shocked you do me an injustice in more ways than one! Ah, he was an imaginative beggar! He would give himself away; he would give himself up. I could see in his glance darted into the night all his inner being carried on, projected headlong into the fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations. He had no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned for what he had failed to obtain. He was very far away from me who watched him across three feet of space. With every instant he was penetrating deeper into the impossible world of romantic achievements. He got to the heart of it at last! A strange look of beatitude overspread his features, his eyes sparkled in the light of the candle burning between us; he positively smiled! He had penetrated to the very heart — to the very heart. It was an ecstatic smile that your faces — or mine either — will never wear, my dear boys. I whisked him back by saying, “If you had stuck to the ship, you mean!”

‘He turned upon me, his eyes suddenly amazed and full of pain, with a bewildered, startled, suffering face, as though he had tumbled down from a star. Neither you nor I will ever look like this on any man. He shuddered profoundly, as if a cold finger-tip had touched his heart. Last of all he sighed.

‘I was not in a merciful mood. He provoked one by his contradictory indiscretions. “It is unfortunate you didn’t know beforehand!” I said with every unkind intention;

but the perfidious shaft fell harmless — dropped at his feet like a spent arrow, as it were, and he did not think of picking it up. Perhaps he had not even seen it. Presently, lolling at ease, he said, “Dash it all! I tell you it bulged. I was holding up my lamp along the angle-iron in the lower deck when a flake of rust as big as the palm of my hand fell off the plate, all of itself.” He passed his hand over his forehead. “The thing stirred and jumped off like something alive while I was looking at it.” “That made you feel pretty bad,” I observed casually. “Do you suppose,” he said, “that I was thinking of myself, with a hundred and sixty people at my back, all fast asleep in that fore-’tween-deck alone — and more of them aft; more on the deck — sleeping — knowing nothing about it — three times as many as there were boats for, even if there had been time? I expected to see the iron open out as I stood there and the rush of water going over them as they lay. . . . What could I do — what?”

‘I can easily picture him to myself in the peopled gloom of the cavernous place, with the light of the globe-lamp falling on a small portion of the bulkhead that had the weight of the ocean on the other side, and the breathing of unconscious sleepers in his ears. I can see him glaring at the iron, startled by the falling rust, overburdened by the knowledge of an imminent death. This, I gathered, was the second time he had been sent forward by that skipper of his, who, I rather think, wanted to keep him away from the bridge. He told me that his first impulse was to shout and straightway make all those people leap out of sleep into terror; but such an overwhelming sense of his helplessness came over him that he was not able to produce a sound. This is, I suppose, what people mean by the tongue cleaving to the roof of the mouth. “Too dry,” was the concise expression he used in reference to this state. Without a sound, then, he scrambled out on deck through the number one hatch. A windsail rigged down there swung against him accidentally, and he remembered that the light touch of the canvas on his face nearly knocked him off the hatchway ladder.

‘He confessed that his knees wobbled a good deal as he stood on the foredeck looking at another sleeping crowd. The engines having been stopped by that time, the steam was blowing off. Its deep rumble made the whole night vibrate like a bass string. The ship trembled to it.

‘He saw here and there a head lifted off a mat, a vague form uprise in sitting posture, listen sleepily for a moment, sink down again into the billowy confusion of boxes, steam-winch, ventilators. He was aware all these people did not know enough to take intelligent notice of that strange noise. The ship of iron, the men with white faces, all the sights, all the sounds, everything on board to that ignorant and pious multitude was strange alike, and as trustworthy as it would for ever remain incomprehensible. It occurred to him that the fact was fortunate. The idea of it was simply terrible.

‘You must remember he believed, as any other man would have done in his place, that the ship would go down at any moment; the bulging, rust-eaten plates that kept back the ocean, fatally must give way, all at once like an undermined dam, and let in a sudden and overwhelming flood. He stood still looking at these recumbent bodies, a doomed man aware of his fate, surveying the silent company of the dead. They were

dead! Nothing could save them! There were boats enough for half of them perhaps, but there was no time. No time! No time! It did not seem worth while to open his lips, to stir hand or foot. Before he could shout three words, or make three steps, he would be floundering in a sea whitened awfully by the desperate struggles of human beings, clamorous with the distress of cries for help. There was no help. He imagined what would happen perfectly; he went through it all motionless by the hatchway with the lamp in his hand — he went through it to the very last harrowing detail. I think he went through it again while he was telling me these things he could not tell the court.

“I saw as clearly as I see you now that there was nothing I could do. It seemed to take all life out of my limbs. I thought I might just as well stand where I was and wait. I did not think I had many seconds. . . .” Suddenly the steam ceased blowing off. The noise, he remarked, had been distracting, but the silence at once became intolerably oppressive.

“I thought I would choke before I got drowned,” he said.

‘He protested he did not think of saving himself. The only distinct thought formed, vanishing, and re-forming in his brain, was: eight hundred people and seven boats; eight hundred people and seven boats.

“Somebody was speaking aloud inside my head,” he said a little wildly. “Eight hundred people and seven boats — and no time! Just think of it.” He leaned towards me across the little table, and I tried to avoid his stare. “Do you think I was afraid of death?” he asked in a voice very fierce and low. He brought down his open hand with a bang that made the coffee-cups dance. “I am ready to swear I was not — I was not. . . . By God — no!” He hitched himself upright and crossed his arms; his chin fell on his breast.

‘The soft clashes of crockery reached us faintly through the high windows. There was a burst of voices, and several men came out in high good-humour into the gallery. They were exchanging jocular reminiscences of the donkeys in Cairo. A pale anxious youth stepping softly on long legs was being chaffed by a strutting and rubicund globe-trotter about his purchases in the bazaar. “No, really — do you think I’ve been done to that extent?” he inquired very earnest and deliberate. The band moved away, dropping into chairs as they went; matches flared, illuminating for a second faces without the ghost of an expression and the flat glaze of white shirt-fronts; the hum of many conversations animated with the ardour of feasting sounded to me absurd and infinitely remote.

“Some of the crew were sleeping on the number one hatch within reach of my arm,” began Jim again.

‘You must know they kept Kalashee watch in that ship, all hands sleeping through the night, and only the reliefs of quartermasters and look-out men being called. He was tempted to grip and shake the shoulder of the nearest lascar, but he didn’t. Something held his arms down along his sides. He was not afraid — oh no! only he just couldn’t — that’s all. He was not afraid of death perhaps, but I’ll tell you what, he was afraid of the emergency. His confounded imagination had evoked for him all the horrors of panic, the trampling rush, the pitiful screams, boats swamped — all the appalling incidents of

a disaster at sea he had ever heard of. He might have been resigned to die but I suspect he wanted to die without added terrors, quietly, in a sort of peaceful trance. A certain readiness to perish is not so very rare, but it is seldom that you meet men whose souls, steeled in the impenetrable armour of resolution, are ready to fight a losing battle to the last; the desire of peace waxes stronger as hope declines, till at last it conquers the very desire of life. Which of us here has not observed this, or maybe experienced something of that feeling in his own person — this extreme weariness of emotions, the vanity of effort, the yearning for rest? Those striving with unreasonable forces know it well, — the shipwrecked castaways in boats, wanderers lost in a desert, men battling against the unthinking might of nature, or the stupid brutality of crowds.’

Chapter 8

‘How long he stood stock-still by the hatch expecting every moment to feel the ship dip under his feet and the rush of water take him at the back and toss him like a chip, I cannot say. Not very long — two minutes perhaps. A couple of men he could not make out began to converse drowsily, and also, he could not tell where, he detected a curious noise of shuffling feet. Above these faint sounds there was that awful stillness preceding a catastrophe, that trying silence of the moment before the crash; then it came into his head that perhaps he would have time to rush along and cut all the lanyards of the gripes, so that the boats would float as the ship went down.

‘The Patna had a long bridge, and all the boats were up there, four on one side and three on the other — the smallest of them on the port-side and nearly abreast of the steering gear. He assured me, with evident anxiety to be believed, that he had been most careful to keep them ready for instant service. He knew his duty. I dare say he was a good enough mate as far as that went. “I always believed in being prepared for the worst,” he commented, staring anxiously in my face. I nodded my approval of the sound principle, averting my eyes before the subtle unsoundness of the man.

‘He started unsteadily to run. He had to step over legs, avoid stumbling against the heads. Suddenly some one caught hold of his coat from below, and a distressed voice spoke under his elbow. The light of the lamp he carried in his right hand fell upon an upturned dark face whose eyes entreated him together with the voice. He had picked up enough of the language to understand the word water, repeated several times in a tone of insistence, of prayer, almost of despair. He gave a jerk to get away, and felt an arm embrace his leg.

“‘The beggar clung to me like a drowning man,” he said impressively. “Water, water! What water did he mean? What did he know? As calmly as I could I ordered him to let go. He was stopping me, time was pressing, other men began to stir; I wanted time — time to cut the boats adrift. He got hold of my hand now, and I felt that he would begin to shout. It flashed upon me it was enough to start a panic, and I hauled off with my free arm and slung the lamp in his face. The glass jingled, the light went out, but the blow made him let go, and I ran off — I wanted to get at the boats; I wanted to get at the boats. He leaped after me from behind. I turned on him. He would not keep quiet; he tried to shout; I had half throttled him before I made out what he wanted. He wanted some water — water to drink; they were on strict allowance, you know, and he had with him a young boy I had noticed several times. His child was sick — and thirsty. He had caught sight of me as I passed by, and was begging for a little water. That’s all. We were under the bridge, in the dark. He kept on snatching at my wrists;

there was no getting rid of him. I dashed into my berth, grabbed my water-bottle, and thrust it into his hands. He vanished. I didn't find out till then how much I was in want of a drink myself." He leaned on one elbow with a hand over his eyes.

"I felt a creepy sensation all down my backbone; there was something peculiar in all this. The fingers of the hand that shaded his brow trembled slightly. He broke the short silence.

"These things happen only once to a man and . . . Ah! well! When I got on the bridge at last the beggars were getting one of the boats off the chocks. A boat! I was running up the ladder when a heavy blow fell on my shoulder, just missing my head. It didn't stop me, and the chief engineer — they had got him out of his bunk by then — raised the boat-stretcher again. Somehow I had no mind to be surprised at anything. All this seemed natural — and awful — and awful. I dodged that miserable maniac, lifted him off the deck as though he had been a little child, and he started whispering in my arms: 'Don't! don't! I thought you were one of them niggers.' I flung him away, he skidded along the bridge and knocked the legs from under the little chap — the second. The skipper, busy about the boat, looked round and came at me head down, growling like a wild beast. I flinched no more than a stone. I was as solid standing there as this," he tapped lightly with his knuckles the wall beside his chair. "It was as though I had heard it all, seen it all, gone through it all twenty times already. I wasn't afraid of them. I drew back my fist and he stopped short, muttering —

"'Ah! it's you. Lend a hand quick.'

"That's what he said. Quick! As if anybody could be quick enough. 'Aren't you going to do something?' I asked. 'Yes. Clear out,' he snarled over his shoulder.

"I don't think I understood then what he meant. The other two had picked themselves up by that time, and they rushed together to the boat. They tramped, they wheezed, they shoved, they cursed the boat, the ship, each other — cursed me. All in mutters. I didn't move, I didn't speak. I watched the slant of the ship. She was as still as if landed on the blocks in a dry dock — only she was like this," He held up his hand, palm under, the tips of the fingers inclined downwards. "Like this," he repeated. "I could see the line of the horizon before me, as clear as a bell, above her stem-head; I could see the water far off there black and sparkling, and still — still as a-pond, deadly still, more still than ever sea was before — more still than I could bear to look at. Have you watched a ship floating head down, checked in sinking by a sheet of old iron too rotten to stand being shored up? Have you? Oh yes, shored up? I thought of that — I thought of every mortal thing; but can you shore up a bulkhead in five minutes — or in fifty for that matter? Where was I going to get men that would go down below? And the timber — the timber! Would you have had the courage to swing the maul for the first blow if you had seen that bulkhead? Don't say you would: you had not seen it; nobody would. Hang it — to do a thing like that you must believe there is a chance, one in a thousand, at least, some ghost of a chance; and you would not have believed. Nobody would have believed. You think me a cur for standing there, but what would you have done? What! You can't tell — nobody can tell. One must have time to turn

round. What would you have me do? Where was the kindness in making crazy with fright all those people I could not save single-handed — that nothing could save? Look here! As true as I sit on this chair before you . . .”

‘He drew quick breaths at every few words and shot quick glances at my face, as though in his anguish he were watchful of the effect. He was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence — another possessor of his soul. These were issues beyond the competency of a court of inquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life, and did not want a judge. He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice. I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, bullied, perhaps, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision if one had to be fair to all the phantoms in possession — to the reputable that had its claims and to the disreputable that had its exigencies. I can’t explain to you who haven’t seen him and who hear his words only at second hand the mixed nature of my feelings. It seemed to me I was being made to comprehend the Inconceivable — and I know of nothing to compare with the discomfort of such a sensation. I was made to look at the convention that lurks in all truth and on the essential sincerity of falsehood. He appealed to all sides at once — to the side turned perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge. He swayed me. I own to it, I own up. The occasion was obscure, insignificant — what you will: a lost youngster, one in a million — but then he was one of us; an incident as completely devoid of importance as the flooding of an ant-heap, and yet the mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind’s conception of itself. . . .’

Marlow paused to put new life into his expiring cheroot, seemed to forget all about the story, and abruptly began again.

‘My fault of course. One has no business really to get interested. It’s a weakness of mine. His was of another kind. My weakness consists in not having a discriminating eye for the incidental — for the externals — no eye for the hod of the rag-picker or the fine linen of the next man. Next man — that’s it. I have met so many men,’ he pursued, with momentary sadness — ‘met them too with a certain — certain — impact, let us say; like this fellow, for instance — and in each case all I could see was merely the human being. A confounded democratic quality of vision which may be better than total blindness, but has been of no advantage to me, I can assure you. Men expect one to take into account their fine linen. But I never could get up any enthusiasm about these things. Oh! it’s a failing; it’s a failing; and then comes a soft evening; a lot of men too indolent for whist — and a story. . . .’

He paused again to wait for an encouraging remark, perhaps, but nobody spoke; only the host, as if reluctantly performing a duty, murmured —

‘You are so subtle, Marlow.’

‘Who? I?’ said Marlow in a low voice. ‘Oh no! But he was; and try as I may for the success of this yarn, I am missing innumerable shades — they were so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words. Because he complicated matters by being so simple, too — the simplest poor devil! . . . By Jove! he was amazing. There he sat telling me that just as I saw him before my eyes he wouldn’t be afraid to face anything — and believing in it too. I tell you it was fabulously innocent and it was enormous, enormous! I watched him covertly, just as though I had suspected him of an intention to take a jolly good rise out of me. He was confident that, on the square, “on the square, mind!” there was nothing he couldn’t meet. Ever since he had been “so high” — “quite a little chap,” he had been preparing himself for all the difficulties that can beset one on land and water. He confessed proudly to this kind of foresight. He had been elaborating dangers and defences, expecting the worst, rehearsing his best. He must have led a most exalted existence. Can you fancy it? A succession of adventures, so much glory, such a victorious progress! and the deep sense of his sagacity crowning every day of his inner life. He forgot himself; his eyes shone; and with every word my heart, searched by the light of his absurdity, was growing heavier in my breast. I had no mind to laugh, and lest I should smile I made for myself a stolid face. He gave signs of irritation.

“It is always the unexpected that happens,” I said in a propitiatory tone. My obtuseness provoked him into a contemptuous “Pshaw!” I suppose he meant that the unexpected couldn’t touch him; nothing less than the unconceivable itself could get over his perfect state of preparation. He had been taken unawares — and he whispered to himself a malediction upon the waters and the firmament, upon the ship, upon the men. Everything had betrayed him! He had been tricked into that sort of high-minded resignation which prevented him lifting as much as his little finger, while these others who had a very clear perception of the actual necessity were tumbling against each other and sweating desperately over that boat business. Something had gone wrong there at the last moment. It appears that in their flurry they had contrived in some mysterious way to get the sliding bolt of the foremost boat-chock jammed tight, and forthwith had gone out of the remnants of their minds over the deadly nature of that accident. It must have been a pretty sight, the fierce industry of these beggars toiling on a motionless ship that floated quietly in the silence of a world asleep, fighting against time for the freeing of that boat, grovelling on all-fours, standing up in despair, tugging, pushing, snarling at each other venomously, ready to kill, ready to weep, and only kept from flying at each other’s throats by the fear of death that stood silent behind them like an inflexible and cold-eyed taskmaster. Oh yes! It must have been a pretty sight. He saw it all, he could talk about it with scorn and bitterness; he had a minute knowledge of it by means of some sixth sense, I conclude, because he swore to me he had remained apart without a glance at them and at the boat — without one single glance. And I believe him. I should think he was too busy watching the threatening slant of the ship, the suspended menace discovered in the midst of the

most perfect security — fascinated by the sword hanging by a hair over his imaginative head.

‘Nothing in the world moved before his eyes, and he could depict to himself without hindrance the sudden swing upwards of the dark sky-line, the sudden tilt up of the vast plain of the sea, the swift still rise, the brutal fling, the grasp of the abyss, the struggle without hope, the starlight closing over his head for ever like the vault of a tomb — the revolt of his young life — the black end. He could! By Jove! who couldn’t? And you must remember he was a finished artist in that peculiar way, he was a gifted poor devil with the faculty of swift and forestalling vision. The sights it showed him had turned him into cold stone from the soles of his feet to the nape of his neck; but there was a hot dance of thoughts in his head, a dance of lame, blind, mute thoughts — a whirl of awful cripples. Didn’t I tell you he confessed himself before me as though I had the power to bind and to loose? He burrowed deep, deep, in the hope of my absolution, which would have been of no good to him. This was one of those cases which no solemn deception can palliate, where no man can help; where his very Maker seems to abandon a sinner to his own devices.

‘He stood on the starboard side of the bridge, as far as he could get from the struggle for the boat, which went on with the agitation of madness and the stealthiness of a conspiracy. The two Malays had meantime remained holding to the wheel. Just picture to yourselves the actors in that, thank God! unique, episode of the sea, four beside themselves with fierce and secret exertions, and three looking on in complete immobility, above the awnings covering the profound ignorance of hundreds of human beings, with their weariness, with their dreams, with their hopes, arrested, held by an invisible hand on the brink of annihilation. For that they were so, makes no doubt to me: given the state of the ship, this was the deadliest possible description of accident that could happen. These beggars by the boat had every reason to go distracted with funk. Frankly, had I been there, I would not have given as much as a counterfeit farthing for the ship’s chance to keep above water to the end of each successive second. And still she floated! These sleeping pilgrims were destined to accomplish their whole pilgrimage to the bitterness of some other end. It was as if the Omnipotence whose mercy they confessed had needed their humble testimony on earth for a while longer, and had looked down to make a sign, “Thou shalt not!” to the ocean. Their escape would trouble me as a prodigiously inexplicable event, did I not know how tough old iron can be — as tough sometimes as the spirit of some men we meet now and then, worn to a shadow and breasting the weight of life. Not the least wonder of these twenty minutes, to my mind, is the behaviour of the two helmsmen. They were amongst the native batch of all sorts brought over from Aden to give evidence at the inquiry. One of them, labouring under intense bashfulness, was very young, and with his smooth, yellow, cheery countenance looked even younger than he was. I remember perfectly Brierly asking him, through the interpreter, what he thought of it at the time, and the interpreter, after a short colloquy, turning to the court with an important air —

“He says he thought nothing.”

‘The other, with patient blinking eyes, a blue cotton handkerchief, faded with much washing, bound with a smart twist over a lot of grey wisps, his face shrunk into grim hollows, his brown skin made darker by a mesh of wrinkles, explained that he had a knowledge of some evil thing befalling the ship, but there had been no order; he could not remember an order; why should he leave the helm? To some further questions he jerked back his spare shoulders, and declared it never came into his mind then that the white men were about to leave the ship through fear of death. He did not believe it now. There might have been secret reasons. He wagged his old chin knowingly. Aha! secret reasons. He was a man of great experience, and he wanted that white Tuan to know — he turned towards Brierly, who didn’t raise his head — that he had acquired a knowledge of many things by serving white men on the sea for a great number of years — and, suddenly, with shaky excitement he poured upon our spellbound attention a lot of queer-sounding names, names of dead-and-gone skippers, names of forgotten country ships, names of familiar and distorted sound, as if the hand of dumb time had been at work on them for ages. They stopped him at last. A silence fell upon the court, — a silence that remained unbroken for at least a minute, and passed gently into a deep murmur. This episode was the sensation of the second day’s proceedings — affecting all the audience, affecting everybody except Jim, who was sitting moodily at the end of the first bench, and never looked up at this extraordinary and damning witness that seemed possessed of some mysterious theory of defence.

‘So these two lascars stuck to the helm of that ship without steerage-way, where death would have found them if such had been their destiny. The whites did not give them half a glance, had probably forgotten their existence. Assuredly Jim did not remember it. He remembered he could do nothing; he could do nothing, now he was alone. There was nothing to do but to sink with the ship. No use making a disturbance about it. Was there? He waited upstanding, without a sound, stiffened in the idea of some sort of heroic discretion. The first engineer ran cautiously across the bridge to tug at his sleeve.

“‘Come and help! For God’s sake, come and help!’

‘He ran back to the boat on the points of his toes, and returned directly to worry at his sleeve, begging and cursing at the same time.

“‘I believe he would have kissed my hands,’ said Jim savagely, “and, next moment, he starts foaming and whispering in my face, ‘If I had the time I would like to crack your skull for you.’ I pushed him away. Suddenly he caught hold of me round the neck. Damn him! I hit him. I hit out without looking. ‘Won’t you save your own life — you infernal coward?’ he sobs. Coward! He called me an infernal coward! Ha! ha! ha! ha! He called me — ha! ha! ha! . . .”

‘He had thrown himself back and was shaking with laughter. I had never in my life heard anything so bitter as that noise. It fell like a blight on all the merriment about donkeys, pyramids, bazaars, or what not. Along the whole dim length of the gallery the voices dropped, the pale blotches of faces turned our way with one accord, and the

silence became so profound that the clear tinkle of a teaspoon falling on the tessellated floor of the verandah rang out like a tiny and silvery scream.

““You mustn’t laugh like this, with all these people about,” I remonstrated. “It isn’t nice for them, you know.”

‘He gave no sign of having heard at first, but after a while, with a stare that, missing me altogether, seemed to probe the heart of some awful vision, he muttered carelessly — ”Oh! they’ll think I am drunk.”

‘And after that you would have thought from his appearance he would never make a sound again. But — no fear! He could no more stop telling now than he could have stopped living by the mere exertion of his will.’

Chapter 9

“I was saying to myself, ‘Sink — curse you! Sink!’” These were the words with which he began again. He wanted it over. He was severely left alone, and he formulated in his head this address to the ship in a tone of imprecation, while at the same time he enjoyed the privilege of witnessing scenes — as far as I can judge — of low comedy. They were still at that bolt. The skipper was ordering, “Get under and try to lift”; and the others naturally shirked. You understand that to be squeezed flat under the keel of a boat wasn’t a desirable position to be caught in if the ship went down suddenly. “Why don’t you — you the strongest?” whined the little engineer. “Gott-for-dam! I am too thick,” spluttered the skipper in despair. It was funny enough to make angels weep. They stood idle for a moment, and suddenly the chief engineer rushed again at Jim.

“Come and help, man! Are you mad to throw your only chance away? Come and help, man! Man! Look there — look!”

‘And at last Jim looked astern where the other pointed with maniacal insistence. He saw a silent black squall which had eaten up already one-third of the sky. You know how these squalls come up there about that time of the year. First you see a darkening of the horizon — no more; then a cloud rises opaque like a wall. A straight edge of vapour lined with sickly whitish gleams flies up from the southwest, swallowing the stars in whole constellations; its shadow flies over the waters, and confounds sea and sky into one abyss of obscurity. And all is still. No thunder, no wind, no sound; not a flicker of lightning. Then in the tenebrous immensity a livid arch appears; a swell or two like undulations of the very darkness run past, and suddenly, wind and rain strike together with a peculiar impetuosity as if they had burst through something solid. Such a cloud had come up while they weren’t looking. They had just noticed it, and were perfectly justified in surmising that if in absolute stillness there was some chance for the ship to keep afloat a few minutes longer, the least disturbance of the sea would make an end of her instantly. Her first nod to the swell that precedes the burst of such a squall would be also her last, would become a plunge, would, so to speak, be prolonged into a long dive, down, down to the bottom. Hence these new capers of their fright, these new antics in which they displayed their extreme aversion to die.

“It was black, black,” pursued Jim with moody steadiness. “It had sneaked upon us from behind. The infernal thing! I suppose there had been at the back of my head some hope yet. I don’t know. But that was all over anyhow. It maddened me to see myself caught like this. I was angry, as though I had been trapped. I was trapped! The night was hot, too, I remember. Not a breath of air.”

‘He remembered so well that, gasping in the chair, he seemed to sweat and choke before my eyes. No doubt it maddened him; it knocked him over afresh — in a manner of speaking — but it made him also remember that important purpose which had sent him rushing on that bridge only to slip clean out of his mind. He had intended to cut the lifeboats clear of the ship. He whipped out his knife and went to work slashing as though he had seen nothing, had heard nothing, had known of no one on board. They thought him hopelessly wrong-headed and crazy, but dared not protest noisily against this useless loss of time. When he had done he returned to the very same spot from which he had started. The chief was there, ready with a clutch at him to whisper close to his head, scathingly, as though he wanted to bite his ear —

“You silly fool! do you think you’ll get the ghost of a show when all that lot of brutes is in the water? Why, they will batter your head for you from these boats.”

‘He wrung his hands, ignored, at Jim’s elbow. The skipper kept up a nervous shuffle in one place and mumbled, “Hammer! hammer! Mein Gott! Get a hammer.”

‘The little engineer whimpered like a child, but, broken arm and all, he turned out the least craven of the lot as it seems, and, actually, mustered enough pluck to run an errand to the engine-room. No trifle, it must be owned in fairness to him. Jim told me he darted desperate looks like a cornered man, gave one low wail, and dashed off. He was back instantly clambering, hammer in hand, and without a pause flung himself at the bolt. The others gave up Jim at once and ran off to assist. He heard the tap, tap of the hammer, the sound of the released chock falling over. The boat was clear. Only then he turned to look — only then. But he kept his distance — he kept his distance. He wanted me to know he had kept his distance; that there was nothing in common between him and these men — who had the hammer. Nothing whatever. It is more than probable he thought himself cut off from them by a space that could not be traversed, by an obstacle that could not be overcome, by a chasm without bottom. He was as far as he could get from them — the whole breadth of the ship.

‘His feet were glued to that remote spot and his eyes to their indistinct group bowed together and swaying strangely in the common torment of fear. A hand-lamp lashed to a stanchion above a little table rigged up on the bridge — the Patna had no chart-room amidships — threw a light on their labouring shoulders, on their arched and bobbing backs. They pushed at the bow of the boat; they pushed out into the night; they pushed, and would no more look back at him. They had given him up as if indeed he had been too far, too hopelessly separated from themselves, to be worth an appealing word, a glance, or a sign. They had no leisure to look back upon his passive heroism, to feel the sting of his abstention. The boat was heavy; they pushed at the bow with no breath to spare for an encouraging word: but the turmoil of terror that had scattered their self-command like chaff before the wind, converted their desperate exertions into a bit of fooling, upon my word, fit for knockabout clowns in a farce. They pushed with their hands, with their heads, they pushed for dear life with all the weight of their bodies, they pushed with all the might of their souls — only no sooner had they succeeded in canting the stem clear of the davit than they would leave off like one man

and start a wild scramble into her. As a natural consequence the boat would swing in abruptly, driving them back, helpless and jostling against each other. They would stand nonplussed for a while, exchanging in fierce whispers all the infamous names they could call to mind, and go at it again. Three times this occurred. He described it to me with morose thoughtfulness. He hadn't lost a single movement of that comic business. "I loathed them. I hated them. I had to look at all that," he said without emphasis, turning upon me a sombrely watchful glance. "Was ever there any one so shamefully tried?"

'He took his head in his hands for a moment, like a man driven to distraction by some unspeakable outrage. These were things he could not explain to the court — and not even to me; but I would have been little fitted for the reception of his confidences had I not been able at times to understand the pauses between the words. In this assault upon his fortitude there was the jeering intention of a spiteful and vile vengeance; there was an element of burlesque in his ordeal — a degradation of funny grimaces in the approach of death or dishonour.

'He related facts which I have not forgotten, but at this distance of time I couldn't recall his very words: I only remember that he managed wonderfully to convey the brooding rancour of his mind into the bare recital of events. Twice, he told me, he shut his eyes in the certitude that the end was upon him already, and twice he had to open them again. Each time he noted the darkening of the great stillness. The shadow of the silent cloud had fallen upon the ship from the zenith, and seemed to have extinguished every sound of her teeming life. He could no longer hear the voices under the awnings. He told me that each time he closed his eyes a flash of thought showed him that crowd of bodies, laid out for death, as plain as daylight. When he opened them, it was to see the dim struggle of four men fighting like mad with a stubborn boat. "They would fall back before it time after time, stand swearing at each other, and suddenly make another rush in a bunch. . . . Enough to make you die laughing," he commented with downcast eyes; then raising them for a moment to my face with a dismal smile, "I ought to have a merry life of it, by God! for I shall see that funny sight a good many times yet before I die." His eyes fell again. "See and hear. . . . See and hear," he repeated twice, at long intervals, filled by vacant staring.

'He roused himself.

"I made up my mind to keep my eyes shut," he said, "and I couldn't. I couldn't, and I don't care who knows it. Let them go through that kind of thing before they talk. Just let them — and do better — that's all. The second time my eyelids flew open and my mouth too. I had felt the ship move. She just dipped her bows — and lifted them gently — and slow! everlastingly slow; and ever so little. She hadn't done that much for days. The cloud had raced ahead, and this first swell seemed to travel upon a sea of lead. There was no life in that stir. It managed, though, to knock over something in my head. What would you have done? You are sure of yourself — aren't you? What would you do if you felt now — this minute — the house here move, just move a little

under your chair. Leap! By heavens! you would take one spring from where you sit and land in that clump of bushes yonder.”

‘He flung his arm out at the night beyond the stone balustrade. I held my peace. He looked at me very steadily, very severe. There could be no mistake: I was being bullied now, and it behoved me to make no sign lest by a gesture or a word I should be drawn into a fatal admission about myself which would have had some bearing on the case. I was not disposed to take any risk of that sort. Don’t forget I had him before me, and really he was too much like one of us not to be dangerous. But if you want to know I don’t mind telling you that I did, with a rapid glance, estimate the distance to the mass of denser blackness in the middle of the grass-plot before the verandah. He exaggerated. I would have landed short by several feet — and that’s the only thing of which I am fairly certain.

‘The last moment had come, as he thought, and he did not move. His feet remained glued to the planks if his thoughts were knocking about loose in his head. It was at this moment too that he saw one of the men around the boat step backwards suddenly, clutch at the air with raised arms, totter and collapse. He didn’t exactly fall, he only slid gently into a sitting posture, all hunched up, and with his shoulders propped against the side of the engine-room skylight. “That was the donkey-man. A haggard, white-faced chap with a ragged moustache. Acted third engineer,” he explained.

“Dead,” I said. We had heard something of that in court.

“So they say,” he pronounced with sombre indifference. “Of course I never knew. Weak heart. The man had been complaining of being out of sorts for some time before. Excitement. Over-exertion. Devil only knows. Ha! ha! ha! It was easy to see he did not want to die either. Droll, isn’t it? May I be shot if he hadn’t been fooled into killing himself! Fooled — neither more nor less. Fooled into it, by heavens! just as I . . . Ah! If he had only kept still; if he had only told them to go to the devil when they came to rush him out of his bunk because the ship was sinking! If he had only stood by with his hands in his pockets and called them names!”

‘He got up, shook his fist, glared at me, and sat down.

“A chance missed, eh?” I murmured.

“Why don’t you laugh?” he said. “A joke hatched in hell. Weak heart! . . . I wish sometimes mine had been.”

‘This irritated me. “Do you?” I exclaimed with deep-rooted irony. “Yes! Can’t you understand?” he cried. “I don’t know what more you could wish for,” I said angrily. He gave me an utterly uncomprehending glance. This shaft had also gone wide of the mark, and he was not the man to bother about stray arrows. Upon my word, he was too unsuspecting; he was not fair game. I was glad that my missile had been thrown away, — that he had not even heard the twang of the bow.

‘Of course he could not know at the time the man was dead. The next minute — his last on board — was crowded with a tumult of events and sensations which beat about him like the sea upon a rock. I use the simile advisedly, because from his relation I am forced to believe he had preserved through it all a strange illusion of passiveness, as

though he had not acted but had suffered himself to be handled by the infernal powers who had selected him for the victim of their practical joke. The first thing that came to him was the grinding surge of the heavy davits swinging out at last — a jar which seemed to enter his body from the deck through the soles of his feet, and travel up his spine to the crown of his head. Then, the squall being very near now, another and a heavier swell lifted the passive hull in a threatening heave that checked his breath, while his brain and his heart together were pierced as with daggers by panic-stricken screams. “Let go! For God’s sake, let go! Let go! She’s going.” Following upon that the boat-falls ripped through the blocks, and a lot of men began to talk in startled tones under the awnings. “When these beggars did break out, their yelps were enough to wake the dead,” he said. Next, after the splashing shock of the boat literally dropped in the water, came the hollow noises of stamping and tumbling in her, mingled with confused shouts: “Unhook! Unhook! Shove! Unhook! Shove for your life! Here’s the squall down on us. . . .” He heard, high above his head, the faint muttering of the wind; he heard below his feet a cry of pain. A lost voice alongside started cursing a swivel hook. The ship began to buzz fore and aft like a disturbed hive, and, as quietly as he was telling me of all this — because just then he was very quiet in attitude, in face, in voice — he went on to say without the slightest warning as it were, “I stumbled over his legs.”

‘This was the first I heard of his having moved at all. I could not restrain a grunt of surprise. Something had started him off at last, but of the exact moment, of the cause that tore him out of his immobility, he knew no more than the uprooted tree knows of the wind that laid it low. All this had come to him: the sounds, the sights, the legs of the dead man — by Jove! The infernal joke was being crammed devilishly down his throat, but — look you — he was not going to admit of any sort of swallowing motion in his gullet. It’s extraordinary how he could cast upon you the spirit of his illusion. I listened as if to a tale of black magic at work upon a corpse.

“‘He went over sideways, very gently, and this is the last thing I remember seeing on board,” he continued. “I did not care what he did. It looked as though he were picking himself up: I thought he was picking himself up, of course: I expected him to bolt past me over the rail and drop into the boat after the others. I could hear them knocking about down there, and a voice as if crying up a shaft called out ‘George!’ Then three voices together raised a yell. They came to me separately: one bleated, another screamed, one howled. Ough!”

‘He shivered a little, and I beheld him rise slowly as if a steady hand from above had been pulling him out of the chair by his hair. Up, slowly — to his full height, and when his knees had locked stiff the hand let him go, and he swayed a little on his feet. There was a suggestion of awful stillness in his face, in his movements, in his very voice when he said “They shouted” — and involuntarily I pricked up my ears for the ghost of that shout that would be heard directly through the false effect of silence. “There were eight hundred people in that ship,” he said, impaling me to the back of my seat with an awful blank stare. “Eight hundred living people, and they were yelling after

the one dead man to come down and be saved. ‘Jump, George! Jump! Oh, jump!’ I stood by with my hand on the davit. I was very quiet. It had come over pitch dark. You could see neither sky nor sea. I heard the boat alongside go bump, bump, and not another sound down there for a while, but the ship under me was full of talking noises. Suddenly the skipper howled ‘Mein Gott! The squall! The squall! Shove off!’ With the first hiss of rain, and the first gust of wind, they screamed, ‘Jump, George! We’ll catch you! Jump!’ The ship began a slow plunge; the rain swept over her like a broken sea; my cap flew off my head; my breath was driven back into my throat. I heard as if I had been on the top of a tower another wild screech, ‘Geo-o-o-orge! Oh, jump!’ She was going down, down, head first under me. . . .”

‘He raised his hand deliberately to his face, and made picking motions with his fingers as though he had been bothered with cobwebs, and afterwards he looked into the open palm for quite half a second before he blurted out —

“I had jumped . . .” He checked himself, averted his gaze. . . . “It seems,” he added.

‘His clear blue eyes turned to me with a piteous stare, and looking at him standing before me, dumfounded and hurt, I was oppressed by a sad sense of resigned wisdom, mingled with the amused and profound pity of an old man helpless before a childish disaster.

“Looks like it,” I muttered.

“I knew nothing about it till I looked up,” he explained hastily. And that’s possible, too. You had to listen to him as you would to a small boy in trouble. He didn’t know. It had happened somehow. It would never happen again. He had landed partly on somebody and fallen across a thwart. He felt as though all his ribs on his left side must be broken; then he rolled over, and saw vaguely the ship he had deserted uprising above him, with the red side-light glowing large in the rain like a fire on the brow of a hill seen through a mist. “She seemed higher than a wall; she loomed like a cliff over the boat . . . I wished I could die,” he cried. “There was no going back. It was as if I had jumped into a well — into an everlasting deep hole. . . .”

Chapter 10

‘He locked his fingers together and tore them apart. Nothing could be more true: he had indeed jumped into an everlasting deep hole. He had tumbled from a height he could never scale again. By that time the boat had gone driving forward past the bows. It was too dark just then for them to see each other, and, moreover, they were blinded and half drowned with rain. He told me it was like being swept by a flood through a cavern. They turned their backs to the squall; the skipper, it seems, got an oar over the stern to keep the boat before it, and for two or three minutes the end of the world had come through a deluge in a pitchy blackness. The sea hissed “like twenty thousand kettles.” That’s his simile, not mine. I fancy there was not much wind after the first gust; and he himself had admitted at the inquiry that the sea never got up that night to any extent. He crouched down in the bows and stole a furtive glance back. He saw just one yellow gleam of the mast-head light high up and blurred like a last star ready to dissolve. “It terrified me to see it still there,” he said. That’s what he said. What terrified him was the thought that the drowning was not over yet. No doubt he wanted to be done with that abomination as quickly as possible. Nobody in the boat made a sound. In the dark she seemed to fly, but of course she could not have had much way. Then the shower swept ahead, and the great, distracting, hissing noise followed the rain into distance and died out. There was nothing to be heard then but the slight wash about the boat’s sides. Somebody’s teeth were chattering violently. A hand touched his back. A faint voice said, “You there?” Another cried out shakily, “She’s gone!” and they all stood up together to look astern. They saw no lights. All was black. A thin cold drizzle was driving into their faces. The boat lurched slightly. The teeth chattered faster, stopped, and began again twice before the man could master his shiver sufficiently to say, “Ju-ju-st in ti-ti-me. . . . Brrrr.” He recognised the voice of the chief engineer saying surlily, “I saw her go down. I happened to turn my head.” The wind had dropped almost completely.

‘They watched in the dark with their heads half turned to windward as if expecting to hear cries. At first he was thankful the night had covered up the scene before his eyes, and then to know of it and yet to have seen and heard nothing appeared somehow the culminating point of an awful misfortune. “Strange, isn’t it?” he murmured, interrupting himself in his disjointed narrative.

‘It did not seem so strange to me. He must have had an unconscious conviction that the reality could not be half as bad, not half as anguishing, appalling, and vengeful as the created terror of his imagination. I believe that, in this first moment, his heart was wrung with all the suffering, that his soul knew the accumulated savour of all the fear,

all the horror, all the despair of eight hundred human beings pounced upon in the night by a sudden and violent death, else why should he have said, "It seemed to me that I must jump out of that accursed boat and swim back to see — half a mile — more — any distance — to the very spot . . ."? Why this impulse? Do you see the significance? Why back to the very spot? Why not drown alongside — if he meant drowning? Why back to the very spot, to see — as if his imagination had to be soothed by the assurance that all was over before death could bring relief? I defy any one of you to offer another explanation. It was one of those bizarre and exciting glimpses through the fog. It was an extraordinary disclosure. He let it out as the most natural thing one could say. He fought down that impulse and then he became conscious of the silence. He mentioned this to me. A silence of the sea, of the sky, merged into one indefinite immensity still as death around these saved, palpitating lives. "You might have heard a pin drop in the boat," he said with a queer contraction of his lips, like a man trying to master his sensibilities while relating some extremely moving fact. A silence! God alone, who had willed him as he was, knows what he made of it in his heart. "I didn't think any spot on earth could be so still," he said. "You couldn't distinguish the sea from the sky; there was nothing to see and nothing to hear. Not a glimmer, not a shape, not a sound. You could have believed that every bit of dry land had gone to the bottom; that every man on earth but I and these beggars in the boat had got drowned." He leaned over the table with his knuckles propped amongst coffee-cups, liqueur-glasses, cigar-ends. "I seemed to believe it. Everything was gone and — all was over . . ." he fetched a deep sigh . . . "with me."

Marlow sat up abruptly and flung away his cheroot with force. It made a darting red trail like a toy rocket fired through the drapery of creepers. Nobody stirred.

"Hey, what do you think of it?" he cried with sudden animation. "Wasn't he true to himself, wasn't he? His saved life was over for want of ground under his feet, for want of sights for his eyes, for want of voices in his ears. Annihilation — hey! And all the time it was only a clouded sky, a sea that did not break, the air that did not stir. Only a night; only a silence.

"It lasted for a while, and then they were suddenly and unanimously moved to make a noise over their escape. "I knew from the first she would go." "Not a minute too soon." "A narrow squeak, b'gosh!" He said nothing, but the breeze that had dropped came back, a gentle draught freshened steadily, and the sea joined its murmuring voice to this talkative reaction succeeding the dumb moments of awe. She was gone! She was gone! Not a doubt of it. Nobody could have helped. They repeated the same words over and over again as though they couldn't stop themselves. Never doubted she would go. The lights were gone. No mistake. The lights were gone. Couldn't expect anything else. She had to go. . . . He noticed that they talked as though they had left behind them nothing but an empty ship. They concluded she would not have been long when she once started. It seemed to cause them some sort of satisfaction. They assured each other that she couldn't have been long about it — "Just shot down like a flat-iron." The chief engineer declared that the mast-head light at the moment of sinking seemed

to drop "like a lighted match you throw down." At this the second laughed hysterically. "I am g-g-glad, I am gla-a-a-d." His teeth went on "like an electric rattle," said Jim, "and all at once he began to cry. He wept and blubbered like a child, catching his breath and sobbing 'Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!' He would be quiet for a while and start suddenly, 'Oh, my poor arm! oh, my poor a-a-a-arm!' I felt I could knock him down. Some of them sat in the stern-sheets. I could just make out their shapes. Voices came to me, mumble, mumble, grunt, grunt. All this seemed very hard to bear. I was cold too. And I could do nothing. I thought that if I moved I would have to go over the side and . . ."

'His hand groped stealthily, came in contact with a liqueur-glass, and was withdrawn suddenly as if it had touched a red-hot coal. I pushed the bottle slightly. "Won't you have some more?" I asked. He looked at me angrily. "Don't you think I can tell you what there is to tell without screwing myself up?" he asked. The squad of globe-trotters had gone to bed. We were alone but for a vague white form erect in the shadow, that, being looked at, cringed forward, hesitated, backed away silently. It was getting late, but I did not hurry my guest.

'In the midst of his forlorn state he heard his companions begin to abuse some one. "What kept you from jumping, you lunatic?" said a scolding voice. The chief engineer left the stern-sheets, and could be heard clambering forward as if with hostile intentions against "the greatest idiot that ever was." The skipper shouted with rasping effort offensive epithets from where he sat at the oar. He lifted his head at that uproar, and heard the name "George," while a hand in the dark struck him on the breast. "What have you got to say for yourself, you fool?" queried somebody, with a sort of virtuous fury. "They were after me," he said. "They were abusing me — abusing me . . . by the name of George."

'He paused to stare, tried to smile, turned his eyes away and went on. "That little second puts his head right under my nose, 'Why, it's that blasted mate!' 'What!' howls the skipper from the other end of the boat. 'No!' shrieks the chief. And he too stooped to look at my face."

'The wind had left the boat suddenly. The rain began to fall again, and the soft, uninterrupted, a little mysterious sound with which the sea receives a shower arose on all sides in the night. "They were too taken aback to say anything more at first," he narrated steadily, "and what could I have to say to them?" He faltered for a moment, and made an effort to go on. "They called me horrible names." His voice, sinking to a whisper, now and then would leap up suddenly, hardened by the passion of scorn, as though he had been talking of secret abominations. "Never mind what they called me," he said grimly. "I could hear hate in their voices. A good thing too. They could not forgive me for being in that boat. They hated it. It made them mad. . . ." He laughed short. . . . "But it kept me from — Look! I was sitting with my arms crossed, on the gunwale! . . ." He perched himself smartly on the edge of the table and crossed his arms. . . . "Like this — see? One little tilt backwards and I would have been gone — after the others. One little tilt — the least bit — the least bit." He frowned, and

tapping his forehead with the tip of his middle finger, "It was there all the time," he said impressively. "All the time — that notion. And the rain — cold, thick, cold as melted snow — colder — on my thin cotton clothes — I'll never be so cold again in my life, I know. And the sky was black too — all black. Not a star, not a light anywhere. Nothing outside that confounded boat and those two yapping before me like a couple of mean mongrels at a tree'd thief. Yap! yap! 'What you doing here? You're a fine sort! Too much of a bloomin' gentleman to put your hand to it. Come out of your trance, did you? To sneak in? Did you?' Yap! yap! 'You ain't fit to live!' Yap! yap! Two of them together trying to out-bark each other. The other would bay from the stern through the rain — couldn't see him — couldn't make it out — some of his filthy jargon. Yap! yap! Bow-ow-ow-ow-ow! Yap! yap! It was sweet to hear them; it kept me alive, I tell you. It saved my life. At it they went, as if trying to drive me overboard with the noise! . . . 'I wonder you had pluck enough to jump. You ain't wanted here. If I had known who it was, I would have tipped you over — you skunk! What have you done with the other? Where did you get the pluck to jump — you coward? What's to prevent us three from firing you overboard?' . . . They were out of breath; the shower passed away upon the sea. Then nothing. There was nothing round the boat, not even a sound. Wanted to see me overboard, did they? Upon my soul! I think they would have had their wish if they had only kept quiet. Fire me overboard! Would they? 'Try,' I said. 'I would for twopence.' 'Too good for you,' they screeched together. It was so dark that it was only when one or the other of them moved that I was quite sure of seeing him. By heavens! I only wish they had tried."

'I couldn't help exclaiming, "What an extraordinary affair!"

"Not bad — eh?" he said, as if in some sort astounded. "They pretended to think I had done away with that donkey-man for some reason or other. Why should I? And how the devil was I to know? Didn't I get somehow into that boat? into that boat — I . . ." The muscles round his lips contracted into an unconscious grimace that tore through the mask of his usual expression — something violent, short-lived and illuminating like a twist of lightning that admits the eye for an instant into the secret convolutions of a cloud. "I did. I was plainly there with them — wasn't I? Isn't it awful a man should be driven to do a thing like that — and be responsible? What did I know about their George they were howling after? I remembered I had seen him curled up on the deck. 'Murdering coward!' the chief kept on calling me. He didn't seem able to remember any other two words. I didn't care, only his noise began to worry me. 'Shut up,' I said. At that he collected himself for a confounded screech. 'You killed him! You killed him!' 'No,' I shouted, 'but I will kill you directly.' I jumped up, and he fell backwards over a thwart with an awful loud thump. I don't know why. Too dark. Tried to step back I suppose. I stood still facing aft, and the wretched little second began to whine, 'You ain't going to hit a chap with a broken arm — and you call yourself a gentleman, too.' I heard a heavy tramp — one — two — and wheezy grunting. The other beast was coming at me, clattering his oar over the stern. I saw him moving, big, big — as you see a man in a mist, in a dream. 'Come on,' I cried. I would have tumbled him over

like a bale of shakings. He stopped, muttered to himself, and went back. Perhaps he had heard the wind. I didn't. It was the last heavy gust we had. He went back to his oar. I was sorry. I would have tried to — to . . .”

‘He opened and closed his curved fingers, and his hands had an eager and cruel flutter. “Steady, steady,” I murmured.

“Eh? What? I am not excited,” he remonstrated, awfully hurt, and with a convulsive jerk of his elbow knocked over the cognac bottle. I started forward, scraping my chair. He bounced off the table as if a mine had been exploded behind his back, and half turned before he alighted, crouching on his feet to show me a startled pair of eyes and a face white about the nostrils. A look of intense annoyance succeeded. “Awfully sorry. How clumsy of me!” he mumbled, very vexed, while the pungent odour of spilt alcohol enveloped us suddenly with an atmosphere of a low drinking-bout in the cool, pure darkness of the night. The lights had been put out in the dining-hall; our candle glimmered solitary in the long gallery, and the columns had turned black from pediment to capital. On the vivid stars the high corner of the Harbour Office stood out distinct across the Esplanade, as though the sombre pile had glided nearer to see and hear.

‘He assumed an air of indifference.

“I dare say I am less calm now than I was then. I was ready for anything. These were trifles. . . .”

“You had a lively time of it in that boat,” I remarked

“I was ready,” he repeated. “After the ship’s lights had gone, anything might have happened in that boat — anything in the world — and the world no wiser. I felt this, and I was pleased. It was just dark enough too. We were like men walled up quick in a roomy grave. No concern with anything on earth. Nobody to pass an opinion. Nothing mattered.” For the third time during this conversation he laughed harshly, but there was no one about to suspect him of being only drunk. “No fear, no law, no sounds, no eyes — not even our own, till — till sunrise at least.”

‘I was struck by the suggestive truth of his words. There is something peculiar in a small boat upon the wide sea. Over the lives borne from under the shadow of death there seems to fall the shadow of madness. When your ship fails you, your whole world seems to fail you; the world that made you, restrained you, took care of you. It is as if the souls of men floating on an abyss and in touch with immensity had been set free for any excess of heroism, absurdity, or abomination. Of course, as with belief, thought, love, hate, conviction, or even the visual aspect of material things, there are as many shipwrecks as there are men, and in this one there was something abject which made the isolation more complete — there was a villainy of circumstances that cut these men off more completely from the rest of mankind, whose ideal of conduct had never undergone the trial of a fiendish and appalling joke. They were exasperated with him for being a half-hearted shirker: he focussed on them his hatred of the whole thing; he would have liked to take a signal revenge for the abhorrent opportunity they had put in his way. Trust a boat on the high seas to bring out the Irrational that lurks at the bottom of every thought, sentiment, sensation, emotion. It was part of the burlesque

meanness pervading that particular disaster at sea that they did not come to blows. It was all threats, all a terribly effective feint, a sham from beginning to end, planned by the tremendous disdain of the Dark Powers whose real terrors, always on the verge of triumph, are perpetually foiled by the steadfastness of men. I asked, after waiting for a while, "Well, what happened?" A futile question. I knew too much already to hope for the grace of a single uplifting touch, for the favour of hinted madness, of shadowed horror. "Nothing," he said. "I meant business, but they meant noise only. Nothing happened."

'And the rising sun found him just as he had jumped up first in the bows of the boat. What a persistence of readiness! He had been holding the tiller in his hand, too, all the night. They had dropped the rudder overboard while attempting to ship it, and I suppose the tiller got kicked forward somehow while they were rushing up and down that boat trying to do all sorts of things at once so as to get clear of the side. It was a long heavy piece of hard wood, and apparently he had been clutching it for six hours or so. If you don't call that being ready! Can you imagine him, silent and on his feet half the night, his face to the gusts of rain, staring at sombre forms watchful of vague movements, straining his ears to catch rare low murmurs in the stern-sheets! Firmness of courage or effort of fear? What do you think? And the endurance is undeniable too. Six hours more or less on the defensive; six hours of alert immobility while the boat drove slowly or floated arrested, according to the caprice of the wind; while the sea, calmed, slept at last; while the clouds passed above his head; while the sky from an immensity lustreless and black, diminished to a sombre and lustrous vault, scintillated with a greater brilliance, faded to the east, paled at the zenith; while the dark shapes blotting the low stars astern got outlines, relief became shoulders, heads, faces, features, — confronted him with dreary stares, had dishevelled hair, torn clothes, blinked red eyelids at the white dawn. "They looked as though they had been knocking about drunk in gutters for a week," he described graphically; and then he muttered something about the sunrise being of a kind that foretells a calm day. You know that sailor habit of referring to the weather in every connection. And on my side his few mumbled words were enough to make me see the lower limb of the sun clearing the line of the horizon, the tremble of a vast ripple running over all the visible expanse of the sea, as if the waters had shuddered, giving birth to the globe of light, while the last puff of the breeze would stir the air in a sigh of relief.

"They sat in the stern shoulder to shoulder, with the skipper in the middle, like three dirty owls, and stared at me," I heard him say with an intention of hate that distilled a corrosive virtue into the commonplace words like a drop of powerful poison falling into a glass of water; but my thoughts dwelt upon that sunrise. I could imagine under the pellucid emptiness of the sky these four men imprisoned in the solitude of the sea, the lonely sun, regardless of the speck of life, ascending the clear curve of the heaven as if to gaze ardently from a greater height at his own splendour reflected in the still ocean. "They called out to me from aft," said Jim, "as though we had been chums together. I heard them. They were begging me to be sensible and drop that

‘blooming piece of wood.’ Why would I carry on so? They hadn’t done me any harm — had they? There had been no harm. . . . No harm!”

‘His face crimsoned as though he could not get rid of the air in his lungs.

““No harm!” he burst out. “I leave it to you. You can understand. Can’t you? You see it — don’t you? No harm! Good God! What more could they have done? Oh yes, I know very well — I jumped. Certainly. I jumped! I told you I jumped; but I tell you they were too much for any man. It was their doing as plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over. Can’t you see it? You must see it. Come. Speak — straight out.”

‘His uneasy eyes fastened upon mine, questioned, begged, challenged, entreated. For the life of me I couldn’t help murmuring, “You’ve been tried.” “More than is fair,” he caught up swiftly. “I wasn’t given half a chance — with a gang like that. And now they were friendly — oh, so damnably friendly! Chums, shipmates. All in the same boat. Make the best of it. They hadn’t meant anything. They didn’t care a hang for George. George had gone back to his berth for something at the last moment and got caught. The man was a manifest fool. Very sad, of course. . . . Their eyes looked at me; their lips moved; they wagged their heads at the other end of the boat — three of them; they beckoned — to me. Why not? Hadn’t I jumped? I said nothing. There are no words for the sort of things I wanted to say. If I had opened my lips just then I would have simply howled like an animal. I was asking myself when I would wake up. They urged me aloud to come aft and hear quietly what the skipper had to say. We were sure to be picked up before the evening — right in the track of all the Canal traffic; there was smoke to the north-west now.

““It gave me an awful shock to see this faint, faint blur, this low trail of brown mist through which you could see the boundary of sea and sky. I called out to them that I could hear very well where I was. The skipper started swearing, as hoarse as a crow. He wasn’t going to talk at the top of his voice for my accommodation. ‘Are you afraid they will hear you on shore?’ I asked. He glared as if he would have liked to claw me to pieces. The chief engineer advised him to humour me. He said I wasn’t right in my head yet. The other rose astern, like a thick pillar of flesh — and talked — talked. . . .”

‘Jim remained thoughtful. “Well?” I said. “What did I care what story they agreed to make up?” he cried recklessly. “They could tell what they jolly well liked. It was their business. I knew the story. Nothing they could make people believe could alter it for me. I let him talk, argue — talk, argue. He went on and on and on. Suddenly I felt my legs give way under me. I was sick, tired — tired to death. I let fall the tiller, turned my back on them, and sat down on the foremost thwart. I had enough. They called to me to know if I understood — wasn’t it true, every word of it? It was true, by God! after their fashion. I did not turn my head. I heard them palavering together. ‘The silly ass won’t say anything.’ ‘Oh, he understands well enough.’ ‘Let him be; he will be all right.’ ‘What can he do?’ What could I do? Weren’t we all in the same boat? I tried to be deaf. The smoke had disappeared to the northward. It was a dead calm.

They had a drink from the water-breaker, and I drank too. Afterwards they made a great business of spreading the boat-sail over the gunwales. Would I keep a look-out? They crept under, out of my sight, thank God! I felt weary, weary, done up, as if I hadn't had one hour's sleep since the day I was born. I couldn't see the water for the glitter of the sunshine. From time to time one of them would creep out, stand up to take a look all round, and get under again. I could hear spells of snoring below the sail. Some of them could sleep. One of them at least. I couldn't! All was light, light, and the boat seemed to be falling through it. Now and then I would feel quite surprised to find myself sitting on a thwart. . . ."

'He began to walk with measured steps to and fro before my chair, one hand in his trousers-pocket, his head bent thoughtfully, and his right arm at long intervals raised for a gesture that seemed to put out of his way an invisible intruder.

"I suppose you think I was going mad," he began in a changed tone. "And well you may, if you remember I had lost my cap. The sun crept all the way from east to west over my bare head, but that day I could not come to any harm, I suppose. The sun could not make me mad. . . ." His right arm put aside the idea of madness. . . . "Neither could it kill me. . . ." Again his arm repulsed a shadow. . . . "That rested with me."

"Did it?" I said, inexpressibly amazed at this new turn, and I looked at him with the same sort of feeling I might be fairly conceived to experience had he, after spinning round on his heel, presented an altogether new face.

"I didn't get brain fever, I did not drop dead either," he went on. "I didn't bother myself at all about the sun over my head. I was thinking as coolly as any man that ever sat thinking in the shade. That greasy beast of a skipper poked his big cropped head from under the canvas and screwed his fishy eyes up at me. 'Donnerwetter! you will die,' he growled, and drew in like a turtle. I had seen him. I had heard him. He didn't interrupt me. I was thinking just then that I wouldn't."

'He tried to sound my thought with an attentive glance dropped on me in passing. "Do you mean to say you had been deliberating with yourself whether you would die?" I asked in as impenetrable a tone as I could command. He nodded without stopping. "Yes, it had come to that as I sat there alone," he said. He passed on a few steps to the imaginary end of his beat, and when he flung round to come back both his hands were thrust deep into his pockets. He stopped short in front of my chair and looked down. "Don't you believe it?" he inquired with tense curiosity. I was moved to make a solemn declaration of my readiness to believe implicitly anything he thought fit to tell me.'

Chapter 11

‘He heard me out with his head on one side, and I had another glimpse through a rent in the mist in which he moved and had his being. The dim candle spluttered within the ball of glass, and that was all I had to see him by; at his back was the dark night with the clear stars, whose distant glitter disposed in retreating planes lured the eye into the depths of a greater darkness; and yet a mysterious light seemed to show me his boyish head, as if in that moment the youth within him had, for a moment, glowed and expired. “You are an awful good sort to listen like this,” he said. “It does me good. You don’t know what it is to me. You don’t” . . . words seemed to fail him. It was a distinct glimpse. He was a youngster of the sort you like to see about you; of the sort you like to imagine yourself to have been; of the sort whose appearance claims the fellowship of these illusions you had thought gone out, extinct, cold, and which, as if rekindled at the approach of another flame, give a flutter deep, deep down somewhere, give a flutter of light . . . of heat! . . . Yes; I had a glimpse of him then . . . and it was not the last of that kind. . . . “You don’t know what it is for a fellow in my position to be believed — make a clean breast of it to an elder man. It is so difficult — so awfully unfair — so hard to understand.”

‘The mists were closing again. I don’t know how old I appeared to him — and how much wise. Not half as old as I felt just then; not half as uselessly wise as I knew myself to be. Surely in no other craft as in that of the sea do the hearts of those already launched to sink or swim go out so much to the youth on the brink, looking with shining eyes upon that glitter of the vast surface which is only a reflection of his own glances full of fire. There is such magnificent vagueness in the expectations that had driven each of us to sea, such a glorious indefiniteness, such a beautiful greed of adventures that are their own and only reward. What we get — well, we won’t talk of that; but can one of us restrain a smile? In no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality — in no other is the beginning all illusion — the disenchantment more swift — the subjugation more complete. Hadn’t we all commenced with the same desire, ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory of the same cherished glamour through the sordid days of imprecation? What wonder that when some heavy prod gets home the bond is found to be close; that besides the fellowship of the craft there is felt the strength of a wider feeling — the feeling that binds a man to a child. He was there before me, believing that age and wisdom can find a remedy against the pain of truth, giving me a glimpse of himself as a young fellow in a scrape that is the very devil of a scrape, the sort of scrape greybeards wag at solemnly while they hide a smile. And he had been deliberating upon death — confound him! He had found that

to meditate about because he thought he had saved his life, while all its glamour had gone with the ship in the night. What more natural! It was tragic enough and funny enough in all conscience to call aloud for compassion, and in what was I better than the rest of us to refuse him my pity? And even as I looked at him the mists rolled into the rent, and his voice spoke —

“I was so lost, you know. It was the sort of thing one does not expect to happen to one. It was not like a fight, for instance.”

“It was not,” I admitted. He appeared changed, as if he had suddenly matured.

“One couldn’t be sure,” he muttered.

“Ah! You were not sure,” I said, and was placated by the sound of a faint sigh that passed between us like the flight of a bird in the night.

“Well, I wasn’t,” he said courageously. “It was something like that wretched story they made up. It was not a lie — but it wasn’t truth all the same. It was something. . . . One knows a downright lie. There was not the thickness of a sheet of paper between the right and the wrong of this affair.”

“How much more did you want?” I asked; but I think I spoke so low that he did not catch what I said. He had advanced his argument as though life had been a network of paths separated by chasms. His voice sounded reasonable.

“Suppose I had not — I mean to say, suppose I had stuck to the ship? Well. How much longer? Say a minute — half a minute. Come. In thirty seconds, as it seemed certain then, I would have been overboard; and do you think I would not have laid hold of the first thing that came in my way — oar, life-buoy, grating — anything? Wouldn’t you?”

“And be saved,” I interjected.

“I would have meant to be,” he retorted. “And that’s more than I meant when I” . . . he shivered as if about to swallow some nauseous drug . . . “jumped,” he pronounced with a convulsive effort, whose stress, as if propagated by the waves of the air, made my body stir a little in the chair. He fixed me with lowering eyes. “Don’t you believe me?” he cried. “I swear! . . . Confound it! You got me here to talk, and . . . You must! . . . You said you would believe.” “Of course I do,” I protested, in a matter-of-fact tone which produced a calming effect. “Forgive me,” he said. “Of course I wouldn’t have talked to you about all this if you had not been a gentleman. I ought to have known . . . I am — I am — a gentleman too . . .” “Yes, yes,” I said hastily. He was looking me squarely in the face, and withdrew his gaze slowly. “Now you understand why I didn’t after all . . . didn’t go out in that way. I wasn’t going to be frightened at what I had done. And, anyhow, if I had stuck to the ship I would have done my best to be saved. Men have been known to float for hours — in the open sea — and be picked up not much the worse for it. I might have lasted it out better than many others. There’s nothing the matter with my heart.” He withdrew his right fist from his pocket, and the blow he struck on his chest resounded like a muffled detonation in the night.

“No,” I said. He meditated, with his legs slightly apart and his chin sunk. “A hair’s-breadth,” he muttered. “Not the breadth of a hair between this and that. And at the time . . .”

“It is difficult to see a hair at midnight,” I put in, a little viciously I fear. Don’t you see what I mean by the solidarity of the craft? I was aggrieved against him, as though he had cheated me — me! — of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of my beginnings, as though he had robbed our common life of the last spark of its glamour. “And so you cleared out — at once.”

“Jumped,” he corrected me incisively. “Jumped — mind!” he repeated, and I wondered at the evident but obscure intention. “Well, yes! Perhaps I could not see then. But I had plenty of time and any amount of light in that boat. And I could think, too. Nobody would know, of course, but this did not make it any easier for me. You’ve got to believe that, too. I did not want all this talk. . . . No . . . Yes . . . I won’t lie . . . I wanted it: it is the very thing I wanted — there. Do you think you or anybody could have made me if I . . . I am — I am not afraid to tell. And I wasn’t afraid to think either. I looked it in the face. I wasn’t going to run away. At first — at night, if it hadn’t been for those fellows I might have . . . No! by heavens! I was not going to give them that satisfaction. They had done enough. They made up a story, and believed it for all I know. But I knew the truth, and I would live it down — alone, with myself. I wasn’t going to give in to such a beastly unfair thing. What did it prove after all? I was confoundedly cut up. Sick of life — to tell you the truth; but what would have been the good to shirk it — in — in — that way? That was not the way. I believe — I believe it would have — it would have ended — nothing.”

‘He had been walking up and down, but with the last word he turned short at me.

“What do you believe?” he asked with violence. A pause ensued, and suddenly I felt myself overcome by a profound and hopeless fatigue, as though his voice had startled me out of a dream of wandering through empty spaces whose immensity had harassed my soul and exhausted my body.

“ . . . Would have ended nothing,” he muttered over me obstinately, after a little while. “No! the proper thing was to face it out — alone for myself — wait for another chance — find out . . .”

Chapter 12

‘All around everything was still as far as the ear could reach. The mist of his feelings shifted between us, as if disturbed by his struggles, and in the rifts of the immaterial veil he would appear to my staring eyes distinct of form and pregnant with vague appeal like a symbolic figure in a picture. The chill air of the night seemed to lie on my limbs as heavy as a slab of marble.

“I see,” I murmured, more to prove to myself that I could break my state of numbness than for any other reason.

“The Avondale picked us up just before sunset,” he remarked moodily. “Steamed right straight for us. We had only to sit and wait.”

‘After a long interval, he said, “They told their story.” And again there was that oppressive silence. “Then only I knew what it was I had made up my mind to,” he added.

“You said nothing,” I whispered.

“What could I say?” he asked, in the same low tone. . . . “Shock slight. Stopped the ship. Ascertained the damage. Took measures to get the boats out without creating a panic. As the first boat was lowered ship went down in a squall. Sank like lead. . . . What could be more clear” . . . he hung his head . . . “and more awful?” His lips quivered while he looked straight into my eyes. “I had jumped — hadn’t I?” he asked, dismayed. “That’s what I had to live down. The story didn’t matter.” . . . He clasped his hands for an instant, glanced right and left into the gloom: “It was like cheating the dead,” he stammered.

“And there were no dead,” I said.

‘He went away from me at this. That is the only way I can describe it. In a moment I saw his back close to the balustrade. He stood there for some time, as if admiring the purity and the peace of the night. Some flowering-shrub in the garden below spread its powerful scent through the damp air. He returned to me with hasty steps.

“And that did not matter,” he said, as stubbornly as you please.

“Perhaps not,” I admitted. I began to have a notion he was too much for me. After all, what did I know?

“Dead or not dead, I could not get clear,” he said. “I had to live; hadn’t I?”

“Well, yes — if you take it in that way,” I mumbled.

“I was glad, of course,” he threw out carelessly, with his mind fixed on something else. “The exposure,” he pronounced slowly, and lifted his head. “Do you know what was my first thought when I heard? I was relieved. I was relieved to learn that those shouts — did I tell you I had heard shouts? No? Well, I did. Shouts for help . . . blown

along with the drizzle. Imagination, I suppose. And yet I can hardly . . . How stupid. . . . The others did not. I asked them afterwards. They all said No. No? And I was hearing them even then! I might have known — but I didn't think — I only listened. Very faint screams — day after day. Then that little half-caste chap here came up and spoke to me. 'The Patna . . . French gunboat . . . towed successfully to Aden . . . Investigation . . . Marine Office . . . Sailors' Home . . . arrangements made for your board and lodging!' I walked along with him, and I enjoyed the silence. So there had been no shouting. Imagination. I had to believe him. I could hear nothing any more. I wonder how long I could have stood it. It was getting worse, too . . . I mean — louder." 'He fell into thought.

"And I had heard nothing! Well — so be it. But the lights! The lights did go! We did not see them. They were not there. If they had been, I would have swam back — I would have gone back and shouted alongside — I would have begged them to take me on board. . . . I would have had my chance. . . . You doubt me? . . . How do you know how I felt? . . . What right have you to doubt? . . . I very nearly did it as it was — do you understand?" His voice fell. "There was not a glimmer — not a glimmer," he protested mournfully. "Don't you understand that if there had been, you would not have seen me here? You see me — and you doubt."

'I shook my head negatively. This question of the lights being lost sight of when the boat could not have been more than a quarter of a mile from the ship was a matter for much discussion. Jim stuck to it that there was nothing to be seen after the first shower had cleared away; and the others had affirmed the same thing to the officers of the Avondale. Of course people shook their heads and smiled. One old skipper who sat near me in court tickled my ear with his white beard to murmur, "Of course they would lie." As a matter of fact nobody lied; not even the chief engineer with his story of the mast-head light dropping like a match you throw down. Not consciously, at least. A man with his liver in such a state might very well have seen a floating spark in the corner of his eye when stealing a hurried glance over his shoulder. They had seen no light of any sort though they were well within range, and they could only explain this in one way: the ship had gone down. It was obvious and comforting. The foreseen fact coming so swiftly had justified their haste. No wonder they did not cast about for any other explanation. Yet the true one was very simple, and as soon as Brierly suggested it the court ceased to bother about the question. If you remember, the ship had been stopped, and was lying with her head on the course steered through the night, with her stern canted high and her bows brought low down in the water through the filling of the fore-compartment. Being thus out of trim, when the squall struck her a little on the quarter, she swung head to wind as sharply as though she had been at anchor. By this change in her position all her lights were in a very few moments shut off from the boat to leeward. It may very well be that, had they been seen, they would have had the effect of a mute appeal — that their glimmer lost in the darkness of the cloud would have had the mysterious power of the human glance that can awaken the feelings of remorse and pity. It would have said, "I am here — still here" . . . and what more

can the eye of the most forsaken of human beings say? But she turned her back on them as if in disdain of their fate: she had swung round, burdened, to glare stubbornly at the new danger of the open sea which she so strangely survived to end her days in a breaking-up yard, as if it had been her recorded fate to die obscurely under the blows of many hammers. What were the various ends their destiny provided for the pilgrims I am unable to say; but the immediate future brought, at about nine o'clock next morning, a French gunboat homeward bound from Reunion. The report of her commander was public property. He had swept a little out of his course to ascertain what was the matter with that steamer floating dangerously by the head upon a still and hazy sea. There was an ensign, union down, flying at her main gaff (the serang had the sense to make a signal of distress at daylight); but the cooks were preparing the food in the cooking-boxes forward as usual. The decks were packed as close as a sheep-pen: there were people perched all along the rails, jammed on the bridge in a solid mass; hundreds of eyes stared, and not a sound was heard when the gunboat ranged abreast, as if all that multitude of lips had been sealed by a spell.

'The Frenchman hailed, could get no intelligible reply, and after ascertaining through his binoculars that the crowd on deck did not look plague-stricken, decided to send a boat. Two officers came on board, listened to the serang, tried to talk with the Arab, couldn't make head or tail of it: but of course the nature of the emergency was obvious enough. They were also very much struck by discovering a white man, dead and curled up peacefully on the bridge. "Fort intrigues par ce cadavre," as I was informed a long time after by an elderly French lieutenant whom I came across one afternoon in Sydney, by the merest chance, in a sort of cafe, and who remembered the affair perfectly. Indeed this affair, I may notice in passing, had an extraordinary power of defying the shortness of memories and the length of time: it seemed to live, with a sort of uncanny vitality, in the minds of men, on the tips of their tongues. I've had the questionable pleasure of meeting it often, years afterwards, thousands of miles away, emerging from the remotest possible talk, coming to the surface of the most distant allusions. Has it not turned up to-night between us? And I am the only seaman here. I am the only one to whom it is a memory. And yet it has made its way out! But if two men who, unknown to each other, knew of this affair met accidentally on any spot of this earth, the thing would pop up between them as sure as fate, before they parted. I had never seen that Frenchman before, and at the end of an hour we had done with each other for life: he did not seem particularly talkative either; he was a quiet, massive chap in a creased uniform, sitting drowsily over a tumbler half full of some dark liquid. His shoulder-straps were a bit tarnished, his clean-shaved cheeks were large and sallow; he looked like a man who would be given to taking snuff — don't you know? I won't say he did; but the habit would have fitted that kind of man. It all began by his handing me a number of Home News, which I didn't want, across the marble table. I said "Merci." We exchanged a few apparently innocent remarks, and suddenly, before I knew how it had come about, we were in the midst of it, and

he was telling me how much they had been “intrigued by that corpse.” It turned out he had been one of the boarding officers.

‘In the establishment where we sat one could get a variety of foreign drinks which were kept for the visiting naval officers, and he took a sip of the dark medical-looking stuff, which probably was nothing more nasty than cassis a l’eau, and glancing with one eye into the tumbler, shook his head slightly. “Impossible de comprendre — vous concevez,” he said, with a curious mixture of unconcern and thoughtfulness. I could very easily conceive how impossible it had been for them to understand. Nobody in the gunboat knew enough English to get hold of the story as told by the serang. There was a good deal of noise, too, round the two officers. “They crowded upon us. There was a circle round that dead man (autour de ce mort),” he described. “One had to attend to the most pressing. These people were beginning to agitate themselves — Parbleu! A mob like that — don’t you see?” he interjected with philosophic indulgence. As to the bulkhead, he had advised his commander that the safest thing was to leave it alone, it was so villainous to look at. They got two hawsers on board promptly (en toute hale) and took the Patna in tow — stern foremost at that — which, under the circumstances, was not so foolish, since the rudder was too much out of the water to be of any great use for steering, and this manoeuvre eased the strain on the bulkhead, whose state, he expounded with stolid glibness, demanded the greatest care (exigeait les plus grands menagements). I could not help thinking that my new acquaintance must have had a voice in most of these arrangements: he looked a reliable officer, no longer very active, and he was seamanlike too, in a way, though as he sat there, with his thick fingers clasped lightly on his stomach, he reminded you of one of those snuffy, quiet village priests, into whose ears are poured the sins, the sufferings, the remorse of peasant generations, on whose faces the placid and simple expression is like a veil thrown over the mystery of pain and distress. He ought to have had a threadbare black soutane buttoned smoothly up to his ample chin, instead of a frock-coat with shoulder-straps and brass buttons. His broad bosom heaved regularly while he went on telling me that it had been the very devil of a job, as doubtless (sans doute) I could figure to myself in my quality of a seaman (en votre qualite de marin). At the end of the period he inclined his body slightly towards me, and, pursing his shaved lips, allowed the air to escape with a gentle hiss. “Luckily,” he continued, “the sea was level like this table, and there was no more wind than there is here.” . . . The place struck me as indeed intolerably stuffy, and very hot; my face burned as though I had been young enough to be embarrassed and blushing. They had directed their course, he pursued, to the nearest English port “naturellement,” where their responsibility ceased, “Dieu merci.” . . . He blew out his flat cheeks a little. . . . “Because, mind you (notez bien), all the time of towing we had two quartermasters stationed with axes by the hawsers, to cut us clear of our tow in case she . . .” He fluttered downwards his heavy eyelids, making his meaning as plain as possible. . . . “What would you! One does what one can (on fait ce qu’on peut),” and for a moment he managed to invest his ponderous immobility with an air of resignation. “Two quartermasters — thirty hours — always

there. Two!" he repeated, lifting up his right hand a little, and exhibiting two fingers. This was absolutely the first gesture I saw him make. It gave me the opportunity to "note" a starred scar on the back of his hand — effect of a gunshot clearly; and, as if my sight had been made more acute by this discovery, I perceived also the seam of an old wound, beginning a little below the temple and going out of sight under the short grey hair at the side of his head — the graze of a spear or the cut of a sabre. He clasped his hands on his stomach again. "I remained on board that — that — my memory is going (s'en va). Ah! Patt-na. C'est bien ca. Patt-na. Merci. It is droll how one forgets. I stayed on that ship thirty hours. . . ."

"You did!" I exclaimed. Still gazing at his hands, he pursed his lips a little, but this time made no hissing sound. "It was judged proper," he said, lifting his eyebrows dispassionately, "that one of the officers should remain to keep an eye open (pour ouvrir l'oeil)" . . . he sighed idly . . . "and for communicating by signals with the towing ship — do you see? — and so on. For the rest, it was my opinion too. We made our boats ready to drop over — and I also on that ship took measures. . . . Enfin! One has done one's possible. It was a delicate position. Thirty hours! They prepared me some food. As for the wine — go and whistle for it — not a drop." In some extraordinary way, without any marked change in his inert attitude and in the placid expression of his face, he managed to convey the idea of profound disgust. "I — you know — when it comes to eating without my glass of wine — I am nowhere."

'I was afraid he would enlarge upon the grievance, for though he didn't stir a limb or twitch a feature, he made one aware how much he was irritated by the recollection. But he seemed to forget all about it. They delivered their charge to the "port authorities," as he expressed it. He was struck by the calmness with which it had been received. "One might have thought they had such a droll find (drole de trouvaille) brought them every day. You are extraordinary — you others," he commented, with his back propped against the wall, and looking himself as incapable of an emotional display as a sack of meal. There happened to be a man-of-war and an Indian Marine steamer in the harbour at the time, and he did not conceal his admiration of the efficient manner in which the boats of these two ships cleared the Patna of her passengers. Indeed his torpid demeanour concealed nothing: it had that mysterious, almost miraculous, power of producing striking effects by means impossible of detection which is the last word of the highest art. "Twenty-five minutes — watch in hand — twenty-five, no more." . . . He unclasped and clasped again his fingers without removing his hands from his stomach, and made it infinitely more effective than if he had thrown up his arms to heaven in amazement. . . . "All that lot (tout ce monde) on shore — with their little affairs — nobody left but a guard of seamen (marins de l'Etat) and that interesting corpse (cet interessant cadavre). Twenty-five minutes." . . . With downcast eyes and his head tilted slightly on one side he seemed to roll knowingly on his tongue the savour of a smart bit of work. He persuaded one without any further demonstration that his approval was eminently worth having, and resuming his hardly interrupted immobility, he went on to inform me that, being under orders to make the best of their way to

Toulon, they left in two hours' time, "so that (de sorte que) there are many things in this incident of my life (dans cet episode de ma vie) which have remained obscure."

Chapter 13

‘After these words, and without a change of attitude, he, so to speak, submitted himself passively to a state of silence. I kept him company; and suddenly, but not abruptly, as if the appointed time had arrived for his moderate and husky voice to come out of his immobility, he pronounced, “Mon Dieu! how the time passes!” Nothing could have been more commonplace than this remark; but its utterance coincided for me with a moment of vision. It’s extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. Perhaps it’s just as well; and it may be that it is this very dullness that makes life to the incalculable majority so supportable and so welcome. Nevertheless, there can be but few of us who had never known one of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much — everything — in a flash — before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence. I raised my eyes when he spoke, and I saw him as though I had never seen him before. I saw his chin sunk on his breast, the clumsy folds of his coat, his clasped hands, his motionless pose, so curiously suggestive of his having been simply left there. Time had passed indeed: it had overtaken him and gone ahead. It had left him hopelessly behind with a few poor gifts: the iron-grey hair, the heavy fatigue of the tanned face, two scars, a pair of tarnished shoulder-straps; one of those steady, reliable men who are the raw material of great reputations, one of those uncounted lives that are buried without drums and trumpets under the foundations of monumental successes. “I am now third lieutenant of the *Victorieuse*” (she was the flagship of the French Pacific squadron at the time), he said, detaching his shoulders from the wall a couple of inches to introduce himself. I bowed slightly on my side of the table, and told him I commanded a merchant vessel at present anchored in Rushcutters’ Bay. He had “remarked” her, — a pretty little craft. He was very civil about it in his impassive way. I even fancy he went the length of tilting his head in compliment as he repeated, breathing visibly the while, “Ah, yes. A little craft painted black — very pretty — very pretty (*tres coquet*).” After a time he twisted his body slowly to face the glass door on our right. “A dull town (*triste ville*),” he observed, staring into the street. It was a brilliant day; a southerly buster was raging, and we could see the passers-by, men and women, buffeted by the wind on the sidewalks, the sunlit fronts of the houses across the road blurred by the tall whirls of dust. “I descended on shore,” he said, “to stretch my legs a little, but . . .” He didn’t finish, and sank into the depths of his repose. “Pray — tell me,” he began, coming up ponderously, “what was there at the bottom of this affair — precisely (*au juste*)? It is curious. That dead man, for instance — and so on.”

“There were living men too,” I said; “much more curious.”

“No doubt, no doubt,” he agreed half audibly, then, as if after mature consideration, murmured, “Evidently.” I made no difficulty in communicating to him what had interested me most in this affair. It seemed as though he had a right to know: hadn’t he spent thirty hours on board the Palna — had he not taken the succession, so to speak, had he not done “his possible”? He listened to me, looking more priest-like than ever, and with what — probably on account of his downcast eyes — had the appearance of devout concentration. Once or twice he elevated his eyebrows (but without raising his eyelids), as one would say “The devil!” Once he calmly exclaimed, “Ah, bah!” under his breath, and when I had finished he pursed his lips in a deliberate way and emitted a sort of sorrowful whistle.

‘In any one else it might have been an evidence of boredom, a sign of indifference; but he, in his occult way, managed to make his immobility appear profoundly responsive, and as full of valuable thoughts as an egg is of meat. What he said at last was nothing more than a “Very interesting,” pronounced politely, and not much above a whisper. Before I got over my disappointment he added, but as if speaking to himself, “That’s it. That is it.” His chin seemed to sink lower on his breast, his body to weigh heavier on his seat. I was about to ask him what he meant, when a sort of preparatory tremor passed over his whole person, as a faint ripple may be seen upon stagnant water even before the wind is felt. “And so that poor young man ran away along with the others,” he said, with grave tranquillity.

‘I don’t know what made me smile: it is the only genuine smile of mine I can remember in connection with Jim’s affair. But somehow this simple statement of the matter sounded funny in French. . . . “S’est enfi avec les autres,” had said the lieutenant. And suddenly I began to admire the discrimination of the man. He had made out the point at once: he did get hold of the only thing I cared about. I felt as though I were taking professional opinion on the case. His imperturbable and mature calmness was that of an expert in possession of the facts, and to whom one’s perplexities are mere child’s-play. “Ah! The young, the young,” he said indulgently. “And after all, one does not die of it.” “Die of what?” I asked swiftly. “Of being afraid.” He elucidated his meaning and sipped his drink.

‘I perceived that the three last fingers of his wounded hand were stiff and could not move independently of each other, so that he took up his tumbler with an ungainly clutch. “One is always afraid. One may talk, but . . .” He put down the glass awkwardly. . . . “The fear, the fear — look you — it is always there.” . . . He touched his breast near a brass button, on the very spot where Jim had given a thump to his own when protesting that there was nothing the matter with his heart. I suppose I made some sign of dissent, because he insisted, “Yes! yes! One talks, one talks; this is all very fine; but at the end of the reckoning one is no cleverer than the next man — and no more brave. Brave! This is always to be seen. I have rolled my hump (roule ma bosse),” he said, using the slang expression with imperturbable seriousness, “in all parts of the world; I have known brave men — famous ones! Allez!” . . . He drank carelessly. . . . “Brave — you conceive — in the Service — one has got to be — the trade demands it (le metier

veut ca). Is it not so?" he appealed to me reasonably. "Eh bien! Each of them — I say each of them, if he were an honest man — bien entendu — would confess that there is a point — there is a point — for the best of us — there is somewhere a point when you let go everything (vous lachez tout). And you have got to live with that truth — do you see? Given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come. Abominable funk (un trac epouvantable). And even for those who do not believe this truth there is fear all the same — the fear of themselves. Absolutely so. Trust me. Yes. Yes. . . . At my age one knows what one is talking about — que diable!" . . . He had delivered himself of all this as immovably as though he had been the mouthpiece of abstract wisdom, but at this point he heightened the effect of detachment by beginning to twirl his thumbs slowly. "It's evident — parbleu!" he continued; "for, make up your mind as much as you like, even a simple headache or a fit of indigestion (un derangement d'estomac) is enough to . . . Take me, for instance — I have made my proofs. Eh bien! I, who am speaking to you, once . . ."

'He drained his glass and returned to his twirling. "No, no; one does not die of it," he pronounced finally, and when I found he did not mean to proceed with the personal anecdote, I was extremely disappointed; the more so as it was not the sort of story, you know, one could very well press him for. I sat silent, and he too, as if nothing could please him better. Even his thumbs were still now. Suddenly his lips began to move. "That is so," he resumed placidly. "Man is born a coward (L'homme est ne poltron). It is a difficulty — parbleu! It would be too easy other wise. But habit — habit — necessity — do you see? — the eye of others — voila. One puts up with it. And then the example of others who are no better than yourself, and yet make good countenance. . . ."

'His voice ceased.

"That young man — you will observe — had none of these inducements — at least at the moment," I remarked.

'He raised his eyebrows forgivingly: "I don't say; I don't say. The young man in question might have had the best dispositions — the best dispositions," he repeated, wheezing a little.

"I am glad to see you taking a lenient view," I said. "His own feeling in the matter was — ah! — hopeful, and . . ."

'The shuffle of his feet under the table interrupted me. He drew up his heavy eyelids. Drew up, I say — no other expression can describe the steady deliberation of the act — and at last was disclosed completely to me. I was confronted by two narrow grey circlets, like two tiny steel rings around the profound blackness of the pupils. The sharp glance, coming from that massive body, gave a notion of extreme efficiency, like a razor-edge on a battle-axe. "Pardon," he said punctiliously. His right hand went up, and he swayed forward. "Allow me . . . I contended that one may get on knowing very well that one's courage does not come of itself (ne vient pas tout seul). There's nothing much in that to get upset about. One truth the more ought not to make life impossible. . . . But the honour — the honour, monsieur! . . . The honour . . . that

is real — that is! And what life may be worth when” . . . he got on his feet with a ponderous impetuosity, as a startled ox might scramble up from the grass . . . “when the honour is gone — ah ca! par exemple — I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion — because — monsieur — I know nothing of it.”

‘I had risen too, and, trying to throw infinite politeness into our attitudes, we faced each other mutely, like two china dogs on a mantelpiece. Hang the fellow! he had pricked the bubble. The blight of futility that lies in wait for men’s speeches had fallen upon our conversation, and made it a thing of empty sounds. “Very well,” I said, with a disconcerted smile; “but couldn’t it reduce itself to not being found out?” He made as if to retort readily, but when he spoke he had changed his mind. “This, monsieur, is too fine for me — much above me — I don’t think about it.” He bowed heavily over his cap, which he held before him by the peak, between the thumb and the forefinger of his wounded hand. I bowed too. We bowed together: we scraped our feet at each other with much ceremony, while a dirty specimen of a waiter looked on critically, as though he had paid for the performance. “Serviteur,” said the Frenchman. Another scrape. “Monsieur” . . . “Monsieur.” . . . The glass door swung behind his burly back. I saw the southerly buster get hold of him and drive him down wind with his hand to his head, his shoulders braced, and the tails of his coat blown hard against his legs.

‘I sat down again alone and discouraged — discouraged about Jim’s case. If you wonder that after more than three years it had preserved its actuality, you must know that I had seen him only very lately. I had come straight from Samarang, where I had loaded a cargo for Sydney: an utterly uninteresting bit of business, — what Charley here would call one of my rational transactions, — and in Samarang I had seen something of Jim. He was then working for De Jongh, on my recommendation. Water-clerk. “My representative afloat,” as De Jongh called him. You can’t imagine a mode of life more barren of consolation, less capable of being invested with a spark of glamour — unless it be the business of an insurance canvasser. Little Bob Stanton — Charley here knew him well — had gone through that experience. The same who got drowned afterwards trying to save a lady’s-maid in the Sephora disaster. A case of collision on a hazy morning off the Spanish coast — you may remember. All the passengers had been packed tidily into the boats and shoved clear of the ship, when Bob sheered alongside again and scrambled back on deck to fetch that girl. How she had been left behind I can’t make out; anyhow, she had gone completely crazy — wouldn’t leave the ship — held to the rail like grim death. The wrestling-match could be seen plainly from the boats; but poor Bob was the shortest chief mate in the merchant service, and the woman stood five feet ten in her shoes and was as strong as a horse, I’ve been told. So it went on, pull devil, pull baker, the wretched girl screaming all the time, and Bob letting out a yell now and then to warn his boat to keep well clear of the ship. One of the hands told me, hiding a smile at the recollection, “It was for all the world, sir, like a naughty youngster fighting with his mother.” The same old chap said that “At the last we could see that Mr. Stanton had given up hauling at the gal, and just stood by looking at her, watchful like. We thought afterwards he must’ve been

reckoning that, maybe, the rush of water would tear her away from the rail by-and-by and give him a show to save her. We daren't come alongside for our life; and after a bit the old ship went down all on a sudden with a lurch to starboard — plop. The suck in was something awful. We never saw anything alive or dead come up." Poor Bob's spell of shore-life had been one of the complications of a love affair, I believe. He fondly hoped he had done with the sea for ever, and made sure he had got hold of all the bliss on earth, but it came to canvassing in the end. Some cousin of his in Liverpool put up to it. He used to tell us his experiences in that line. He made us laugh till we cried, and, not altogether displeased at the effect, undersized and bearded to the waist like a gnome, he would tiptoe amongst us and say, "It's all very well for you beggars to laugh, but my immortal soul was shrivelled down to the size of a parched pea after a week of that work." I don't know how Jim's soul accommodated itself to the new conditions of his life — I was kept too busy in getting him something to do that would keep body and soul together — but I am pretty certain his adventurous fancy was suffering all the pangs of starvation. It had certainly nothing to feed upon in this new calling. It was distressing to see him at it, though he tackled it with a stubborn serenity for which I must give him full credit. I kept my eye on his shabby plodding with a sort of notion that it was a punishment for the heroics of his fancy — an expiation for his craving after more glamour than he could carry. He had loved too well to imagine himself a glorious racehorse, and now he was condemned to toil without honour like a costermonger's donkey. He did it very well. He shut himself in, put his head down, said never a word. Very well; very well indeed — except for certain fantastic and violent outbreaks, on the deplorable occasions when the irrepressible Patna case cropped up. Unfortunately that scandal of the Eastern seas would not die out. And this is the reason why I could never feel I had done with Jim for good.

'I sat thinking of him after the French lieutenant had left, not, however, in connection with De Jongh's cool and gloomy backshop, where we had hurriedly shaken hands not very long ago, but as I had seen him years before in the last flickers of the candle, alone with me in the long gallery of the Malabar House, with the chill and the darkness of the night at his back. The respectable sword of his country's law was suspended over his head. To-morrow — or was it to-day? (midnight had slipped by long before we parted) — the marble-faced police magistrate, after distributing fines and terms of imprisonment in the assault-and-battery case, would take up the awful weapon and smite his bowed neck. Our communion in the night was uncommonly like a last vigil with a condemned man. He was guilty too. He was guilty — as I had told myself repeatedly, guilty and done for; nevertheless, I wished to spare him the mere detail of a formal execution. I don't pretend to explain the reasons of my desire — I don't think I could; but if you haven't got a sort of notion by this time, then I must have been very obscure in my narrative, or you too sleepy to seize upon the sense of my words. I don't defend my morality. There was no morality in the impulse which induced me to lay before him Brierly's plan of evasion — I may call it — in all its primitive simplicity. There were the rupees — absolutely ready in my pocket and very

much at his service. Oh! a loan; a loan of course — and if an introduction to a man (in Rangoon) who could put some work in his way . . . Why! with the greatest pleasure. I had pen, ink, and paper in my room on the first floor And even while I was speaking I was impatient to begin the letter — day, month, year, 2.30 A.M. . . . for the sake of our old friendship I ask you to put some work in the way of Mr. James So-and-so, in whom, &c., &c. . . . I was even ready to write in that strain about him. If he had not enlisted my sympathies he had done better for himself — he had gone to the very fount and origin of that sentiment he had reached the secret sensibility of my egoism. I am concealing nothing from you, because were I to do so my action would appear more unintelligible than any man's action has the right to be, and — in the second place — to-morrow you will forget my sincerity along with the other lessons of the past. In this transaction, to speak grossly and precisely, I was the irreproachable man; but the subtle intentions of my immorality were defeated by the moral simplicity of the criminal. No doubt he was selfish too, but his selfishness had a higher origin, a more lofty aim. I discovered that, say what I would, he was eager to go through the ceremony of execution, and I didn't say much, for I felt that in argument his youth would tell against me heavily: he believed where I had already ceased to doubt. There was something fine in the wildness of his unexpressed, hardly formulated hope. "Clear out! Couldn't think of it," he said, with a shake of the head. "I make you an offer for which I neither demand nor expect any sort of gratitude," I said; "you shall repay the money when convenient, and . . ." "Awfully good of you," he muttered without looking up. I watched him narrowly: the future must have appeared horribly uncertain to him; but he did not falter, as though indeed there had been nothing wrong with his heart. I felt angry — not for the first time that night. "The whole wretched business," I said, "is bitter enough, I should think, for a man of your kind . . ." "It is, it is," he whispered twice, with his eyes fixed on the floor. It was heartrending. He towered above the light, and I could see the down on his cheek, the colour mantling warm under the smooth skin of his face. Believe me or not, I say it was outrageously heartrending. It provoked me to brutality. "Yes," I said; "and allow me to confess that I am totally unable to imagine what advantage you can expect from this licking of the dregs." "Advantage!" he murmured out of his stillness. "I am dashed if I do," I said, enraged. "I've been trying to tell you all there is in it," he went on slowly, as if meditating something unanswerable. "But after all, it is my trouble." I opened my mouth to retort, and discovered suddenly that I'd lost all confidence in myself; and it was as if he too had given me up, for he mumbled like a man thinking half aloud. "Went away . . . went into hospitals. . . . Not one of them would face it. . . . They! . . ." He moved his hand slightly to imply disdain. "But I've got to get over this thing, and I mustn't shirk any of it or . . . I won't shirk any of it." He was silent. He gazed as though he had been haunted. His unconscious face reflected the passing expressions of scorn, of despair, of resolution — reflected them in turn, as a magic mirror would reflect the gliding passage of unearthly shapes. He lived surrounded by deceitful ghosts, by austere shades. "Oh! nonsense, my dear fellow," I began. He had a movement of impatience. "You don't seem to understand,"

he said incisively; then looking at me without a wink, "I may have jumped, but I don't run away." "I meant no offence," I said; and added stupidly, "Better men than you have found it expedient to run, at times." He coloured all over, while in my confusion I half-choked myself with my own tongue. "Perhaps so," he said at last, "I am not good enough; I can't afford it. I am bound to fight this thing down — I am fighting it now." I got out of my chair and felt stiff all over. The silence was embarrassing, and to put an end to it I imagined nothing better but to remark, "I had no idea it was so late," in an airy tone. . . . "I dare say you have had enough of this," he said brusquely: "and to tell you the truth" — he began to look round for his hat — "so have I."

'Well! he had refused this unique offer. He had struck aside my helping hand; he was ready to go now, and beyond the balustrade the night seemed to wait for him very still, as though he had been marked down for its prey. I heard his voice. "Ah! here it is." He had found his hat. For a few seconds we hung in the wind. "What will you do after — after . . ." I asked very low. "Go to the dogs as likely as not," he answered in a gruff mutter. I had recovered my wits in a measure, and judged best to take it lightly. "Pray remember," I said, "that I should like very much to see you again before you go." "I don't know what's to prevent you. The damned thing won't make me invisible," he said with intense bitterness, — "no such luck." And then at the moment of taking leave he treated me to a ghastly muddle of dubious stammers and movements, to an awful display of hesitations. God forgive him — me! He had taken it into his fanciful head that I was likely to make some difficulty as to shaking hands. It was too awful for words. I believe I shouted suddenly at him as you would bellow to a man you saw about to walk over a cliff; I remember our voices being raised, the appearance of a miserable grin on his face, a crushing clutch on my hand, a nervous laugh. The candle spluttered out, and the thing was over at last, with a groan that floated up to me in the dark. He got himself away somehow. The night swallowed his form. He was a horrible bungler. Horrible. I heard the quick crunch-crunch of the gravel under his boots. He was running. Absolutely running, with nowhere to go to. And he was not yet four-and-twenty.'

Chapter 14

‘I slept little, hurried over my breakfast, and after a slight hesitation gave up my early morning visit to my ship. It was really very wrong of me, because, though my chief mate was an excellent man all round, he was the victim of such black imaginings that if he did not get a letter from his wife at the expected time he would go quite distracted with rage and jealousy, lose all grip on the work, quarrel with all hands, and either weep in his cabin or develop such a ferocity of temper as all but drove the crew to the verge of mutiny. The thing had always seemed inexplicable to me: they had been married thirteen years; I had a glimpse of her once, and, honestly, I couldn’t conceive a man abandoned enough to plunge into sin for the sake of such an unattractive person. I don’t know whether I have not done wrong by refraining from putting that view before poor Selvin: the man made a little hell on earth for himself, and I also suffered indirectly, but some sort of, no doubt, false delicacy prevented me. The marital relations of seamen would make an interesting subject, and I could tell you instances. . . . However, this is not the place, nor the time, and we are concerned with Jim — who was unmarried. If his imaginative conscience or his pride; if all the extravagant ghosts and austere shades that were the disastrous familiars of his youth would not let him run away from the block, I, who of course can’t be suspected of such familiars, was irresistibly impelled to go and see his head roll off. I wended my way towards the court. I didn’t hope to be very much impressed or edified, or interested or even frightened — though, as long as there is any life before one, a jolly good fright now and then is a salutary discipline. But neither did I expect to be so awfully depressed. The bitterness of his punishment was in its chill and mean atmosphere. The real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind, and from that point of view he was no mean traitor, but his execution was a hole-and-corner affair. There was no high scaffolding, no scarlet cloth (did they have scarlet cloth on Tower Hill? They should have had), no awe-stricken multitude to be horrified at his guilt and be moved to tears at his fate — no air of sombre retribution. There was, as I walked along, the clear sunshine, a brilliance too passionate to be consoling, the streets full of jumbled bits of colour like a damaged kaleidoscope: yellow, green, blue, dazzling white, the brown nudity of an undraped shoulder, a bullock-cart with a red canopy, a company of native infantry in a drab body with dark heads marching in dusty laced boots, a native policeman in a sombre uniform of scanty cut and belted in patent leather, who looked up at me with orientally pitiful eyes as though his migrating spirit were suffering exceedingly from that unforeseen — what d’ye call ‘em? — avatar — incarnation. Under the shade of a lonely tree in the courtyard, the villagers connected

with the assault case sat in a picturesque group, looking like a chromo-lithograph of a camp in a book of Eastern travel. One missed the obligatory thread of smoke in the foreground and the pack-animals grazing. A blank yellow wall rose behind overtopping the tree, reflecting the glare. The court-room was sombre, seemed more vast. High up in the dim space the punkahs were swaying short to and fro, to and fro. Here and there a draped figure, dwarfed by the bare walls, remained without stirring amongst the rows of empty benches, as if absorbed in pious meditation. The plaintiff, who had been beaten, — an obese chocolate-coloured man with shaved head, one fat breast bare and a bright yellow caste-mark above the bridge of his nose, — sat in pompous immobility: only his eyes glittered, rolling in the gloom, and the nostrils dilated and collapsed violently as he breathed. Brierly dropped into his seat looking done up, as though he had spent the night in sprinting on a cinder-track. The pious sailing-ship skipper appeared excited and made uneasy movements, as if restraining with difficulty an impulse to stand up and exhort us earnestly to prayer and repentance. The head of the magistrate, delicately pale under the neatly arranged hair, resembled the head of a hopeless invalid after he had been washed and brushed and propped up in bed. He moved aside the vase of flowers — a bunch of purple with a few pink blossoms on long stalks — and seizing in both hands a long sheet of bluish paper, ran his eye over it, propped his forearms on the edge of the desk, and began to read aloud in an even, distinct, and careless voice.

‘By Jove! For all my foolishness about scaffolds and heads rolling off — I assure you it was infinitely worse than a beheading. A heavy sense of finality brooded over all this, unrelieved by the hope of rest and safety following the fall of the axe. These proceedings had all the cold vengefulness of a death-sentence, and the cruelty of a sentence of exile. This is how I looked at it that morning — and even now I seem to see an undeniable vestige of truth in that exaggerated view of a common occurrence. You may imagine how strongly I felt this at the time. Perhaps it is for that reason that I could not bring myself to admit the finality. The thing was always with me, I was always eager to take opinion on it, as though it had not been practically settled: individual opinion — international opinion — by Jove! That Frenchman’s, for instance. His own country’s pronouncement was uttered in the passionless and definite phraseology a machine would use, if machines could speak. The head of the magistrate was half hidden by the paper, his brow was like alabaster.

‘There were several questions before the court. The first as to whether the ship was in every respect fit and seaworthy for the voyage. The court found she was not. The next point, I remember, was, whether up to the time of the accident the ship had been navigated with proper and seamanlike care. They said Yes to that, goodness knows why, and then they declared that there was no evidence to show the exact cause of the accident. A floating derelict probably. I myself remember that a Norwegian barque bound out with a cargo of pitch-pine had been given up as missing about that time, and it was just the sort of craft that would capsize in a squall and float bottom up for months — a kind of maritime ghoulish prowler to kill ships in the dark. Such

wandering corpses are common enough in the North Atlantic, which is haunted by all the terrors of the sea, — fogs, icebergs, dead ships bent upon mischief, and long sinister gales that fasten upon one like a vampire till all the strength and the spirit and even hope are gone, and one feels like the empty shell of a man. But there — in those seas — the incident was rare enough to resemble a special arrangement of a malevolent providence, which, unless it had for its object the killing of a donkeyman and the bringing of worse than death upon Jim, appeared an utterly aimless piece of devilry. This view occurring to me took off my attention. For a time I was aware of the magistrate's voice as a sound merely; but in a moment it shaped itself into distinct words . . . "in utter disregard of their plain duty," it said. The next sentence escaped me somehow, and then . . . "abandoning in the moment of danger the lives and property confided to their charge" . . . went on the voice evenly, and stopped. A pair of eyes under the white forehead shot darkly a glance above the edge of the paper. I looked for Jim hurriedly, as though I had expected him to disappear. He was very still — but he was there. He sat pink and fair and extremely attentive. "Therefore, . . ." began the voice emphatically. He stared with parted lips, hanging upon the words of the man behind the desk. These came out into the stillness wafted on the wind made by the punkahs, and I, watching for their effect upon him, caught only the fragments of official language. . . . "The Court . . . Gustav So-and-so . . . master . . . native of Germany . . . James So-and-so . . . mate . . . certificates cancelled." A silence fell. The magistrate had dropped the paper, and, leaning sideways on the arm of his chair, began to talk with Brierly easily. People started to move out; others were pushing in, and I also made for the door. Outside I stood still, and when Jim passed me on his way to the gate, I caught at his arm and detained him. The look he gave discomposed me, as though I had been responsible for his state he looked at me as if I had been the embodied evil of life. "It's all over," I stammered. "Yes," he said thickly. "And now let no man . . ." He jerked his arm out of my grasp. I watched his back as he went away. It was a long street, and he remained in sight for some time. He walked rather slow, and straddling his legs a little, as if he had found it difficult to keep a straight line. Just before I lost him I fancied he staggered a bit.

"Man overboard," said a deep voice behind me. Turning round, I saw a fellow I knew slightly, a West Australian; Chester was his name. He, too, had been looking after Jim. He was a man with an immense girth of chest, a rugged, clean-shaved face of mahogany colour, and two blunt tufts of iron-grey, thick, wiry hairs on his upper lip. He had been pearler, wrecker, trader, whaler too, I believe; in his own words — anything and everything a man may be at sea, but a pirate. The Pacific, north and south, was his proper hunting-ground; but he had wandered so far afield looking for a cheap steamer to buy. Lately he had discovered — so he said — a guano island somewhere, but its approaches were dangerous, and the anchorage, such as it was, could not be considered safe, to say the least of it. "As good as a gold-mine," he would exclaim. "Right bang in the middle of the Walpole Reefs, and if it's true enough that you can get no holding-ground anywhere in less than forty fathom, then what

of that? There are the hurricanes, too. But it's a first-rate thing. As good as a gold-mine — better! Yet there's not a fool of them that will see it. I can't get a skipper or a shipowner to go near the place. So I made up my mind to cart the blessed stuff myself." . . . This was what he required a steamer for, and I knew he was just then negotiating enthusiastically with a Parsee firm for an old, brig-rigged, sea-anachronism of ninety horse-power. We had met and spoken together several times. He looked knowingly after Jim. "Takes it to heart?" he asked scornfully. "Very much," I said. "Then he's no good," he opined. "What's all the to-do about? A bit of ass's skin. That never yet made a man. You must see things exactly as they are — if you don't, you may just as well give in at once. You will never do anything in this world. Look at me. I made it a practice never to take anything to heart." "Yes," I said, "you see things as they are." "I wish I could see my partner coming along, that's what I wish to see," he said. "Know my partner? Old Robinson. Yes; the Robinson. Don't you know? The notorious Robinson. The man who smuggled more opium and bagged more seals in his time than any loose Johnny now alive. They say he used to board the sealing-schooners up Alaska way when the fog was so thick that the Lord God, He alone, could tell one man from another. Holy-Terror Robinson. That's the man. He is with me in that guano thing. The best chance he ever came across in his life." He put his lips to my ear. "Cannibal? — well, they used to give him the name years and years ago. You remember the story? A shipwreck on the west side of Stewart Island; that's right; seven of them got ashore, and it seems they did not get on very well together. Some men are too cantankerous for anything — don't know how to make the best of a bad job — don't see things as they are — as they are, my boy! And then what's the consequence? Obvious! Trouble, trouble; as likely as not a knock on the head; and serve 'em right too. That sort is the most useful when it's dead. The story goes that a boat of Her Majesty's ship Wolverine found him kneeling on the kelp, naked as the day he was born, and chanting some psalm-tune or other; light snow was falling at the time. He waited till the boat was an oar's length from the shore, and then up and away. They chased him for an hour up and down the boulders, till a marihe flung a stone that took him behind the ear providentially and knocked him senseless. Alone? Of course. But that's like that tale of sealing-schooners; the Lord God knows the right and the wrong of that story. The cutter did not investigate much. They wrapped him in a boat-cloak and took him off as quick as they could, with a dark night coming on, the weather threatening, and the ship firing recall guns every five minutes. Three weeks afterwards he was as well as ever. He didn't allow any fuss that was made on shore to upset him; he just shut his lips tight, and let people screech. It was bad enough to have lost his ship, and all he was worth besides, without paying attention to the hard names they called him. That's the man for me." He lifted his arm for a signal to some one down the street. "He's got a little money, so I had to let him into my thing. Had to! It would have been sinful to throw away such a find, and I was cleaned out myself. It cut me to the quick, but I could see the matter just as it was, and if I must share — thinks I — with any man, then give me Robinson. I left

him at breakfast in the hotel to come to court, because I've an idea. . . . Ah! Good morning, Captain Robinson. . . . Friend of mine, Captain Robinson."

'An emaciated patriarch in a suit of white drill, a solah topi with a green-lined rim on a head trembling with age, joined us after crossing the street in a trotting shuffle, and stood propped with both hands on the handle of an umbrella. A white beard with amber streaks hung lumpily down to his waist. He blinked his creased eyelids at me in a bewildered way. "How do you do? how do you do?" he piped amiably, and tottered. "A little deaf," said Chester aside. "Did you drag him over six thousand miles to get a cheap steamer?" I asked. "I would have taken him twice round the world as soon as look at him," said Chester with immense energy. "The steamer will be the making of us, my lad. Is it my fault that every skipper and shipowner in the whole of blessed Australasia turns out a blamed fool? Once I talked for three hours to a man in Auckland. 'Send a ship,' I said, 'send a ship. I'll give you half of the first cargo for yourself, free gratis for nothing — just to make a good start.' Says he, 'I wouldn't do it if there was no other place on earth to send a ship to.' Perfect ass, of course. Rocks, currents, no anchorage, sheer cliff to lay to, no insurance company would take the risk, didn't see how he could get loaded under three years. Ass! I nearly went on my knees to him. 'But look at the thing as it is,' says I. 'Damn rocks and hurricanes. Look at it as it is. There's guano there Queensland sugar-planters would fight for — fight for on the quay, I tell you.' . . . What can you do with a fool? . . . 'That's one of your little jokes, Chester,' he says. . . . Joke! I could have wept. Ask Captain Robinson here. . . . And there was another shipowning fellow — a fat chap in a white waistcoat in Wellington, who seemed to think I was up to some swindle or other. 'I don't know what sort of fool you're looking for,' he says, 'but I am busy just now. Good morning.' I longed to take him in my two hands and smash him through the window of his own office. But I didn't. I was as mild as a curate. 'Think of it,' says I. 'Do think it over. I'll call to-morrow.' He grunted something about being 'out all day.' On the stairs I felt ready to beat my head against the wall from vexation. Captain Robinson here can tell you. It was awful to think of all that lovely stuff lying waste under the sun — stuff that would send the sugar-cane shooting sky-high. The making of Queensland! The making of Queensland! And in Brisbane, where I went to have a last try, they gave me the name of a lunatic. Idiots! The only sensible man I came across was the cabman who drove me about. A broken-down swell he was, I fancy. Hey! Captain Robinson? You remember I told you about my cabby in Brisbane — don't you? The chap had a wonderful eye for things. He saw it all in a jiffy. It was a real pleasure to talk with him. One evening after a devil of a day amongst shipowners I felt so bad that, says I, 'I must get drunk. Come along; I must get drunk, or I'll go mad.' 'I am your man,' he says; 'go ahead.' I don't know what I would have done without him. Hey! Captain Robinson."

'He poked the ribs of his partner. "He! he! he!" laughed the Ancient, looked aimlessly down the street, then peered at me doubtfully with sad, dim pupils. . . . "He! he! he!" . . . He leaned heavier on the umbrella, and dropped his gaze on the ground. I needn't tell you I had tried to get away several times, but Chester had foiled every attempt by

simply catching hold of my coat. "One minute. I've a notion." "What's your infernal notion?" I exploded at last. "If you think I am going in with you . . ." "No, no, my boy. Too late, if you wanted ever so much. We've got a steamer." "You've got the ghost of a steamer," I said. "Good enough for a start — there's no superior nonsense about us. Is there, Captain Robinson?" "No! no! no!" croaked the old man without lifting his eyes, and the senile tremble of his head became almost fierce with determination. "I understand you know that young chap," said Chester, with a nod at the street from which Jim had disappeared long ago. "He's been having grub with you in the Malabar last night — so I was told."

'I said that was true, and after remarking that he too liked to live well and in style, only that, for the present, he had to be saving of every penny — "none too many for the business! Isn't that so, Captain Robinson?" — he squared his shoulders and stroked his dumpy moustache, while the notorious Robinson, coughing at his side, clung more than ever to the handle of the umbrella, and seemed ready to subside passively into a heap of old bones. "You see, the old chap has all the money," whispered Chester confidentially. "I've been cleaned out trying to engineer the dratted thing. But wait a bit, wait a bit. The good time is coming." . . . He seemed suddenly astonished at the signs of impatience I gave. "Oh, crakee!" he cried; "I am telling you of the biggest thing that ever was, and you . . ." "I have an appointment," I pleaded mildly. "What of that?" he asked with genuine surprise; "let it wait." "That's exactly what I am doing now," I remarked; "hadn't you better tell me what it is you want?" "Buy twenty hotels like that," he growled to himself; "and every joker boarding in them too — twenty times over." He lifted his head smartly "I want that young chap." "I don't understand," I said. "He's no good, is he?" said Chester crisply. "I know nothing about it," I protested. "Why, you told me yourself he was taking it to heart," argued Chester. "Well, in my opinion a chap who . . . Anyhow, he can't be much good; but then you see I am on the look-out for somebody, and I've just got a thing that will suit him. I'll give him a job on my island." He nodded significantly. "I'm going to dump forty coolies there — if I've to steal 'em. Somebody must work the stuff. Oh! I mean to act square: wooden shed, corrugated-iron roof — I know a man in Hobart who will take my bill at six months for the materials. I do. Honour bright. Then there's the water-supply. I'll have to fly round and get somebody to trust me for half-a-dozen second-hand iron tanks. Catch rain-water, hey? Let him take charge. Make him supreme boss over the coolies. Good idea, isn't it? What do you say?" "There are whole years when not a drop of rain falls on Walpole," I said, too amazed to laugh. He bit his lip and seemed bothered. "Oh, well, I will fix up something for them — or land a supply. Hang it all! That's not the question."

'I said nothing. I had a rapid vision of Jim perched on a shadowless rock, up to his knees in guano, with the screams of sea-birds in his ears, the incandescent ball of the sun above his head; the empty sky and the empty ocean all a-quiver, simmering together in the heat as far as the eye could reach. "I wouldn't advise my worst enemy . . ." I began. "What's the matter with you?" cried Chester; "I mean to give him a good

screw — that is, as soon as the thing is set going, of course. It's as easy as falling off a log. Simply nothing to do; two six-shooters in his belt . . . Surely he wouldn't be afraid of anything forty coolies could do — with two six-shooters and he the only armed man too! It's much better than it looks. I want you to help me to talk him over." "No!" I shouted. Old Robinson lifted his bleared eyes dismally for a moment, Chester looked at me with infinite contempt. "So you wouldn't advise him?" he uttered slowly. "Certainly not," I answered, as indignant as though he had requested me to help murder somebody; "moreover, I am sure he wouldn't. He is badly cut up, but he isn't mad as far as I know." "He is no earthly good for anything," Chester mused aloud. "He would just have done for me. If you only could see a thing as it is, you would see it's the very thing for him. And besides . . . Why! it's the most splendid, sure chance . . ." He got angry suddenly. "I must have a man. There! . . ." He stamped his foot and smiled unpleasantly. "Anyhow, I could guarantee the island wouldn't sink under him — and I believe he is a bit particular on that point." "Good morning," I said curtly. He looked at me as though I had been an incomprehensible fool. . . . "Must be moving, Captain Robinson," he yelled suddenly into the old man's ear. "These Parsee Johnnies are waiting for us to clinch the bargain." He took his partner under the arm with a firm grip, swung him round, and, unexpectedly, leered at me over his shoulder. "I was trying to do him a kindness," he asserted, with an air and tone that made my blood boil. "Thank you for nothing — in his name," I rejoined. "Oh! you are devilish smart," he sneered; "but you are like the rest of them. Too much in the clouds. See what you will do with him." "I don't know that I want to do anything with him." "Don't you?" he spluttered; his grey moustache bristled with anger, and by his side the notorious Robinson, propped on the umbrella, stood with his back to me, as patient and still as a worn-out cab-horse. "I haven't found a guano island," I said. "It's my belief you wouldn't know one if you were led right up to it by the hand," he riposted quickly; "and in this world you've got to see a thing first, before you can make use of it. Got to see it through and through at that, neither more nor less." "And get others to see it, too," I insinuated, with a glance at the bowed back by his side. Chester snorted at me. "His eyes are right enough — don't you worry. He ain't a puppy." "Oh, dear, no!" I said. "Come along, Captain Robinson," he shouted, with a sort of bullying deference under the rim of the old man's hat; the Holy Terror gave a submissive little jump. The ghost of a steamer was waiting for them, Fortune on that fair isle! They made a curious pair of Argonauts. Chester strode on leisurely, well set up, portly, and of conquering mien; the other, long, wasted, drooping, and hooked to his arm, shuffled his withered shanks with desperate haste.'

Chapter 15

‘I did not start in search of Jim at once, only because I had really an appointment which I could not neglect. Then, as ill-luck would have it, in my agent’s office I was fastened upon by a fellow fresh from Madagascar with a little scheme for a wonderful piece of business. It had something to do with cattle and cartridges and a Prince Ravonalo something; but the pivot of the whole affair was the stupidity of some admiral — Admiral Pierre, I think. Everything turned on that, and the chap couldn’t find words strong enough to express his confidence. He had globular eyes starting out of his head with a fishy glitter, bumps on his forehead, and wore his long hair brushed back without a parting. He had a favourite phrase which he kept on repeating triumphantly, “The minimum of risk with the maximum of profit is my motto. What?” He made my head ache, spoiled my tiffin, but got his own out of me all right; and as soon as I had shaken him off, I made straight for the water-side. I caught sight of Jim leaning over the parapet of the quay. Three native boatmen quarrelling over five annas were making an awful row at his elbow. He didn’t hear me come up, but spun round as if the slight contact of my finger had released a catch. “I was looking,” he stammered. I don’t remember what I said, not much anyhow, but he made no difficulty in following me to the hotel.

‘He followed me as manageable as a little child, with an obedient air, with no sort of manifestation, rather as though he had been waiting for me there to come along and carry him off. I need not have been so surprised as I was at his tractability. On all the round earth, which to some seems so big and that others affect to consider as rather smaller than a mustard-seed, he had no place where he could — what shall I say? — where he could withdraw. That’s it! Withdraw — be alone with his loneliness. He walked by my side very calm, glancing here and there, and once turned his head to look after a Sidiboy fireman in a cutaway coat and yellowish trousers, whose black face had silky gleams like a lump of anthracite coal. I doubt, however, whether he saw anything, or even remained all the time aware of my companionship, because if I had not edged him to the left here, or pulled him to the right there, I believe he would have gone straight before him in any direction till stopped by a wall or some other obstacle. I steered him into my bedroom, and sat down at once to write letters. This was the only place in the world (unless, perhaps, the Walpole Reef — but that was not so handy) where he could have it out with himself without being bothered by the rest of the universe. The damned thing — as he had expressed it — had not made him invisible, but I behaved exactly as though he were. No sooner in my chair I bent over my writing-desk like a medieval scribe, and, but for the movement of the hand holding

the pen, remained anxiously quiet. I can't say I was frightened; but I certainly kept as still as if there had been something dangerous in the room, that at the first hint of a movement on my part would be provoked to pounce upon me. There was not much in the room — you know how these bedrooms are — a sort of four-poster bedstead under a mosquito-net, two or three chairs, the table I was writing at, a bare floor. A glass door opened on an upstairs verandah, and he stood with his face to it, having a hard time with all possible privacy. Dusk fell; I lit a candle with the greatest economy of movement and as much prudence as though it were an illegal proceeding. There is no doubt that he had a very hard time of it, and so had I, even to the point, I must own, of wishing him to the devil, or on Walpole Reef at least. It occurred to me once or twice that, after all, Chester was, perhaps, the man to deal effectively with such a disaster. That strange idealist had found a practical use for it at once — unerringly, as it were. It was enough to make one suspect that, maybe, he really could see the true aspect of things that appeared mysterious or utterly hopeless to less imaginative persons. I wrote and wrote; I liquidated all the arrears of my correspondence, and then went on writing to people who had no reason whatever to expect from me a gossipy letter about nothing at all. At times I stole a sidelong glance. He was rooted to the spot, but convulsive shudders ran down his back; his shoulders would heave suddenly. He was fighting, he was fighting — mostly for his breath, as it seemed. The massive shadows, cast all one way from the straight flame of the candle, seemed possessed of gloomy consciousness; the immobility of the furniture had to my furtive eye an air of attention. I was becoming fanciful in the midst of my industrious scribbling; and though, when the scratching of my pen stopped for a moment, there was complete silence and stillness in the room, I suffered from that profound disturbance and confusion of thought which is caused by a violent and menacing uproar — of a heavy gale at sea, for instance. Some of you may know what I mean: that mingled anxiety, distress, and irritation with a sort of craven feeling creeping in — not pleasant to acknowledge, but which gives a quite special merit to one's endurance. I don't claim any merit for standing the stress of Jim's emotions; I could take refuge in the letters; I could have written to strangers if necessary. Suddenly, as I was taking up a fresh sheet of notepaper, I heard a low sound, the first sound that, since we had been shut up together, had come to my ears in the dim stillness of the room. I remained with my head down, with my hand arrested. Those who have kept vigil by a sick-bed have heard such faint sounds in the stillness of the night watches, sounds wrung from a racked body, from a weary soul. He pushed the glass door with such force that all the panes rang: he stepped out, and I held my breath, straining my ears without knowing what else I expected to hear. He was really taking too much to heart an empty formality which to Chester's rigorous criticism seemed unworthy the notice of a man who could see things as they were. An empty formality; a piece of parchment. Well, well. As to an inaccessible guano deposit, that was another story altogether. One could intelligibly break one's heart over that. A feeble burst of many voices mingled with the tinkle of silver and glass floated up from the dining-room below; through the open door the outer edge of the light from

my candle fell on his back faintly; beyond all was black; he stood on the brink of a vast obscurity, like a lonely figure by the shore of a sombre and hopeless ocean. There was the Walpole Reef in it — to be sure — a speck in the dark void, a straw for the drowning man. My compassion for him took the shape of the thought that I wouldn't have liked his people to see him at that moment. I found it trying myself. His back was no longer shaken by his gasps; he stood straight as an arrow, faintly visible and still; and the meaning of this stillness sank to the bottom of my soul like lead into the water, and made it so heavy that for a second I wished heartily that the only course left open for me was to pay for his funeral. Even the law had done with him. To bury him would have been such an easy kindness! It would have been so much in accordance with the wisdom of life, which consists in putting out of sight all the reminders of our folly, of our weakness, of our mortality; all that makes against our efficiency — the memory of our failures, the hints of our undying fears, the bodies of our dead friends. Perhaps he did take it too much to heart. And if so then — Chester's offer. . . . At this point I took up a fresh sheet and began to write resolutely. There was nothing but myself between him and the dark ocean. I had a sense of responsibility. If I spoke, would that motionless and suffering youth leap into the obscurity — clutch at the straw? I found out how difficult it may be sometimes to make a sound. There is a weird power in a spoken word. And why the devil not? I was asking myself persistently while I drove on with my writing. All at once, on the blank page, under the very point of the pen, the two figures of Chester and his antique partner, very distinct and complete, would dodge into view with stride and gestures, as if reproduced in the field of some optical toy. I would watch them for a while. No! They were too phantasmal and extravagant to enter into any one's fate. And a word carries far — very far — deals destruction through time as the bullets go flying through space. I said nothing; and he, out there with his back to the light, as if bound and gagged by all the invisible foes of man, made no stir and made no sound.'

Chapter 16

‘The time was coming when I should see him loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess forming round his name as though he had been the stuff of a hero. It’s true — I assure you; as true as I’m sitting here talking about him in vain. He, on his side, had that faculty of beholding at a hint the face of his desire and the shape of his dream, without which the earth would know no lover and no adventurer. He captured much honour and an Arcadian happiness (I won’t say anything about innocence) in the bush, and it was as good to him as the honour and the Arcadian happiness of the streets to another man. Felicity, felicity — how shall I say it? — is quaffed out of a golden cup in every latitude: the flavour is with you — with you alone, and you can make it as intoxicating as you please. He was of the sort that would drink deep, as you may guess from what went before. I found him, if not exactly intoxicated, then at least flushed with the elixir at his lips. He had not obtained it at once. There had been, as you know, a period of probation amongst infernal ship-chandlers, during which he had suffered and I had worried about — about — my trust — you may call it. I don’t know that I am completely reassured now, after beholding him in all his brilliance. That was my last view of him — in a strong light, dominating, and yet in complete accord with his surroundings — with the life of the forests and with the life of men. I own that I was impressed, but I must admit to myself that after all this is not the lasting impression. He was protected by his isolation, alone of his own superior kind, in close touch with Nature, that keeps faith on such easy terms with her lovers. But I cannot fix before my eye the image of his safety. I shall always remember him as seen through the open door of my room, taking, perhaps, too much to heart the mere consequences of his failure. I am pleased, of course, that some good — and even some splendour — came out of my endeavours; but at times it seems to me it would have been better for my peace of mind if I had not stood between him and Chester’s confoundedly generous offer. I wonder what his exuberant imagination would have made of Walpole islet — that most hopelessly forsaken crumb of dry land on the face of the waters. It is not likely I would ever have heard, for I must tell you that Chester, after calling at some Australian port to patch up his brig-rigged sea-anachronism, steamed out into the Pacific with a crew of twenty-two hands all told, and the only news having a possible bearing upon the mystery of his fate was the news of a hurricane which is supposed to have swept in its course over the Walpole shoals, a month or so afterwards. Not a vestige of the Argonauts ever turned up; not a sound came out of the waste. Finis! The Pacific is the most discreet of live, hot-tempered oceans: the chilly Antarctic can keep a secret too, but more in the manner of a grave.

‘And there is a sense of blessed finality in such discretion, which is what we all more or less sincerely are ready to admit — for what else is it that makes the idea of death supportable? End! Finis! the potent word that exorcises from the house of life the haunting shadow of fate. This is what — notwithstanding the testimony of my eyes and his own earnest assurances — I miss when I look back upon Jim’s success. While there’s life there is hope, truly; but there is fear too. I don’t mean to say that I regret my action, nor will I pretend that I can’t sleep o’ nights in consequence; still, the idea obtrudes itself that he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters. He was not — if I may say so — clear to me. He was not clear. And there is a suspicion he was not clear to himself either. There were his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings — a sort of sublimated, idealised selfishness. He was — if you allow me to say so — very fine; very fine — and very unfortunate. A little coarser nature would not have borne the strain; it would have had to come to terms with itself — with a sigh, with a grunt, or even with a guffaw; a still coarser one would have remained invulnerably ignorant and completely uninteresting.

‘But he was too interesting or too unfortunate to be thrown to the dogs, or even to Chester. I felt this while I sat with my face over the paper and he fought and gasped, struggling for his breath in that terribly stealthy way, in my room; I felt it when he rushed out on the verandah as if to fling himself over — and didn’t; I felt it more and more all the time he remained outside, faintly lighted on the background of night, as if standing on the shore of a sombre and hopeless sea.

‘An abrupt heavy rumble made me lift my head. The noise seemed to roll away, and suddenly a searching and violent glare fell on the blind face of the night. The sustained and dazzling flickers seemed to last for an unconscionable time. The growl of the thunder increased steadily while I looked at him, distinct and black, planted solidly upon the shores of a sea of light. At the moment of greatest brilliance the darkness leaped back with a culminating crash, and he vanished before my dazzled eyes as utterly as though he had been blown to atoms. A blustering sigh passed; furious hands seemed to tear at the shrubs, shake the tops of the trees below, slam doors, break window-panes, all along the front of the building. He stepped in, closing the door behind him, and found me bending over the table: my sudden anxiety as to what he would say was very great, and akin to a fright. “May I have a cigarette?” he asked. I gave a push to the box without raising my head. “I want — want — tobacco,” he muttered. I became extremely buoyant. “Just a moment.” I grunted pleasantly. He took a few steps here and there. “That’s over,” I heard him say. A single distant clap of thunder came from the sea like a gun of distress. “The monsoon breaks up early this year,” he remarked conversationally, somewhere behind me. This encouraged me to turn round, which I did as soon as I had finished addressing the last envelope. He was smoking greedily in the middle of the room, and though he heard the stir I made, he remained with his back to me for a time.

“Come — I carried it off pretty well,” he said, wheeling suddenly. “Something’s paid off — not much. I wonder what’s to come.” His face did not show any emotion, only it

appeared a little darkened and swollen, as though he had been holding his breath. He smiled reluctantly as it were, and went on while I gazed up at him mutely. . . . "Thank you, though — your room — jolly convenient — for a chap — badly hiped." . . . The rain pattered and swished in the garden; a water-pipe (it must have had a hole in it) performed just outside the window a parody of blubbering woe with funny sobs and gurgling lamentations, interrupted by jerky spasms of silence. . . . "A bit of shelter," he mumbled and ceased.

'A flash of faded lightning darted in through the black framework of the windows and ebbed out without any noise. I was thinking how I had best approach him (I did not want to be flung off again) when he gave a little laugh. "No better than a vagabond now" . . . the end of the cigarette smouldered between his fingers . . . "without a single — single," he pronounced slowly; "and yet . . ." He paused; the rain fell with redoubled violence. "Some day one's bound to come upon some sort of chance to get it all back again. Must!" he whispered distinctly, glaring at my boots.

'I did not even know what it was he wished so much to regain, what it was he had so terribly missed. It might have been so much that it was impossible to say. A piece of ass's skin, according to Chester. . . . He looked up at me inquisitively. "Perhaps. If life's long enough," I muttered through my teeth with unreasonable animosity. "Don't reckon too much on it."

"Jove! I feel as if nothing could ever touch me," he said in a tone of sombre conviction. "If this business couldn't knock me over, then there's no fear of there being not enough time to — climb out, and . . ." He looked upwards.

'It struck me that it is from such as he that the great army of waifs and strays is recruited, the army that marches down, down into all the gutters of the earth. As soon as he left my room, that "bit of shelter," he would take his place in the ranks, and begin the journey towards the bottomless pit. I at least had no illusions; but it was I, too, who a moment ago had been so sure of the power of words, and now was afraid to speak, in the same way one dares not move for fear of losing a slippery hold. It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun. It is as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence; the envelope of flesh and blood on which our eyes are fixed melts before the outstretched hand, and there remains only the capricious, unconsolable, and elusive spirit that no eye can follow, no hand can grasp. It was the fear of losing him that kept me silent, for it was borne upon me suddenly and with unaccountable force that should I let him slip away into the darkness I would never forgive myself.

"Well. Thanks — once more. You've been — er — uncommonly — really there's no word to . . . Uncommonly! I don't know why, I am sure. I am afraid I don't feel as grateful as I would if the whole thing hadn't been so brutally sprung on me. Because at bottom . . . you, yourself . . ." He stuttered.

"Possibly," I struck in. He frowned.

"All the same, one is responsible." He watched me like a hawk.

“And that’s true, too,” I said.

“Well. I’ve gone with it to the end, and I don’t intend to let any man cast it in my teeth without — without — resenting it.” He clenched his fist.

“There’s yourself,” I said with a smile — mirthless enough, God knows — but he looked at me menacingly. “That’s my business,” he said. An air of indomitable resolution came and went upon his face like a vain and passing shadow. Next moment he looked a dear good boy in trouble, as before. He flung away the cigarette. “Good-bye,” he said, with the sudden haste of a man who had lingered too long in view of a pressing bit of work waiting for him; and then for a second or so he made not the slightest movement. The downpour fell with the heavy uninterrupted rush of a sweeping flood, with a sound of unchecked overwhelming fury that called to one’s mind the images of collapsing bridges, of uprooted trees, of undermined mountains. No man could breast the colossal and headlong stream that seemed to break and swirl against the dim stillness in which we were precariously sheltered as if on an island. The perforated pipe gurgled, choked, spat, and splashed in odious ridicule of a swimmer fighting for his life. “It is raining,” I remonstrated, “and I . . .” “Rain or shine,” he began brusquely, checked himself, and walked to the window. “Perfect deluge,” he muttered after a while: he leaned his forehead on the glass. “It’s dark, too.”

“Yes, it is very dark,” I said.

‘He pivoted on his heels, crossed the room, and had actually opened the door leading into the corridor before I leaped up from my chair. “Wait,” I cried, “I want you to . . .” “I can’t dine with you again to-night,” he flung at me, with one leg out of the room already. “I haven’t the slightest intention to ask you,” I shouted. At this he drew back his foot, but remained mistrustfully in the very doorway. I lost no time in entreating him earnestly not to be absurd; to come in and shut the door.’

Chapter 17

‘He came in at last; but I believe it was mostly the rain that did it; it was falling just then with a devastating violence which quieted down gradually while we talked. His manner was very sober and set; his bearing was that of a naturally taciturn man possessed by an idea. My talk was of the material aspect of his position; it had the sole aim of saving him from the degradation, ruin, and despair that out there close so swiftly upon a friendless, homeless man; I pleaded with him to accept my help; I argued reasonably: and every time I looked up at that absorbed smooth face, so grave and youthful, I had a disturbing sense of being no help but rather an obstacle to some mysterious, inexplicable, impalpable striving of his wounded spirit.

“I suppose you intend to eat and drink and to sleep under shelter in the usual way,” I remember saying with irritation. “You say you won’t touch the money that is due to you.” . . . He came as near as his sort can to making a gesture of horror. (There were three weeks and five days’ pay owing him as mate of the Patna.) “Well, that’s too little to matter anyhow; but what will you do to-morrow? Where will you turn? You must live . . .” “That isn’t the thing,” was the comment that escaped him under his breath. I ignored it, and went on combating what I assumed to be the scruples of an exaggerated delicacy. “On every conceivable ground,” I concluded, “you must let me help you.” “You can’t,” he said very simply and gently, and holding fast to some deep idea which I could detect shimmering like a pool of water in the dark, but which I despaired of ever approaching near enough to fathom. I surveyed his well-proportioned bulk. “At any rate,” I said, “I am able to help what I can see of you. I don’t pretend to do more.” He shook his head sceptically without looking at me. I got very warm. “But I can,” I insisted. “I can do even more. I am doing more. I am trusting you . . .” “The money . . .” he began. “Upon my word you deserve being told to go to the devil,” I cried, forcing the note of indignation. He was startled, smiled, and I pressed my attack home. “It isn’t a question of money at all. You are too superficial,” I said (and at the same time I was thinking to myself: Well, here goes! And perhaps he is, after all). “Look at the letter I want you to take. I am writing to a man of whom I’ve never asked a favour, and I am writing about you in terms that one only ventures to use when speaking of an intimate friend. I make myself unreservedly responsible for you. That’s what I am doing. And really if you will only reflect a little what that means . . .”

‘He lifted his head. The rain had passed away; only the water-pipe went on shedding tears with an absurd drip, drip outside the window. It was very quiet in the room, whose shadows huddled together in corners, away from the still flame of the candle flaring

upright in the shape of a dagger; his face after a while seemed suffused by a reflection of a soft light as if the dawn had broken already.

“Jove!” he gasped out. “It is noble of you!”

‘Had he suddenly put out his tongue at me in derision, I could not have felt more humiliated. I thought to myself — Serve me right for a sneaking humbug. . . . His eyes shone straight into my face, but I perceived it was not a mocking brightness. All at once he sprang into jerky agitation, like one of those flat wooden figures that are worked by a string. His arms went up, then came down with a slap. He became another man altogether. “And I had never seen,” he shouted; then suddenly bit his lip and frowned. “What a bally ass I’ve been,” he said very slow in an awed tone. . . . “You are a brick!” he cried next in a muffled voice. He snatched my hand as though he had just then seen it for the first time, and dropped it at once. “Why! this is what I — you — I . . .” he stammered, and then with a return of his old stolid, I may say mulish, manner he began heavily, “I would be a brute now if I . . .” and then his voice seemed to break. “That’s all right,” I said. I was almost alarmed by this display of feeling, through which pierced a strange elation. I had pulled the string accidentally, as it were; I did not fully understand the working of the toy. “I must go now,” he said. “Jove! You have helped me. Can’t sit still. The very thing . . .” He looked at me with puzzled admiration. “The very thing . . .”

‘Of course it was the thing. It was ten to one that I had saved him from starvation — of that peculiar sort that is almost invariably associated with drink. This was all. I had not a single illusion on that score, but looking at him, I allowed myself to wonder at the nature of the one he had, within the last three minutes, so evidently taken into his bosom. I had forced into his hand the means to carry on decently the serious business of life, to get food, drink, and shelter of the customary kind while his wounded spirit, like a bird with a broken wing, might hop and flutter into some hole to die quietly of inanition there. This is what I had thrust upon him: a definitely small thing; and — behold! — by the manner of its reception it loomed in the dim light of the candle like a big, indistinct, perhaps a dangerous shadow. “You don’t mind me not saying anything appropriate,” he burst out. “There isn’t anything one could say. Last night already you had done me no end of good. Listening to me — you know. I give you my word I’ve thought more than once the top of my head would fly off. . . .” He darted — positively darted — here and there, rammed his hands into his pockets, jerked them out again, flung his cap on his head. I had no idea it was in him to be so airily brisk. I thought of a dry leaf imprisoned in an eddy of wind, while a mysterious apprehension, a load of indefinite doubt, weighed me down in my chair. He stood stock-still, as if struck motionless by a discovery. “You have given me confidence,” he declared, soberly. “Oh! for God’s sake, my dear fellow — don’t!” I entreated, as though he had hurt me. “All right. I’ll shut up now and henceforth. Can’t prevent me thinking though. . . . Never mind! . . . I’ll show yet . . .” He went to the door in a hurry, paused with his head down, and came back, stepping deliberately. “I always thought that if a fellow could begin with a clean slate . . . And now you . . . in a measure . . . yes . . . clean slate.” I

waved my hand, and he marched out without looking back; the sound of his footfalls died out gradually behind the closed door — the unhesitating tread of a man walking in broad daylight.

‘But as to me, left alone with the solitary candle, I remained strangely unenlightened. I was no longer young enough to behold at every turn the magnificence that besets our insignificant footsteps in good and in evil. I smiled to think that, after all, it was yet he, of us two, who had the light. And I felt sad. A clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock.’

Chapter 18

‘Six months afterwards my friend (he was a cynical, more than middle-aged bachelor, with a reputation for eccentricity, and owned a rice-mill) wrote to me, and judging, from the warmth of my recommendation, that I would like to hear, enlarged a little upon Jim’s perfections. These were apparently of a quiet and effective sort. “Not having been able so far to find more in my heart than a resigned toleration for any individual of my kind, I have lived till now alone in a house that even in this steaming climate could be considered as too big for one man. I have had him to live with me for some time past. It seems I haven’t made a mistake.” It seemed to me on reading this letter that my friend had found in his heart more than tolerance for Jim — that there were the beginnings of active liking. Of course he stated his grounds in a characteristic way. For one thing, Jim kept his freshness in the climate. Had he been a girl — my friend wrote — one could have said he was blooming — blooming modestly — like a violet, not like some of these blatant tropical flowers. He had been in the house for six weeks, and had not as yet attempted to slap him on the back, or address him as “old boy,” or try to make him feel a superannuated fossil. He had nothing of the exasperating young man’s chatter. He was good-tempered, had not much to say for himself, was not clever by any means, thank goodness — wrote my friend. It appeared, however, that Jim was clever enough to be quietly appreciative of his wit, while, on the other hand, he amused him by his naiveness. “The dew is yet on him, and since I had the bright idea of giving him a room in the house and having him at meals I feel less withered myself. The other day he took it into his head to cross the room with no other purpose but to open a door for me; and I felt more in touch with mankind than I had been for years. Ridiculous, isn’t it? Of course I guess there is something — some awful little scrape — which you know all about — but if I am sure that it is terribly heinous, I fancy one could manage to forgive it. For my part, I declare I am unable to imagine him guilty of anything much worse than robbing an orchard. Is it much worse? Perhaps you ought to have told me; but it is such a long time since we both turned saints that you may have forgotten we, too, had sinned in our time? It may be that some day I shall have to ask you, and then I shall expect to be told. I don’t care to question him myself till I have some idea what it is. Moreover, it’s too soon as yet. Let him open the door a few times more for me. . . .” Thus my friend. I was trebly pleased — at Jim’s shaping so well, at the tone of the letter, at my own cleverness. Evidently I had known what I was doing. I had read characters aright, and so on. And what if something unexpected and wonderful were to come of it? That evening, reposing in a deck-chair under the

shade of my own poop awning (it was in Hong-Kong harbour), I laid on Jim's behalf the first stone of a castle in Spain.

'I made a trip to the northward, and when I returned I found another letter from my friend waiting for me. It was the first envelope I tore open. "There are no spoons missing, as far as I know," ran the first line; "I haven't been interested enough to inquire. He is gone, leaving on the breakfast-table a formal little note of apology, which is either silly or heartless. Probably both — and it's all one to me. Allow me to say, lest you should have some more mysterious young men in reserve, that I have shut up shop, definitely and for ever. This is the last eccentricity I shall be guilty of. Do not imagine for a moment that I care a hang; but he is very much regretted at tennis-parties, and for my own sake I've told a plausible lie at the club. . . ." I flung the letter aside and started looking through the batch on my table, till I came upon Jim's handwriting. Would you believe it? One chance in a hundred! But it is always that hundredth chance! That little second engineer of the Patna had turned up in a more or less destitute state, and got a temporary job of looking after the machinery of the mill. "I couldn't stand the familiarity of the little beast," Jim wrote from a seaport seven hundred miles south of the place where he should have been in clover. "I am now for the time with Egstrom & Blake, ship-chandlers, as their — well — runner, to call the thing by its right name. For reference I gave them your name, which they know of course, and if you could write a word in my favour it would be a permanent employment." I was utterly crushed under the ruins of my castle, but of course I wrote as desired. Before the end of the year my new charter took me that way, and I had an opportunity of seeing him.

'He was still with Egstrom & Blake, and we met in what they called "our parlour" opening out of the store. He had that moment come in from boarding a ship, and confronted me head down, ready for a tussle. "What have you got to say for yourself?" I began as soon as we had shaken hands. "What I wrote you — nothing more," he said stubbornly. "Did the fellow blab — or what?" I asked. He looked up at me with a troubled smile. "Oh, no! He didn't. He made it a kind of confidential business between us. He was most damnably mysterious whenever I came over to the mill; he would wink at me in a respectful manner — as much as to say 'We know what we know.' Infernally fawning and familiar — and that sort of thing . . ." He threw himself into a chair and stared down his legs. "One day we happened to be alone and the fellow had the cheek to say, 'Well, Mr. James' — I was called Mr. James there as if I had been the son — 'here we are together once more. This is better than the old ship — ain't it?' . . . Wasn't it appalling, eh? I looked at him, and he put on a knowing air. 'Don't you be uneasy, sir,' he says. 'I know a gentleman when I see one, and I know how a gentleman feels. I hope, though, you will be keeping me on this job. I had a hard time of it too, along of that rotten old Patna racket.' Jove! It was awful. I don't know what I should have said or done if I had not just then heard Mr. Denver calling me in the passage. It was tiffin-time, and we walked together across the yard and through the garden to the bungalow. He began to chaff me in his kindly way . . . I believe he liked me . . ."

‘Jim was silent for a while.

“‘I know he liked me. That’s what made it so hard. Such a splendid man! . . . That morning he slipped his hand under my arm. . . . He, too, was familiar with me.” He burst into a short laugh, and dropped his chin on his breast. “Pah! When I remembered how that mean little beast had been talking to me,” he began suddenly in a vibrating voice, “I couldn’t bear to think of myself . . . I suppose you know . . .” I nodded. . . . “More like a father,” he cried; his voice sank. “I would have had to tell him. I couldn’t let it go on — could I?” “Well?” I murmured, after waiting a while. “I preferred to go,” he said slowly; “this thing must be buried.”

‘We could hear in the shop Blake upbraiding Egstrom in an abusive, strained voice. They had been associated for many years, and every day from the moment the doors were opened to the last minute before closing, Blake, a little man with sleek, jetty hair and unhappy, beady eyes, could be heard rowing his partner incessantly with a sort of scathing and plaintive fury. The sound of that everlasting scolding was part of the place like the other fixtures; even strangers would very soon come to disregard it completely unless it be perhaps to mutter “Nuisance,” or to get up suddenly and shut the door of the “parlour.” Egstrom himself, a raw-boned, heavy Scandinavian, with a busy manner and immense blonde whiskers, went on directing his people, checking parcels, making out bills or writing letters at a stand-up desk in the shop, and comported himself in that clatter exactly as though he had been stone-deaf. Now and again he would emit a bothered perfunctory “Sssh,” which neither produced nor was expected to produce the slightest effect. “They are very decent to me here,” said Jim. “Blake’s a little cad, but Egstrom’s all right.” He stood up quickly, and walking with measured steps to a tripod telescope standing in the window and pointed at the roadstead, he applied his eye to it. “There’s that ship which has been becalmed outside all the morning has got a breeze now and is coming in,” he remarked patiently; “I must go and board.” We shook hands in silence, and he turned to go. “Jim!” I cried. He looked round with his hand on the lock. “You — you have thrown away something like a fortune.” He came back to me all the way from the door. “Such a splendid old chap,” he said. “How could I? How could I?” His lips twitched. “Here it does not matter.” “Oh! you — you — ” I began, and had to cast about for a suitable word, but before I became aware that there was no name that would just do, he was gone. I heard outside Egstrom’s deep gentle voice saying cheerily, “That’s the Sarah W. Granger, Jimmy. You must manage to be first aboard”; and directly Blake struck in, screaming after the manner of an outraged cockatoo, “Tell the captain we’ve got some of his mail here. That’ll fetch him. D’ye hear, Mister What’s-your-name?” And there was Jim answering Egstrom with something boyish in his tone. “All right. I’ll make a race of it.” He seemed to take refuge in the boat-sailing part of that sorry business.

‘I did not see him again that trip, but on my next (I had a six months’ charter) I went up to the store. Ten yards away from the door Blake’s scolding met my ears, and when I came in he gave me a glance of utter wretchedness; Egstrom, all smiles, advanced, extending a large bony hand. “Glad to see you, captain. . . . Sssh. . . . Been

thinking you were about due back here. What did you say, sir? . . . Sssh. . . . Oh! him! He has left us. Come into the parlour." . . . After the slam of the door Blake's strained voice became faint, as the voice of one scolding desperately in a wilderness. . . . "Put us to a great inconvenience, too. Used us badly — I must say . . ." "Where's he gone to? Do you know?" I asked. "No. It's no use asking either," said Egstrom, standing bewhiskered and obliging before me with his arms hanging down his sides clumsily, and a thin silver watch-chain looped very low on a rucked-up blue serge waistcoat. "A man like that don't go anywhere in particular." I was too concerned at the news to ask for the explanation of that pronouncement, and he went on. "He left — let's see — the very day a steamer with returning pilgrims from the Red Sea put in here with two blades of her propeller gone. Three weeks ago now." "Wasn't there something said about the Patna case?" I asked, fearing the worst. He gave a start, and looked at me as if I had been a sorcerer. "Why, yes! How do you know? Some of them were talking about it here. There was a captain or two, the manager of Vanlo's engineering shop at the harbour, two or three others, and myself. Jim was in here too, having a sandwich and a glass of beer; when we are busy — you see, captain — there's no time for a proper tiffin. He was standing by this table eating sandwiches, and the rest of us were round the telescope watching that steamer come in; and by-and-by Vanlo's manager began to talk about the chief of the Patna; he had done some repairs for him once, and from that he went on to tell us what an old ruin she was, and the money that had been made out of her. He came to mention her last voyage, and then we all struck in. Some said one thing and some another — not much — what you or any other man might say; and there was some laughing. Captain O'Brien of the Sarah W. Granger, a large, noisy old man with a stick — he was sitting listening to us in this arm-chair here — he let drive suddenly with his stick at the floor, and roars out, 'Skunks!' . . . Made us all jump. Vanlo's manager winks at us and asks, 'What's the matter, Captain O'Brien?' 'Matter! matter!' the old man began to shout; 'what are you Injuns laughing at? It's no laughing matter. It's a disgrace to human natur' — that's what it is. I would despise being seen in the same room with one of those men. Yes, sir!' He seemed to catch my eye like, and I had to speak out of civility. 'Skunks!' says I, 'of course, Captain O'Brien, and I wouldn't care to have them here myself, so you're quite safe in this room, Captain O'Brien. Have a little something cool to drink.' 'Dam' your drink, Egstrom,' says he, with a twinkle in his eye; 'when I want a drink I will shout for it. I am going to quit. It stinks here now.' At this all the others burst out laughing, and out they go after the old man. And then, sir, that blasted Jim he puts down the sandwich he had in his hand and walks round the table to me; there was his glass of beer poured out quite full. 'I am off,' he says — just like this. 'It isn't half-past one yet,' says I; 'you might snatch a smoke first.' I thought he meant it was time for him to go down to his work. When I understood what he was up to, my arms fell — so! Can't get a man like that every day, you know, sir; a regular devil for sailing a boat; ready to go out miles to sea to meet ships in any sort of weather. More than once a captain would come in here full of it, and the first thing he would say would be, 'That's

a reckless sort of a lunatic you've got for water-clerk, Egstrom. I was feeling my way in at daylight under short canvas when there comes flying out of the mist right under my forefoot a boat half under water, sprays going over the mast-head, two frightened niggers on the bottom boards, a yelling fiend at the tiller. Hey! hey! Ship ahoy! ahoy! Captain! Hey! hey! Egstrom & Blake's man first to speak to you! Hey! hey! Egstrom & Blake! Hallo! hey! whoop! Kick the niggers — out reefs — a squall on at the time — shoots ahead whooping and yelling to me to make sail and he would give me a lead in — more like a demon than a man. Never saw a boat handled like that in all my life. Couldn't have been drunk — was he? Such a quiet, soft-spoken chap too — blush like a girl when he came on board. . . .' I tell you, Captain Marlow, nobody had a chance against us with a strange ship when Jim was out. The other ship-chandlers just kept their old customers, and . . ."

'Egstrom appeared overcome with emotion.

"'Why, sir — it seemed as though he wouldn't mind going a hundred miles out to sea in an old shoe to nab a ship for the firm. If the business had been his own and all to make yet, he couldn't have done more in that way. And now . . . all at once . . . like this! Thinks I to myself: 'Oho! a rise in the screw — that's the trouble — is it?' 'All right,' says I, 'no need of all that fuss with me, Jimmy. Just mention your figure. Anything in reason.' He looks at me as if he wanted to swallow something that stuck in his throat. 'I can't stop with you.' 'What's that blooming joke?' I asks. He shakes his head, and I could see in his eye he was as good as gone already, sir. So I turned to him and slanged him till all was blue. 'What is it you're running away from?' I asks. 'Who has been getting at you? What scared you? You haven't as much sense as a rat; they don't clear out from a good ship. Where do you expect to get a better berth? — you this and you that.' I made him look sick, I can tell you. 'This business ain't going to sink,' says I. He gave a big jump. 'Good-bye,' he says, nodding at me like a lord; 'you ain't half a bad chap, Egstrom. I give you my word that if you knew my reasons you wouldn't care to keep me.' 'That's the biggest lie you ever told in your life,' says I; 'I know my own mind.' He made me so mad that I had to laugh. 'Can't you really stop long enough to drink this glass of beer here, you funny beggar, you?' I don't know what came over him; he didn't seem able to find the door; something comical, I can tell you, captain. I drank the beer myself. 'Well, if you're in such a hurry, here's luck to you in your own drink,' says I; 'only, you mark my words, if you keep up this game you'll very soon find that the earth ain't big enough to hold you — that's all.' He gave me one black look, and out he rushed with a face fit to scare little children."

'Egstrom snorted bitterly, and combed one auburn whisker with knotty fingers. "Haven't been able to get a man that was any good since. It's nothing but worry, worry, worry in business. And where might you have come across him, captain, if it's fair to ask?"

"'He was the mate of the Patna that voyage," I said, feeling that I owed some explanation. For a time Egstrom remained very still, with his fingers plunged in the hair at the side of his face, and then exploded. "And who the devil cares about that?"

“I daresay no one,” I began . . . “And what the devil is he — anyhow — for to go on like this?” He stuffed suddenly his left whisker into his mouth and stood amazed. “Jee!” he exclaimed, “I told him the earth wouldn’t be big enough to hold his caper.”

Chapter 19

‘I have told you these two episodes at length to show his manner of dealing with himself under the new conditions of his life. There were many others of the sort, more than I could count on the fingers of my two hands. They were all equally tinged by a high-minded absurdity of intention which made their futility profound and touching. To fling away your daily bread so as to get your hands free for a grapple with a ghost may be an act of prosaic heroism. Men had done it before (though we who have lived know full well that it is not the haunted soul but the hungry body that makes an outcast), and men who had eaten and meant to eat every day had applauded the creditable folly. He was indeed unfortunate, for all his recklessness could not carry him out from under the shadow. There was always a doubt of his courage. The truth seems to be that it is impossible to lay the ghost of a fact. You can face it or shirk it — and I have come across a man or two who could wink at their familiar shades. Obviously Jim was not of the winking sort; but what I could never make up my mind about was whether his line of conduct amounted to shirking his ghost or to facing him out.

‘I strained my mental eyesight only to discover that, as with the complexion of all our actions, the shade of difference was so delicate that it was impossible to say. It might have been flight and it might have been a mode of combat. To the common mind he became known as a rolling stone, because this was the funniest part: he did after a time become perfectly known, and even notorious, within the circle of his wanderings (which had a diameter of, say, three thousand miles), in the same way as an eccentric character is known to a whole countryside. For instance, in Bangkok, where he found employment with Yucker Brothers, charterers and teak merchants, it was almost pathetic to see him go about in sunshine hugging his secret, which was known to the very up-country logs on the river. Schomberg, the keeper of the hotel where he boarded, a hirsute Alsatian of manly bearing and an irrepressible retailer of all the scandalous gossip of the place, would, with both elbows on the table, impart an adorned version of the story to any guest who cared to imbibe knowledge along with the more costly liquors. “And, mind you, the nicest fellow you could meet,” would be his generous conclusion; “quite superior.” It says a lot for the casual crowd that frequented Schomberg’s establishment that Jim managed to hang out in Bangkok for a whole six months. I remarked that people, perfect strangers, took to him as one takes to a nice child. His manner was reserved, but it was as though his personal appearance, his hair, his eyes, his smile, made friends for him wherever he went. And, of course, he was no fool. I heard Siegmund Yucker (native of Switzerland), a gentle creature ravaged by a cruel dyspepsia, and so frightfully lame that his head swung through a quarter of a

circle at every step he took, declare appreciatively that for one so young he was “of great gabasidy,” as though it had been a mere question of cubic contents. “Why not send him up country?” I suggested anxiously. (Yucker Brothers had concessions and teak forests in the interior.) “If he has capacity, as you say, he will soon get hold of the work. And physically he is very fit. His health is always excellent.” “Ach! It’s a great ting in dis goundry to be vree vrom tispép-shia,” sighed poor Yucker enviously, casting a stealthy glance at the pit of his ruined stomach. I left him drumming pensively on his desk and muttering, “Es ist ein’ Idee. Es ist ein’ Idee.” Unfortunately, that very evening an unpleasant affair took place in the hotel.

‘I don’t know that I blame Jim very much, but it was a truly regrettable incident. It belonged to the lamentable species of bar-room scuffles, and the other party to it was a cross-eyed Dane of sorts whose visiting-card recited, under his misbegotten name: first lieutenant in the Royal Siamese Navy. The fellow, of course, was utterly hopeless at billiards, but did not like to be beaten, I suppose. He had had enough to drink to turn nasty after the sixth game, and make some scornful remark at Jim’s expense. Most of the people there didn’t hear what was said, and those who had heard seemed to have had all precise recollection scared out of them by the appalling nature of the consequences that immediately ensued. It was very lucky for the Dane that he could swim, because the room opened on a verandah and the Menam flowed below very wide and black. A boat-load of Chinamen, bound, as likely as not, on some thieving expedition, fished out the officer of the King of Siam, and Jim turned up at about midnight on board my ship without a hat. “Everybody in the room seemed to know,” he said, gasping yet from the contest, as it were. He was rather sorry, on general principles, for what had happened, though in this case there had been, he said, “no option.” But what dismayed him was to find the nature of his burden as well known to everybody as though he had gone about all that time carrying it on his shoulders. Naturally after this he couldn’t remain in the place. He was universally condemned for the brutal violence, so unbecoming a man in his delicate position; some maintained he had been disgracefully drunk at the time; others criticised his want of tact. Even Schomberg was very much annoyed. “He is a very nice young man,” he said argumentatively to me, “but the lieutenant is a first-rate fellow too. He dines every night at my table d’hôte, you know. And there’s a billiard-cue broken. I can’t allow that. First thing this morning I went over with my apologies to the lieutenant, and I think I’ve made it all right for myself; but only think, captain, if everybody started such games! Why, the man might have been drowned! And here I can’t run out into the next street and buy a new cue. I’ve got to write to Europe for them. No, no! A temper like that won’t do!” . . . He was extremely sore on the subject.

‘This was the worst incident of all in his — his retreat. Nobody could deplore it more than myself; for if, as somebody said hearing him mentioned, “Oh yes! I know. He has knocked about a good deal out here,” yet he had somehow avoided being battered and chipped in the process. This last affair, however, made me seriously uneasy, because if his exquisite sensibilities were to go the length of involving him in pot-house shindies,

he would lose his name of an inoffensive, if aggravating, fool, and acquire that of a common loafer. For all my confidence in him I could not help reflecting that in such cases from the name to the thing itself is but a step. I suppose you will understand that by that time I could not think of washing my hands of him. I took him away from Bangkok in my ship, and we had a longish passage. It was pitiful to see how he shrank within himself. A seaman, even if a mere passenger, takes an interest in a ship, and looks at the sea-life around him with the critical enjoyment of a painter, for instance, looking at another man's work. In every sense of the expression he is "on deck"; but my Jim, for the most part, skulked down below as though he had been a stowaway. He infected me so that I avoided speaking on professional matters, such as would suggest themselves naturally to two sailors during a passage. For whole days we did not exchange a word; I felt extremely unwilling to give orders to my officers in his presence. Often, when alone with him on deck or in the cabin, we didn't know what to do with our eyes.

'I placed him with De Jongh, as you know, glad enough to dispose of him in any way, yet persuaded that his position was now growing intolerable. He had lost some of that elasticity which had enabled him to rebound back into his uncompromising position after every overthrow. One day, coming ashore, I saw him standing on the quay; the water of the roadstead and the sea in the offing made one smooth ascending plane, and the outermost ships at anchor seemed to ride motionless in the sky. He was waiting for his boat, which was being loaded at our feet with packages of small stores for some vessel ready to leave. After exchanging greetings, we remained silent — side by side. "Jove!" he said suddenly, "this is killing work."

'He smiled at me; I must say he generally could manage a smile. I made no reply. I knew very well he was not alluding to his duties; he had an easy time of it with De Jongh. Nevertheless, as soon as he had spoken I became completely convinced that the work was killing. I did not even look at him. "Would you like," said I, "to leave this part of the world altogether; try California or the West Coast? I'll see what I can do . . ." He interrupted me a little scornfully. "What difference would it make?" . . . I felt at once convinced that he was right. It would make no difference; it was not relief he wanted; I seemed to perceive dimly that what he wanted, what he was, as it were, waiting for, was something not easy to define — something in the nature of an opportunity. I had given him many opportunities, but they had been merely opportunities to earn his bread. Yet what more could any man do? The position struck me as hopeless, and poor Brierly's saying recurred to me, "Let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there." Better that, I thought, than this waiting above ground for the impossible. Yet one could not be sure even of that. There and then, before his boat was three oars' lengths away from the quay, I had made up my mind to go and consult Stein in the evening.

'This Stein was a wealthy and respected merchant. His "house" (because it was a house, Stein & Co., and there was some sort of partner who, as Stein said, "looked after the Moluccas") had a large inter-island business, with a lot of trading posts

established in the most out-of-the-way places for collecting the produce. His wealth and his respectability were not exactly the reasons why I was anxious to seek his advice. I desired to confide my difficulty to him because he was one of the most trustworthy men I had ever known. The gentle light of a simple, unwearied, as it were, and intelligent good-nature illumined his long hairless face. It had deep downward folds, and was pale as of a man who had always led a sedentary life — which was indeed very far from being the case. His hair was thin, and brushed back from a massive and lofty forehead. One fancied that at twenty he must have looked very much like what he was now at threescore. It was a student's face; only the eyebrows nearly all white, thick and bushy, together with the resolute searching glance that came from under them, were not in accord with his, I may say, learned appearance. He was tall and loose-jointed; his slight stoop, together with an innocent smile, made him appear benevolently ready to lend you his ear; his long arms with pale big hands had rare deliberate gestures of a pointing out, demonstrating kind. I speak of him at length, because under this exterior, and in conjunction with an upright and indulgent nature, this man possessed an intrepidity of spirit and a physical courage that could have been called reckless had it not been like a natural function of the body — say good digestion, for instance — completely unconscious of itself. It is sometimes said of a man that he carries his life in his hand. Such a saying would have been inadequate if applied to him; during the early part of his existence in the East he had been playing ball with it. All this was in the past, but I knew the story of his life and the origin of his fortune. He was also a naturalist of some distinction, or perhaps I should say a learned collector. Entomology was his special study. His collection of Buprestidae and Longicorns — beetles all — horrible miniature monsters, looking malevolent in death and immobility, and his cabinet of butterflies, beautiful and hovering under the glass of cases on lifeless wings, had spread his fame far over the earth. The name of this merchant, adventurer, sometime adviser of a Malay sultan (to whom he never alluded otherwise than as “my poor Mohammed Bonso”), had, on account of a few bushels of dead insects, become known to learned persons in Europe, who could have had no conception, and certainly would not have cared to know anything, of his life or character. I, who knew, considered him an eminently suitable person to receive my confidences about Jim's difficulties as well as my own.'

Chapter 20

‘Late in the evening I entered his study, after traversing an imposing but empty dining-room very dimly lit. The house was silent. I was preceded by an elderly grim Javanese servant in a sort of livery of white jacket and yellow sarong, who, after throwing the door open, exclaimed low, “O master!” and stepping aside, vanished in a mysterious way as though he had been a ghost only momentarily embodied for that particular service. Stein turned round with the chair, and in the same movement his spectacles seemed to get pushed up on his forehead. He welcomed me in his quiet and humorous voice. Only one corner of the vast room, the corner in which stood his writing-desk, was strongly lighted by a shaded reading-lamp, and the rest of the spacious apartment melted into shapeless gloom like a cavern. Narrow shelves filled with dark boxes of uniform shape and colour ran round the walls, not from floor to ceiling, but in a sombre belt about four feet broad. Catacombs of beetles. Wooden tablets were hung above at irregular intervals. The light reached one of them, and the word *Coleoptera* written in gold letters glittered mysteriously upon a vast dimness. The glass cases containing the collection of butterflies were ranged in three long rows upon slender-legged little tables. One of these cases had been removed from its place and stood on the desk, which was bestrewn with oblong slips of paper blackened with minute handwriting.

“So you see me — so,” he said. His hand hovered over the case where a butterfly in solitary grandeur spread out dark bronze wings, seven inches or more across, with exquisite white veinings and a gorgeous border of yellow spots. “Only one specimen like this they have in your London, and then — no more. To my small native town this my collection I shall bequeath. Something of me. The best.”

‘He bent forward in the chair and gazed intently, his chin over the front of the case. I stood at his back. “Marvellous,” he whispered, and seemed to forget my presence. His history was curious. He had been born in Bavaria, and when a youth of twenty-two had taken an active part in the revolutionary movement of 1848. Heavily compromised, he managed to make his escape, and at first found a refuge with a poor republican watchmaker in Trieste. From there he made his way to Tripoli with a stock of cheap watches to hawk about, — not a very great opening truly, but it turned out lucky enough, because it was there he came upon a Dutch traveller — a rather famous man, I believe, but I don’t remember his name. It was that naturalist who, engaging him as a sort of assistant, took him to the East. They travelled in the Archipelago together and separately, collecting insects and birds, for four years or more. Then the naturalist went home, and Stein, having no home to go to, remained with an old trader he had

come across in his journeys in the interior of Celebes — if Celebes may be said to have an interior. This old Scotsman, the only white man allowed to reside in the country at the time, was a privileged friend of the chief ruler of Wajo States, who was a woman. I often heard Stein relate how that chap, who was slightly paralysed on one side, had introduced him to the native court a short time before another stroke carried him off. He was a heavy man with a patriarchal white beard, and of imposing stature. He came into the council-hall where all the rajahs, pangerans, and headmen were assembled, with the queen, a fat wrinkled woman (very free in her speech, Stein said), reclining on a high couch under a canopy. He dragged his leg, thumping with his stick, and grasped Stein's arm, leading him right up to the couch. "Look, queen, and you rajahs, this is my son," he proclaimed in a stentorian voice. "I have traded with your fathers, and when I die he shall trade with you and your sons."

'By means of this simple formality Stein inherited the Scotsman's privileged position and all his stock-in-trade, together with a fortified house on the banks of the only navigable river in the country. Shortly afterwards the old queen, who was so free in her speech, died, and the country became disturbed by various pretenders to the throne. Stein joined the party of a younger son, the one of whom thirty years later he never spoke otherwise but as "my poor Mohammed Bonso." They both became the heroes of innumerable exploits; they had wonderful adventures, and once stood a siege in the Scotsman's house for a month, with only a score of followers against a whole army. I believe the natives talk of that war to this day. Meantime, it seems, Stein never failed to annex on his own account every butterfly or beetle he could lay hands on. After some eight years of war, negotiations, false truces, sudden outbreaks, reconciliation, treachery, and so on, and just as peace seemed at last permanently established, his "poor Mohammed Bonso" was assassinated at the gate of his own royal residence while dismounting in the highest spirits on his return from a successful deer-hunt. This event rendered Stein's position extremely insecure, but he would have stayed perhaps had it not been that a short time afterwards he lost Mohammed's sister ("my dear wife the princess," he used to say solemnly), by whom he had had a daughter — mother and child both dying within three days of each other from some infectious fever. He left the country, which this cruel loss had made unbearable to him. Thus ended the first and adventurous part of his existence. What followed was so different that, but for the reality of sorrow which remained with him, this strange part must have resembled a dream. He had a little money; he started life afresh, and in the course of years acquired a considerable fortune. At first he had travelled a good deal amongst the islands, but age had stolen upon him, and of late he seldom left his spacious house three miles out of town, with an extensive garden, and surrounded by stables, offices, and bamboo cottages for his servants and dependants, of whom he had many. He drove in his buggy every morning to town, where he had an office with white and Chinese clerks. He owned a small fleet of schooners and native craft, and dealt in island produce on a large scale. For the rest he lived solitary, but not misanthropic, with his books and his collection, classing and arranging specimens, corresponding with entomologists in Europe, writing

up a descriptive catalogue of his treasures. Such was the history of the man whom I had come to consult upon Jim's case without any definite hope. Simply to hear what he would have to say would have been a relief. I was very anxious, but I respected the intense, almost passionate, absorption with which he looked at a butterfly, as though on the bronze sheen of these frail wings, in the white tracings, in the gorgeous markings, he could see other things, an image of something as perishable and defying destruction as these delicate and lifeless tissues displaying a splendour unmarred by death.

"Marvellous!" he repeated, looking up at me. "Look! The beauty — but that is nothing — look at the accuracy, the harmony. And so fragile! And so strong! And so exact! This is Nature — the balance of colossal forces. Every star is so — and every blade of grass stands so — and the mighty Kosmos in perfect equilibrium produces — this. This wonder; this masterpiece of Nature — the great artist."

"Never heard an entomologist go on like this," I observed cheerfully. "Masterpiece! And what of man?"

"Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece," he said, keeping his eyes fixed on the glass case. "Perhaps the artist was a little mad. Eh? What do you think? Sometimes it seems to me that man is come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him; for if not, why should he want all the place? Why should he run about here and there making a great noise about himself, talking about the stars, disturbing the blades of grass? . . ."

"Catching butterflies," I chimed in.

He smiled, threw himself back in his chair, and stretched his legs. "Sit down," he said. "I captured this rare specimen myself one very fine morning. And I had a very big emotion. You don't know what it is for a collector to capture such a rare specimen. You can't know."

I smiled at my ease in a rocking-chair. His eyes seemed to look far beyond the wall at which they stared; and he narrated how, one night, a messenger arrived from his "poor Mohammed," requiring his presence at the "residenz" — as he called it — which was distant some nine or ten miles by a bridle-path over a cultivated plain, with patches of forest here and there. Early in the morning he started from his fortified house, after embracing his little Emma, and leaving the "princess," his wife, in command. He described how she came with him as far as the gate, walking with one hand on the neck of his horse; she had on a white jacket, gold pins in her hair, and a brown leather belt over her left shoulder with a revolver in it. "She talked as women will talk," he said, "telling me to be careful, and to try to get back before dark, and what a great wickedness it was for me to go alone. We were at war, and the country was not safe; my men were putting up bullet-proof shutters to the house and loading their rifles, and she begged me to have no fear for her. She could defend the house against anybody till I returned. And I laughed with pleasure a little. I liked to see her so brave and young and strong. I too was young then. At the gate she caught hold of my hand and gave it one squeeze and fell back. I made my horse stand still outside till I heard the bars of the gate put up behind me. There was a great enemy of mine, a great noble — and

a great rascal too — roaming with a band in the neighbourhood. I cantered for four or five miles; there had been rain in the night, but the musts had gone up, up — and the face of the earth was clean; it lay smiling to me, so fresh and innocent — like a little child. Suddenly somebody fires a volley — twenty shots at least it seemed to me. I hear bullets sing in my ear, and my hat jumps to the back of my head. It was a little intrigue, you understand. They got my poor Mohammed to send for me and then laid that ambush. I see it all in a minute, and I think — This wants a little management. My pony snort, jump, and stand, and I fall slowly forward with my head on his mane. He begins to walk, and with one eye I could see over his neck a faint cloud of smoke hanging in front of a clump of bamboos to my left. I think — Aha! my friends, why you not wait long enough before you shoot? This is not yet gelungen. Oh no! I get hold of my revolver with my right hand — quiet — quiet. After all, there were only seven of these rascals. They get up from the grass and start running with their sarongs tucked up, waving spears above their heads, and yelling to each other to look out and catch the horse, because I was dead. I let them come as close as the door here, and then bang, bang, bang — take aim each time too. One more shot I fire at a man's back, but I miss. Too far already. And then I sit alone on my horse with the clean earth smiling at me, and there are the bodies of three men lying on the ground. One was curled up like a dog, another on his back had an arm over his eyes as if to keep off the sun, and the third man he draws up his leg very slowly and makes it with one kick straight again. I watch him very carefully from my horse, but there is no more — bleibt ganz ruhig — keep still, so. And as I looked at his face for some sign of life I observed something like a faint shadow pass over his forehead. It was the shadow of this butterfly. Look at the form of the wing. This species fly high with a strong flight. I raised my eyes and I saw him fluttering away. I think — Can it be possible? And then I lost him. I dismounted and went on very slow, leading my horse and holding my revolver with one hand and my eyes darting up and down and right and left, everywhere! At last I saw him sitting on a small heap of dirt ten feet away. At once my heart began to beat quick. I let go my horse, keep my revolver in one hand, and with the other snatch my soft felt hat off my head. One step. Steady. Another step. Flop! I got him! When I got up I shook like a leaf with excitement, and when I opened these beautiful wings and made sure what a rare and so extraordinary perfect specimen I had, my head went round and my legs became so weak with emotion that I had to sit on the ground. I had greatly desired to possess myself of a specimen of that species when collecting for the professor. I took long journeys and underwent great privations; I had dreamed of him in my sleep, and here suddenly I had him in my fingers — for myself! In the words of the poet” (he pronounced it “boet”) —

“‘So halt’ ich’s endlich denn in meinen Handen,
Und nenn’ es in gewissem Sinne mein.”

He gave to the last word the emphasis of a suddenly lowered voice, and withdrew his eyes slowly from my face. He began to charge a long-stemmed pipe busily and in

silence, then, pausing with his thumb on the orifice of the bowl, looked again at me significantly.

“Yes, my good friend. On that day I had nothing to desire; I had greatly annoyed my principal enemy; I was young, strong; I had friendship; I had the love” (he said “lof”) “of woman, a child I had, to make my heart very full — and even what I had once dreamed in my sleep had come into my hand too!”

‘He struck a match, which flared violently. His thoughtful placid face twitched once.

“Friend, wife, child,” he said slowly, gazing at the small flame — ”phoo!” The match was blown out. He sighed and turned again to the glass case. The frail and beautiful wings quivered faintly, as if his breath had for an instant called back to life that gorgeous object of his dreams.

“The work,” he began suddenly, pointing to the scattered slips, and in his usual gentle and cheery tone, “is making great progress. I have been this rare specimen describing. . . . Na! And what is your good news?”

“To tell you the truth, Stein,” I said with an effort that surprised me, “I came here to describe a specimen. . . .”

“Butterfly?” he asked, with an unbelieving and humorous eagerness.

“Nothing so perfect,” I answered, feeling suddenly dispirited with all sorts of doubts. “A man!”

“Ach so!” he murmured, and his smiling countenance, turned to me, became grave. Then after looking at me for a while he said slowly, “Well — I am a man too.”

‘Here you have him as he was; he knew how to be so generously encouraging as to make a scrupulous man hesitate on the brink of confidence; but if I did hesitate it was not for long.

‘He heard me out, sitting with crossed legs. Sometimes his head would disappear completely in a great eruption of smoke, and a sympathetic growl would come out from the cloud. When I finished he uncrossed his legs, laid down his pipe, leaned forward towards me earnestly with his elbows on the arms of his chair, the tips of his fingers together.

“I understand very well. He is romantic.”

‘He had diagnosed the case for me, and at first I was quite startled to find how simple it was; and indeed our conference resembled so much a medical consultation — Stein, of learned aspect, sitting in an arm-chair before his desk; I, anxious, in another, facing him, but a little to one side — that it seemed natural to ask —

“What’s good for it?”

‘He lifted up a long forefinger.

“There is only one remedy! One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!” The finger came down on the desk with a smart rap. The case which he had made to look so simple before became if possible still simpler — and altogether hopeless. There was a pause. “Yes,” said I, “strictly speaking, the question is not how to get cured, but how to live.”

‘He approved with his head, a little sadly as it seemed. “Ja! ja! In general, adapting the words of your great poet: That is the question. . . .” He went on nodding sympathetically. . . . “How to be! Ach! How to be.”

‘He stood up with the tips of his fingers resting on the desk.

““We want in so many different ways to be,” he began again. “This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still. He want to be so, and again he want to be so. . . .” He moved his hand up, then down. . . . “He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil — and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow — so fine as he can never be. . . . In a dream. . . .”

‘He lowered the glass lid, the automatic lock clicked sharply, and taking up the case in both hands he bore it religiously away to its place, passing out of the bright circle of the lamp into the ring of fainter light — into shapeless dusk at last. It had an odd effect — as if these few steps had carried him out of this concrete and perplexed world. His tall form, as though robbed of its substance, hovered noiselessly over invisible things with stooping and indefinite movements; his voice, heard in that remoteness where he could be glimpsed mysteriously busy with immaterial cares, was no longer incisive, seemed to roll voluminous and grave — mellowed by distance.

““And because you not always can keep your eyes shut there comes the real trouble — the heart pain — the world pain. I tell you, my friend, it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough. . . . Ja! . . . And all the time you are such a fine fellow too! Wie? Was? Gott im Himmel! How can that be? Ha! ha! ha!”

‘The shadow prowling amongst the graves of butterflies laughed boisterously.

““Yes! Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns — nicht wahr? . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me — how to be?”

‘His voice leaped up extraordinarily strong, as though away there in the dusk he had been inspired by some whisper of knowledge. “I will tell you! For that too there is only one way.”

‘With a hasty swish-swish of his slippers he loomed up in the ring of faint light, and suddenly appeared in the bright circle of the lamp. His extended hand aimed at my breast like a pistol; his deepset eyes seemed to pierce through me, but his twitching lips uttered no word, and the austere exaltation of a certitude seen in the dusk vanished from his face. The hand that had been pointing at my breast fell, and by-and-by, coming a step nearer, he laid it gently on my shoulder. There were things, he said mournfully, that perhaps could never be told, only he had lived so much alone that sometimes he forgot — he forgot. The light had destroyed the assurance which had inspired him in the distant shadows. He sat down and, with both elbows on the desk, rubbed his forehead. “And yet it is true — it is true. In the destructive element

immerse.” . . . He spoke in a subdued tone, without looking at me, one hand on each side of his face. “That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream — and so — ewig — usque ad finem. . . .” The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn — or was it, perchance, at the coming of the night? One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls — over graves. His life had begun in sacrifice, in enthusiasm for generous ideas; he had travelled very far, on various ways, on strange paths, and whatever he followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret. In so far he was right. That was the way, no doubt. Yet for all that, the great plain on which men wander amongst graves and pitfalls remained very desolate under the impalpable poesy of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the centre, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss full of flames. When at last I broke the silence it was to express the opinion that no one could be more romantic than himself.

‘He shook his head slowly, and afterwards looked at me with a patient and inquiring glance. It was a shame, he said. There we were sitting and talking like two boys, instead of putting our heads together to find something practical — a practical remedy — for the evil — for the great evil — he repeated, with a humorous and indulgent smile. For all that, our talk did not grow more practical. We avoided pronouncing Jim’s name as though we had tried to keep flesh and blood out of our discussion, or he were nothing but an erring spirit, a suffering and nameless shade. “Na!” said Stein, rising. “To-night you sleep here, and in the morning we shall do something practical — practical. . . .” He lit a two-branched candlestick and led the way. We passed through empty dark rooms, escorted by gleams from the lights Stein carried. They glided along the waxed floors, sweeping here and there over the polished surface of a table, leaped upon a fragmentary curve of a piece of furniture, or flashed perpendicularly in and out of distant mirrors, while the forms of two men and the flicker of two flames could be seen for a moment stealing silently across the depths of a crystalline void. He walked slowly a pace in advance with stooping courtesy; there was a profound, as it were a listening, quietude on his face; the long flaxen locks mixed with white threads were scattered thinly upon his slightly bowed neck.

“He is romantic — romantic,” he repeated. “And that is very bad — very bad. . . . Very good, too,” he added. “But is he?” I queried.

“Gewiss,” he said, and stood still holding up the candelabrum, but without looking at me. “Evident! What is it that by inward pain makes him know himself? What is it that for you and me makes him — exist?”

‘At that moment it was difficult to believe in Jim’s existence — starting from a country parsonage, blurred by crowds of men as by clouds of dust, silenced by the clashing claims of life and death in a material world — but his imperishable reality came to me with a convincing, with an irresistible force! I saw it vividly, as though in our progress through the lofty silent rooms amongst fleeting gleams of light and the sudden revelations of human figures stealing with flickering flames within unfathomable and

pellucid depths, we had approached nearer to absolute Truth, which, like Beauty itself, floats elusive, obscure, half submerged, in the silent still waters of mystery. "Perhaps he is," I admitted with a slight laugh, whose unexpectedly loud reverberation made me lower my voice directly; "but I am sure you are." With his head dropping on his breast and the light held high he began to walk again. "Well — I exist, too," he said.

'He preceded me. My eyes followed his movements, but what I did see was not the head of the firm, the welcome guest at afternoon receptions, the correspondent of learned societies, the entertainer of stray naturalists; I saw only the reality of his destiny, which he had known how to follow with unfaltering footsteps, that life begun in humble surroundings, rich in generous enthusiasms, in friendship, love, war — in all the exalted elements of romance. At the door of my room he faced me. "Yes," I said, as though carrying on a discussion, "and amongst other things you dreamed foolishly of a certain butterfly; but when one fine morning your dream came in your way you did not let the splendid opportunity escape. Did you? Whereas he . . ." Stein lifted his hand. "And do you know how many opportunities I let escape; how many dreams I had lost that had come in my way?" He shook his head regretfully. "It seems to me that some would have been very fine — if I had made them come true. Do you know how many? Perhaps I myself don't know." "Whether his were fine or not," I said, "he knows of one which he certainly did not catch." "Everybody knows of one or two like that," said Stein; "and that is the trouble — the great trouble. . . ."

'He shook hands on the threshold, peered into my room under his raised arm. "Sleep well. And to-morrow we must do something practical — practical. . . ."

'Though his own room was beyond mine I saw him return the way he came. He was going back to his butterflies.'

Chapter 21

‘I don’t suppose any of you have ever heard of Patusan?’ Marlow resumed, after a silence occupied in the careful lighting of a cigar. ‘It does not matter; there’s many a heavenly body in the lot crowding upon us of a night that mankind had never heard of, it being outside the sphere of its activities and of no earthly importance to anybody but to the astronomers who are paid to talk learnedly about its composition, weight, path — the irregularities of its conduct, the aberrations of its light — a sort of scientific scandal-mongering. Thus with Patusan. It was referred to knowingly in the inner government circles in Batavia, especially as to its irregularities and aberrations, and it was known by name to some few, very few, in the mercantile world. Nobody, however, had been there, and I suspect no one desired to go there in person, just as an astronomer, I should fancy, would strongly object to being transported into a distant heavenly body, where, parted from his earthly emoluments, he would be bewildered by the view of an unfamiliar heavens. However, neither heavenly bodies nor astronomers have anything to do with Patusan. It was Jim who went there. I only meant you to understand that had Stein arranged to send him into a star of the fifth magnitude the change could not have been greater. He left his earthly failings behind him and what sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon. Entirely new, entirely remarkable. And he got hold of them in a remarkable way.

‘Stein was the man who knew more about Patusan than anybody else. More than was known in the government circles I suspect. I have no doubt he had been there, either in his butterfly-hunting days or later on, when he tried in his incorrigible way to season with a pinch of romance the fattening dishes of his commercial kitchen. There were very few places in the Archipelago he had not seen in the original dusk of their being, before light (and even electric light) had been carried into them for the sake of better morality and — and — well — the greater profit, too. It was at breakfast of the morning following our talk about Jim that he mentioned the place, after I had quoted poor Brierly’s remark: “Let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there.” He looked up at me with interested attention, as though I had been a rare insect. “This could be done, too,” he remarked, sipping his coffee. “Bury him in some sort,” I explained. “One doesn’t like to do it of course, but it would be the best thing, seeing what he is.” “Yes; he is young,” Stein mused. “The youngest human being now in existence,” I affirmed. “Schon. There’s Patusan,” he went on in the same tone. . . . “And the woman is dead now,” he added incomprehensibly.

‘Of course I don’t know that story; I can only guess that once before Patusan had been used as a grave for some sin, transgression, or misfortune. It is impossible to suspect Stein. The only woman that had ever existed for him was the Malay girl he called “My wife the princess,” or, more rarely, in moments of expansion, “the mother of my Emma.” Who was the woman he had mentioned in connection with Patusan I can’t say; but from his allusions I understand she had been an educated and very good-looking Dutch-Malay girl, with a tragic or perhaps only a pitiful history, whose most painful part no doubt was her marriage with a Malacca Portuguese who had been clerk in some commercial house in the Dutch colonies. I gathered from Stein that this man was an unsatisfactory person in more ways than one, all being more or less indefinite and offensive. It was solely for his wife’s sake that Stein had appointed him manager of Stein & Co.’s trading post in Patusan; but commercially the arrangement was not a success, at any rate for the firm, and now the woman had died, Stein was disposed to try another agent there. The Portuguese, whose name was Cornelius, considered himself a very deserving but ill-used person, entitled by his abilities to a better position. This man Jim would have to relieve. “But I don’t think he will go away from the place,” remarked Stein. “That has nothing to do with me. It was only for the sake of the woman that I . . . But as I think there is a daughter left, I shall let him, if he likes to stay, keep the old house.”

‘Patusan is a remote district of a native-ruled state, and the chief settlement bears the same name. At a point on the river about forty miles from the sea, where the first houses come into view, there can be seen rising above the level of the forests the summits of two steep hills very close together, and separated by what looks like a deep fissure, the cleavage of some mighty stroke. As a matter of fact, the valley between is nothing but a narrow ravine; the appearance from the settlement is of one irregularly conical hill split in two, and with the two halves leaning slightly apart. On the third day after the full, the moon, as seen from the open space in front of Jim’s house (he had a very fine house in the native style when I visited him), rose exactly behind these hills, its diffused light at first throwing the two masses into intensely black relief, and then the nearly perfect disc, glowing ruddily, appeared, gliding upwards between the sides of the chasm, till it floated away above the summits, as if escaping from a yawning grave in gentle triumph. “Wonderful effect,” said Jim by my side. “Worth seeing. Is it not?”

‘And this question was put with a note of personal pride that made me smile, as though he had had a hand in regulating that unique spectacle. He had regulated so many things in Patusan — things that would have appeared as much beyond his control as the motions of the moon and the stars.

‘It was inconceivable. That was the distinctive quality of the part into which Stein and I had tumbled him unwittingly, with no other notion than to get him out of the way; out of his own way, be it understood. That was our main purpose, though, I own, I might have had another motive which had influenced me a little. I was about to go home for a time; and it may be I desired, more than I was aware of myself, to dispose

of him — to dispose of him, you understand — before I left. I was going home, and he had come to me from there, with his miserable trouble and his shadowy claim, like a man panting under a burden in a mist. I cannot say I had ever seen him distinctly — not even to this day, after I had my last view of him; but it seemed to me that the less I understood the more I was bound to him in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge. I did not know so much more about myself. And then, I repeat, I was going home — to that home distant enough for all its hearthstones to be like one hearthstone, by which the humblest of us has the right to sit. We wander in our thousands over the face of the earth, the illustrious and the obscure, earning beyond the seas our fame, our money, or only a crust of bread; but it seems to me that for each of us going home must be like going to render an account. We return to face our superiors, our kindred, our friends — those whom we obey, and those whom we love; but even they who have neither, the most free, lonely, irresponsible and bereft of ties, — even those for whom home holds no dear face, no familiar voice, — even they have to meet the spirit that dwells within the land, under its sky, in its air, in its valleys, and on its rises, in its fields, in its waters and its trees — a mute friend, judge, and inspirer. Say what you like, to get its joy, to breathe its peace, to face its truth, one must return with a clear conscience. All this may seem to you sheer sentimentalism; and indeed very few of us have the will or the capacity to look consciously under the surface of familiar emotions. There are the girls we love, the men we look up to, the tenderness, the friendships, the opportunities, the pleasures! But the fact remains that you must touch your reward with clean hands, lest it turn to dead leaves, to thorns, in your grasp. I think it is the lonely, without a fireside or an affection they may call their own, those who return not to a dwelling but to the land itself, to meet its disembodied, eternal, and unchangeable spirit — it is those who understand best its severity, its saving power, the grace of its secular right to our fidelity, to our obedience. Yes! few of us understand, but we all feel it though, and I say all without exception, because those who do not feel do not count. Each blade of grass has its spot on earth whence it draws its life, its strength; and so is man rooted to the land from which he draws his faith together with his life. I don't know how much Jim understood; but I know he felt, he felt confusedly but powerfully, the demand of some such truth or some such illusion — I don't care how you call it, there is so little difference, and the difference means so little. The thing is that in virtue of his feeling he mattered. He would never go home now. Not he. Never. Had he been capable of picturesque manifestations he would have shuddered at the thought and made you shudder too. But he was not of that sort, though he was expressive enough in his way. Before the idea of going home he would grow desperately stiff and immovable, with lowered chin and pouted lips, and with those candid blue eyes of his glowering darkly under a frown, as if before something unbearable, as if before something revolting. There was imagination in that hard skull of his, over which the thick clustering hair fitted like a cap. As to me, I have no imagination (I would be more certain about him today, if I had), and I do not mean to imply that I figured to myself the spirit of the land uprising above the white

cliffs of Dover, to ask me what I — returning with no bones broken, so to speak — had done with my very young brother. I could not make such a mistake. I knew very well he was of those about whom there is no inquiry; I had seen better men go out, disappear, vanish utterly, without provoking a sound of curiosity or sorrow. The spirit of the land, as becomes the ruler of great enterprises, is careless of innumerable lives. Woe to the stragglers! We exist only in so far as we hang together. He had straggled in a way; he had not hung on; but he was aware of it with an intensity that made him touching, just as a man's more intense life makes his death more touching than the death of a tree. I happened to be handy, and I happened to be touched. That's all there is to it. I was concerned as to the way he would go out. It would have hurt me if, for instance, he had taken to drink. The earth is so small that I was afraid of, some day, being waylaid by a blear-eyed, swollen-faced, besmirched loafer, with no soles to his canvas shoes, and with a flutter of rags about the elbows, who, on the strength of old acquaintance, would ask for a loan of five dollars. You know the awful jaunty bearing of these scarecrows coming to you from a decent past, the rasping careless voice, the half-averted impudent glances — those meetings more trying to a man who believes in the solidarity of our lives than the sight of an impenitent death-bed to a priest. That, to tell you the truth, was the only danger I could see for him and for me; but I also mistrusted my want of imagination. It might even come to something worse, in some way it was beyond my powers of fancy to foresee. He wouldn't let me forget how imaginative he was, and your imaginative people swing farther in any direction, as if given a longer scope of cable in the uneasy anchorage of life. They do. They take to drink too. It may be I was belittling him by such a fear. How could I tell? Even Stein could say no more than that he was romantic. I only knew he was one of us. And what business had he to be romantic? I am telling you so much about my own instinctive feelings and bemused reflections because there remains so little to be told of him. He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you. I've led him out by the hand; I have paraded him before you. Were my commonplace fears unjust? I won't say — not even now. You may be able to tell better, since the proverb has it that the onlookers see most of the game. At any rate, they were superfluous. He did not go out, not at all; on the contrary, he came on wonderfully, came on straight as a die and in excellent form, which showed that he could stay as well as spurt. I ought to be delighted, for it is a victory in which I had taken my part; but I am not so pleased as I would have expected to be. I ask myself whether his rush had really carried him out of that mist in which he loomed interesting if not very big, with floating outlines — a straggler yearning inconsolably for his humble place in the ranks. And besides, the last word is not said, — probably shall never be said. Are not our lives too short for that full utterance which through all our stammerings is of course our only and abiding intention? I have given up expecting those last words, whose ring, if they could only be pronounced, would shake both heaven and earth. There is never time to say our last word — the last word of our love, of our desire, faith, remorse, submissions, revolt. The heaven and the earth must not be shaken, I suppose — at least, not by

us who know so many truths about either. My last words about Jim shall be few. I affirm he had achieved greatness; but the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions — and safe — and profitable — and dull. Yet you, too, in your time must have known the intensity of life, that light of glamour created in the shock of trifles, as amazing as the glow of sparks struck from a cold stone — and as short-lived, alas!’

Chapter 22

‘The conquest of love, honour, men’s confidence — the pride of it, the power of it, are fit materials for a heroic tale; only our minds are struck by the externals of such a success, and to Jim’s successes there were no externals. Thirty miles of forest shut it off from the sight of an indifferent world, and the noise of the white surf along the coast overpowered the voice of fame. The stream of civilisation, as if divided on a headland a hundred miles north of Patusan, branches east and south-east, leaving its plains and valleys, its old trees and its old mankind, neglected and isolated, such as an insignificant and crumbling islet between the two branches of a mighty, devouring stream. You find the name of the country pretty often in collections of old voyages. The seventeenth-century traders went there for pepper, because the passion for pepper seemed to burn like a flame of love in the breast of Dutch and English adventurers about the time of James the First. Where wouldn’t they go for pepper! For a bag of pepper they would cut each other’s throats without hesitation, and would forswear their souls, of which they were so careful otherwise: the bizarre obstinacy of that desire made them defy death in a thousand shapes — the unknown seas, the loathsome and strange diseases; wounds, captivity, hunger, pestilence, and despair. It made them great! By heavens! it made them heroic; and it made them pathetic too in their craving for trade with the inflexible death levying its toll on young and old. It seems impossible to believe that mere greed could hold men to such a steadfastness of purpose, to such a blind persistence in endeavour and sacrifice. And indeed those who adventured their persons and lives risked all they had for a slender reward. They left their bones to lie bleaching on distant shores, so that wealth might flow to the living at home. To us, their less tried successors, they appear magnified, not as agents of trade but as instruments of a recorded destiny, pushing out into the unknown in obedience to an inward voice, to an impulse beating in the blood, to a dream of the future. They were wonderful; and it must be owned they were ready for the wonderful. They recorded it complacently in their sufferings, in the aspect of the seas, in the customs of strange nations, in the glory of splendid rulers.

‘In Patusan they had found lots of pepper, and had been impressed by the magnificence and the wisdom of the Sultan; but somehow, after a century of chequered intercourse, the country seems to drop gradually out of the trade. Perhaps the pepper had given out. Be it as it may, nobody cares for it now; the glory has departed, the Sultan is an imbecile youth with two thumbs on his left hand and an uncertain and beggarly revenue extorted from a miserable population and stolen from him by his many uncles.

‘This of course I have from Stein. He gave me their names and a short sketch of the life and character of each. He was as full of information about native states as an official report, but infinitely more amusing. He had to know. He traded in so many, and in some districts — as in Patusan, for instance — his firm was the only one to have an agency by special permit from the Dutch authorities. The Government trusted his discretion, and it was understood that he took all the risks. The men he employed understood that too, but he made it worth their while apparently. He was perfectly frank with me over the breakfast-table in the morning. As far as he was aware (the last news was thirteen months old, he stated precisely), utter insecurity for life and property was the normal condition. There were in Patusan antagonistic forces, and one of them was Rajah Allang, the worst of the Sultan’s uncles, the governor of the river, who did the extorting and the stealing, and ground down to the point of extinction the country-born Malays, who, utterly defenceless, had not even the resource of emigrating — ”For indeed,” as Stein remarked, “where could they go, and how could they get away?” No doubt they did not even desire to get away. The world (which is circumscribed by lofty impassable mountains) has been given into the hand of the high-born, and this Rajah they knew: he was of their own royal house. I had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman later on. He was a dirty, little, used-up old man with evil eyes and a weak mouth, who swallowed an opium pill every two hours, and in defiance of common decency wore his hair uncovered and falling in wild stringy locks about his wizened grimy face. When giving audience he would clamber upon a sort of narrow stage erected in a hall like a ruinous barn with a rotten bamboo floor, through the cracks of which you could see, twelve or fifteen feet below, the heaps of refuse and garbage of all kinds lying under the house. That is where and how he received us when, accompanied by Jim, I paid him a visit of ceremony. There were about forty people in the room, and perhaps three times as many in the great courtyard below. There was constant movement, coming and going, pushing and murmuring, at our backs. A few youths in gay silks glared from the distance; the majority, slaves and humble dependants, were half naked, in ragged sarongs, dirty with ashes and mud-stains. I had never seen Jim look so grave, so self-possessed, in an impenetrable, impressive way. In the midst of these dark-faced men, his stalwart figure in white apparel, the gleaming clusters of his fair hair, seemed to catch all the sunshine that trickled through the cracks in the closed shutters of that dim hall, with its walls of mats and a roof of thatch. He appeared like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence. Had they not seen him come up in a canoe they might have thought he had descended upon them from the clouds. He did, however, come in a crazy dug-out, sitting (very still and with his knees together, for fear of overturning the thing) — sitting on a tin box — which I had lent him — nursing on his lap a revolver of the Navy pattern — presented by me on parting — which, through an interposition of Providence, or through some wrong-headed notion, that was just like him, or else from sheer instinctive sagacity, he had decided to carry unloaded. That’s how he ascended the Patusan river. Nothing could have been more prosaic and more unsafe, more extravagantly casual, more lonely. Strange, this fatality

that would cast the complexion of a flight upon all his acts, of impulsive unreflecting desertion of a jump into the unknown.

‘It is precisely the casualness of it that strikes me most. Neither Stein nor I had a clear conception of what might be on the other side when we, metaphorically speaking, took him up and hove him over the wall with scant ceremony. At the moment I merely wished to achieve his disappearance; Stein characteristically enough had a sentimental motive. He had a notion of paying off (in kind, I suppose) the old debt he had never forgotten. Indeed he had been all his life especially friendly to anybody from the British Isles. His late benefactor, it is true, was a Scot — even to the length of being called Alexander McNeil — and Jim came from a long way south of the Tweed; but at the distance of six or seven thousand miles Great Britain, though never diminished, looks foreshortened enough even to its own children to rob such details of their importance. Stein was excusable, and his hinted intentions were so generous that I begged him most earnestly to keep them secret for a time. I felt that no consideration of personal advantage should be allowed to influence Jim; that not even the risk of such influence should be run. We had to deal with another sort of reality. He wanted a refuge, and a refuge at the cost of danger should be offered him — nothing more.

‘Upon every other point I was perfectly frank with him, and I even (as I believed at the time) exaggerated the danger of the undertaking. As a matter of fact I did not do it justice; his first day in Patusan was nearly his last — would have been his last if he had not been so reckless or so hard on himself and had condescended to load that revolver. I remember, as I unfolded our precious scheme for his retreat, how his stubborn but weary resignation was gradually replaced by surprise, interest, wonder, and by boyish eagerness. This was a chance he had been dreaming of. He couldn’t think how he merited that I . . . He would be shot if he could see to what he owed . . . And it was Stein, Stein the merchant, who . . . but of course it was me he had to . . . I cut him short. He was not articulate, and his gratitude caused me inexplicable pain. I told him that if he owed this chance to any one especially, it was to an old Scot of whom he had never heard, who had died many years ago, of whom little was remembered besides a roaring voice and a rough sort of honesty. There was really no one to receive his thanks. Stein was passing on to a young man the help he had received in his own young days, and I had done no more than to mention his name. Upon this he coloured, and, twisting a bit of paper in his fingers, he remarked bashfully that I had always trusted him.

‘I admitted that such was the case, and added after a pause that I wished he had been able to follow my example. “You think I don’t?” he asked uneasily, and remarked in a mutter that one had to get some sort of show first; then brightening up, and in a loud voice he protested he would give me no occasion to regret my confidence, which — which . . .

“Do not misapprehend,” I interrupted. “It is not in your power to make me regret anything.” There would be no regrets; but if there were, it would be altogether my own affair: on the other hand, I wished him to understand clearly that this arrangement,

this — this — experiment, was his own doing; he was responsible for it and no one else. “Why? Why,” he stammered, “this is the very thing that I . . .” I begged him not to be dense, and he looked more puzzled than ever. He was in a fair way to make life intolerable to himself . . . “Do you think so?” he asked, disturbed; but in a moment added confidently, “I was going on though. Was I not?” It was impossible to be angry with him: I could not help a smile, and told him that in the old days people who went on like this were on the way of becoming hermits in a wilderness. “Hermits be hanged!” he commented with engaging impulsiveness. Of course he didn’t mind a wilderness. . . . “I was glad of it,” I said. That was where he would be going to. He would find it lively enough, I ventured to promise. “Yes, yes,” he said, keenly. He had shown a desire, I continued inflexibly, to go out and shut the door after him. . . . “Did I?” he interrupted in a strange access of gloom that seemed to envelop him from head to foot like the shadow of a passing cloud. He was wonderfully expressive after all. Wonderfully! “Did I?” he repeated bitterly. “You can’t say I made much noise about it. And I can keep it up, too — only, confound it! you show me a door.” . . . “Very well. Pass on,” I struck in. I could make him a solemn promise that it would be shut behind him with a vengeance. His fate, whatever it was, would be ignored, because the country, for all its rotten state, was not judged ripe for interference. Once he got in, it would be for the outside world as though he had never existed. He would have nothing but the soles of his two feet to stand upon, and he would have first to find his ground at that. “Never existed — that’s it, by Jove,” he murmured to himself. His eyes, fastened upon my lips, sparkled. If he had thoroughly understood the conditions, I concluded, he had better jump into the first gharry he could see and drive on to Stein’s house for his final instructions. He flung out of the room before I had fairly finished speaking.’

Chapter 23

‘He did not return till next morning. He had been kept to dinner and for the night. There never had been such a wonderful man as Mr. Stein. He had in his pocket a letter for Cornelius (“the Johnnie who’s going to get the sack,” he explained, with a momentary drop in his elation), and he exhibited with glee a silver ring, such as natives use, worn down very thin and showing faint traces of chasing.

‘This was his introduction to an old chap called Doramin — one of the principal men out there — a big pot — who had been Mr. Stein’s friend in that country where he had all these adventures. Mr. Stein called him “war-comrade.” War-comrade was good. Wasn’t it? And didn’t Mr. Stein speak English wonderfully well? Said he had learned it in Celebes — of all places! That was awfully funny. Was it not? He did speak with an accent — a twang — did I notice? That chap Doramin had given him the ring. They had exchanged presents when they parted for the last time. Sort of promising eternal friendship. He called it fine — did I not? They had to make a dash for dear life out of the country when that Mohammed — Mohammed — What’s-his-name had been killed. I knew the story, of course. Seemed a beastly shame, didn’t it? . . .

‘He ran on like this, forgetting his plate, with a knife and fork in hand (he had found me at tiffin), slightly flushed, and with his eyes darkened many shades, which was with him a sign of excitement. The ring was a sort of credential — (“It’s like something you read of in books,” he threw in appreciatively) — and Doramin would do his best for him. Mr. Stein had been the means of saving that chap’s life on some occasion; purely by accident, Mr. Stein had said, but he — Jim — had his own opinion about that. Mr. Stein was just the man to look out for such accidents. No matter. Accident or purpose, this would serve his turn immensely. Hoped to goodness the jolly old beggar had not gone off the hooks meantime. Mr. Stein could not tell. There had been no news for more than a year; they were kicking up no end of an all-fired row amongst themselves, and the river was closed. Jolly awkward, this; but, no fear; he would manage to find a crack to get in.

‘He impressed, almost frightened, me with his elated rattle. He was voluble like a youngster on the eve of a long holiday with a prospect of delightful scrapes, and such an attitude of mind in a grown man and in this connection had in it something phenomenal, a little mad, dangerous, unsafe. I was on the point of entreating him to take things seriously when he dropped his knife and fork (he had begun eating, or rather swallowing food, as it were, unconsciously), and began a search all round his plate. The ring! The ring! Where the devil . . . Ah! Here it was . . . He closed his big hand on it, and tried all his pockets one after another. Jove! wouldn’t do to lose the

thing. He meditated gravely over his fist. Had it? Would hang the bally affair round his neck! And he proceeded to do this immediately, producing a string (which looked like a bit of a cotton shoe-lace) for the purpose. There! That would do the trick! It would be the deuce if . . . He seemed to catch sight of my face for the first time, and it steadied him a little. I probably didn't realise, he said with a naive gravity, how much importance he attached to that token. It meant a friend; and it is a good thing to have a friend. He knew something about that. He nodded at me expressively, but before my disclaiming gesture he leaned his head on his hand and for a while sat silent, playing thoughtfully with the bread-crumbs on the cloth . . . "Slam the door — that was jolly well put," he cried, and jumping up, began to pace the room, reminding me by the set of the shoulders, the turn of his head, the headlong and uneven stride, of that night when he had paced thus, confessing, explaining — what you will — but, in the last instance, living — living before me, under his own little cloud, with all his unconscious subtlety which could draw consolation from the very source of sorrow. It was the same mood, the same and different, like a fickle companion that to-day guiding you on the true path, with the same eyes, the same step, the same impulse, to-morrow will lead you hopelessly astray. His tread was assured, his straying, darkened eyes seemed to search the room for something. One of his footfalls somehow sounded louder than the other — the fault of his boots probably — and gave a curious impression of an invisible halt in his gait. One of his hands was rammed deep into his trousers' pocket, the other waved suddenly above his head. "Slam the door!" he shouted. "I've been waiting for that. I'll show yet . . . I'll . . . I'm ready for any confounded thing . . . I've been dreaming of it . . . Jove! Get out of this. Jove! This is luck at last . . . You wait. I'll . . ."

'He tossed his head fearlessly, and I confess that for the first and last time in our acquaintance I perceived myself unexpectedly to be thoroughly sick of him. Why these vapourings? He was stumping about the room flourishing his arm absurdly, and now and then feeling on his breast for the ring under his clothes. Where was the sense of such exaltation in a man appointed to be a trading-clerk, and in a place where there was no trade — at that? Why hurl defiance at the universe? This was not a proper frame of mind to approach any undertaking; an improper frame of mind not only for him, I said, but for any man. He stood still over me. Did I think so? he asked, by no means subdued, and with a smile in which I seemed to detect suddenly something insolent. But then I am twenty years his senior. Youth is insolent; it is its right — its necessity; it has got to assert itself, and all assertion in this world of doubts is a defiance, is an insolence. He went off into a far corner, and coming back, he, figuratively speaking, turned to rend me. I spoke like that because I — even I, who had been no end kind to him — even I remembered — remembered — against him — what — what had happened. And what about others — the — the — world? Where's the wonder he wanted to get out, meant to get out, meant to stay out — by heavens! And I talked about proper frames of mind!

"It is not I or the world who remember," I shouted. "It is you — you, who remember."

‘He did not flinch, and went on with heat, “Forget everything, everybody, everybody.” . . . His voice fell. . . “But you,” he added.

“Yes — me too — if it would help,” I said, also in a low tone. After this we remained silent and languid for a time as if exhausted. Then he began again, composedly, and told me that Mr. Stein had instructed him to wait for a month or so, to see whether it was possible for him to remain, before he began building a new house for himself, so as to avoid “vain expense.” He did make use of funny expressions — Stein did. “Vain expense” was good. . . . Remain? Why! of course. He would hang on. Let him only get in — that’s all; he would answer for it he would remain. Never get out. It was easy enough to remain.

“Don’t be foolhardy,” I said, rendered uneasy by his threatening tone. “If you only live long enough you will want to come back.”

“Come back to what?” he asked absently, with his eyes fixed upon the face of a clock on the wall.

‘I was silent for a while. “Is it to be never, then?” I said. “Never,” he repeated dreamily without looking at me, and then flew into sudden activity. “Jove! Two o’clock, and I sail at four!”

‘It was true. A brigantine of Stein’s was leaving for the westward that afternoon, and he had been instructed to take his passage in her, only no orders to delay the sailing had been given. I suppose Stein forgot. He made a rush to get his things while I went aboard my ship, where he promised to call on his way to the outer roadstead. He turned up accordingly in a great hurry and with a small leather valise in his hand. This wouldn’t do, and I offered him an old tin trunk of mine supposed to be water-tight, or at least damp-tight. He effected the transfer by the simple process of shooting out the contents of his valise as you would empty a sack of wheat. I saw three books in the tumble; two small, in dark covers, and a thick green-and-gold volume — a half-crown complete Shakespeare. “You read this?” I asked. “Yes. Best thing to cheer up a fellow,” he said hastily. I was struck by this appreciation, but there was no time for Shakespearian talk. A heavy revolver and two small boxes of cartridges were lying on the cuddy-table. “Pray take this,” I said. “It may help you to remain.” No sooner were these words out of my mouth than I perceived what grim meaning they could bear. “May help you to get in,” I corrected myself remorsefully. He however was not troubled by obscure meanings; he thanked me effusively and bolted out, calling Good-bye over his shoulder. I heard his voice through the ship’s side urging his boatmen to give way, and looking out of the stern-port I saw the boat rounding under the counter. He sat in her leaning forward, exciting his men with voice and gestures; and as he had kept the revolver in his hand and seemed to be presenting it at their heads, I shall never forget the scared faces of the four Javanese, and the frantic swing of their stroke which snatched that vision from under my eyes. Then turning away, the first thing I saw were the two boxes of cartridges on the cuddy-table. He had forgotten to take them.

‘I ordered my gig manned at once; but Jim’s rowers, under the impression that their lives hung on a thread while they had that madman in the boat, made such

excellent time that before I had traversed half the distance between the two vessels I caught sight of him clambering over the rail, and of his box being passed up. All the brigantine's canvas was loose, her mainsail was set, and the windlass was just beginning to clink as I stepped upon her deck: her master, a dapper little half-caste of forty or so, in a blue flannel suit, with lively eyes, his round face the colour of lemon-peel, and with a thin little black moustache drooping on each side of his thick, dark lips, came forward smirking. He turned out, notwithstanding his self-satisfied and cheery exterior, to be of a careworn temperament. In answer to a remark of mine (while Jim had gone below for a moment) he said, "Oh yes. Patusan." He was going to carry the gentleman to the mouth of the river, but would "never ascend." His flowing English seemed to be derived from a dictionary compiled by a lunatic. Had Mr. Stein desired him to "ascend," he would have "reverentially" — (I think he wanted to say respectfully — but devil only knows) — "reverentially made objects for the safety of properties." If disregarded, he would have presented "resignation to quit." Twelve months ago he had made his last voyage there, and though Mr. Cornelius "propitiated many offertories" to Mr. Rajah Allang and the "principal populations," on conditions which made the trade "a snare and ashes in the mouth," yet his ship had been fired upon from the woods by "irresponsive parties" all the way down the river; which causing his crew "from exposure to limb to remain silent in hidings," the brigantine was nearly stranded on a sandbank at the bar, where she "would have been perishable beyond the act of man." The angry disgust at the recollection, the pride of his fluency, to which he turned an attentive ear, struggled for the possession of his broad simple face. He scowled and beamed at me, and watched with satisfaction the undeniable effect of his phraseology. Dark frowns ran swiftly over the placid sea, and the brigantine, with her fore-topsail to the mast and her main-boom amidships, seemed bewildered amongst the cat's-paws. He told me further, gnashing his teeth, that the Rajah was a "laughable hyaena" (can't imagine how he got hold of hyaenas); while somebody else was many times falser than the "weapons of a crocodile." Keeping one eye on the movements of his crew forward, he let loose his volubility — comparing the place to a "cage of beasts made ravenous by long impenitence." I fancy he meant impunity. He had no intention, he cried, to "exhibit himself to be made attached purposefully to robbery." The long-drawn wails, giving the time for the pull of the men catting the anchor, came to an end, and he lowered his voice. "Plenty too much enough of Patusan," he concluded, with energy.

'I heard afterwards he had been so indiscreet as to get himself tied up by the neck with a rattan halter to a post planted in the middle of a mud-hole before the Rajah's house. He spent the best part of a day and a whole night in that unwholesome situation, but there is every reason to believe the thing had been meant as a sort of joke. He brooded for a while over that horrid memory, I suppose, and then addressed in a quarrelsome tone the man coming aft to the helm. When he turned to me again it was to speak judicially, without passion. He would take the gentleman to the mouth of the river at Batu Kring (Patusan town "being situated internally," he remarked, "thirty miles"). But in his eyes, he continued — a tone of bored, weary conviction replacing his

previous voluble delivery — the gentleman was already “in the similitude of a corpse.” “What? What do you say?” I asked. He assumed a startlingly ferocious demeanour, and imitated to perfection the act of stabbing from behind. “Already like the body of one deported,” he explained, with the insufferably conceited air of his kind after what they imagine a display of cleverness. Behind him I perceived Jim smiling silently at me, and with a raised hand checking the exclamation on my lips.

‘Then, while the half-caste, bursting with importance, shouted his orders, while the yards swung creaking and the heavy boom came surging over, Jim and I, alone as it were, to leeward of the mainsail, clasped each other’s hands and exchanged the last hurried words. My heart was freed from that dull resentment which had existed side by side with interest in his fate. The absurd chatter of the half-caste had given more reality to the miserable dangers of his path than Stein’s careful statements. On that occasion the sort of formality that had been always present in our intercourse vanished from our speech; I believe I called him “dear boy,” and he tacked on the words “old man” to some half-uttered expression of gratitude, as though his risk set off against my years had made us more equal in age and in feeling. There was a moment of real and profound intimacy, unexpected and short-lived like a glimpse of some everlasting, of some saving truth. He exerted himself to soothe me as though he had been the more mature of the two. “All right, all right,” he said, rapidly, and with feeling. “I promise to take care of myself. Yes; I won’t take any risks. Not a single blessed risk. Of course not. I mean to hang out. Don’t you worry. Jove! I feel as if nothing could touch me. Why! this is luck from the word Go. I wouldn’t spoil such a magnificent chance!” . . . A magnificent chance! Well, it was magnificent, but chances are what men make them, and how was I to know? As he had said, even I — even I remembered — his — his misfortune against him. It was true. And the best thing for him was to go.

‘My gig had dropped in the wake of the brigantine, and I saw him aft detached upon the light of the westering sun, raising his cap high above his head. I heard an indistinct shout, “You — shall — hear — of — me.” Of me, or from me, I don’t know which. I think it must have been of me. My eyes were too dazzled by the glitter of the sea below his feet to see him clearly; I am fated never to see him clearly; but I can assure you no man could have appeared less “in the similitude of a corpse,” as that half-caste croaker had put it. I could see the little wretch’s face, the shape and colour of a ripe pumpkin, poked out somewhere under Jim’s elbow. He, too, raised his arm as if for a downward thrust. Absit omen!’

Chapter 24

‘The coast of Patusan (I saw it nearly two years afterwards) is straight and sombre, and faces a misty ocean. Red trails are seen like cataracts of rust streaming under the dark-green foliage of bushes and creepers clothing the low cliffs. Swampy plains open out at the mouth of rivers, with a view of jagged blue peaks beyond the vast forests. In the offing a chain of islands, dark, crumbling shapes, stand out in the everlasting sunlit haze like the remnants of a wall breached by the sea.

‘There is a village of fisher-folk at the mouth of the Batu Kring branch of the estuary. The river, which had been closed so long, was open then, and Stein’s little schooner, in which I had my passage, worked her way up in three tides without being exposed to a fusillade from “irresponsive parties.” Such a state of affairs belonged already to ancient history, if I could believe the elderly headman of the fishing village, who came on board to act as a sort of pilot. He talked to me (the second white man he had ever seen) with confidence, and most of his talk was about the first white man he had ever seen. He called him Tuan Jim, and the tone of his references was made remarkable by a strange mixture of familiarity and awe. They, in the village, were under that lord’s special protection, which showed that Jim bore no grudge. If he had warned me that I would hear of him it was perfectly true. I was hearing of him. There was already a story that the tide had turned two hours before its time to help him on his journey up the river. The talkative old man himself had steered the canoe and had marvelled at the phenomenon. Moreover, all the glory was in his family. His son and his son-in-law had paddled; but they were only youths without experience, who did not notice the speed of the canoe till he pointed out to them the amazing fact.

‘Jim’s coming to that fishing village was a blessing; but to them, as to many of us, the blessing came heralded by terrors. So many generations had been released since the last white man had visited the river that the very tradition had been lost. The appearance of the being that descended upon them and demanded inflexibly to be taken up to Patusan was discomposing; his insistence was alarming; his generosity more than suspicious. It was an unheard-of request. There was no precedent. What would the Rajah say to this? What would he do to them? The best part of the night was spent in consultation; but the immediate risk from the anger of that strange man seemed so great that at last a cranky dug-out was got ready. The women shrieked with grief as it put off. A fearless old hag cursed the stranger.

‘He sat in it, as I’ve told you, on his tin box, nursing the unloaded revolver on his lap. He sat with precaution — than which there is nothing more fatiguing — and thus entered the land he was destined to fill with the fame of his virtues, from the blue peaks

inland to the white ribbon of surf on the coast. At the first bend he lost sight of the sea with its labouring waves for ever rising, sinking, and vanishing to rise again — the very image of struggling mankind — and faced the immovable forests rooted deep in the soil, soaring towards the sunshine, everlasting in the shadowy might of their tradition, like life itself. And his opportunity sat veiled by his side like an Eastern bride waiting to be uncovered by the hand of the master. He too was the heir of a shadowy and mighty tradition! He told me, however, that he had never in his life felt so depressed and tired as in that canoe. All the movement he dared to allow himself was to reach, as it were by stealth, after the shell of half a cocoa-nut floating between his shoes, and bale some of the water out with a carefully restrained action. He discovered how hard the lid of a block-tin case was to sit upon. He had heroic health; but several times during that journey he experienced fits of giddiness, and between whiles he speculated hazily as to the size of the blister the sun was raising on his back. For amusement he tried by looking ahead to decide whether the muddy object he saw lying on the water's edge was a log of wood or an alligator. Only very soon he had to give that up. No fun in it. Always alligator. One of them flopped into the river and all but capsized the canoe. But this excitement was over directly. Then in a long empty reach he was very grateful to a troop of monkeys who came right down on the bank and made an insulting hullabaloo on his passage. Such was the way in which he was approaching greatness as genuine as any man ever achieved. Principally, he longed for sunset; and meantime his three paddlers were preparing to put into execution their plan of delivering him up to the Rajah.

“I suppose I must have been stupid with fatigue, or perhaps I did doze off for a time,” he said. The first thing he knew was his canoe coming to the bank. He became instantaneously aware of the forest having been left behind, of the first houses being visible higher up, of a stockade on his left, and of his boatmen leaping out together upon a low point of land and taking to their heels. Instinctively he leaped out after them. At first he thought himself deserted for some inconceivable reason, but he heard excited shouts, a gate swung open, and a lot of people poured out, making towards him. At the same time a boat full of armed men appeared on the river and came alongside his empty canoe, thus shutting off his retreat.

“I was too startled to be quite cool — don't you know? and if that revolver had been loaded I would have shot somebody — perhaps two, three bodies, and that would have been the end of me. But it wasn't. . . .” “Why not?” I asked. “Well, I couldn't fight the whole population, and I wasn't coming to them as if I were afraid of my life,” he said, with just a faint hint of his stubborn sulkiness in the glance he gave me. I refrained from pointing out to him that they could not have known the chambers were actually empty. He had to satisfy himself in his own way. . . . “Anyhow it wasn't,” he repeated good-humouredly, “and so I just stood still and asked them what was the matter. That seemed to strike them dumb. I saw some of these thieves going off with my box. That long-legged old scoundrel Kassim (I'll show him to you to-morrow) ran out fussing to me about the Rajah wanting to see me. I said, ‘All right.’ I too wanted

to see the Rajah, and I simply walked in through the gate and — and — here I am.” He laughed, and then with unexpected emphasis, “And do you know what’s the best in it?” he asked. “I’ll tell you. It’s the knowledge that had I been wiped out it is this place that would have been the loser.”

‘He spoke thus to me before his house on that evening I’ve mentioned — after we had watched the moon float away above the chasm between the hills like an ascending spirit out of a grave; its sheen descended, cold and pale, like the ghost of dead sunlight. There is something haunting in the light of the moon; it has all the dispassionateness of a disembodied soul, and something of its inconceivable mystery. It is to our sunshine, which — say what you like — is all we have to live by, what the echo is to the sound: misleading and confusing whether the note be mocking or sad. It robs all forms of matter — which, after all, is our domain — of their substance, and gives a sinister reality to shadows alone. And the shadows were very real around us, but Jim by my side looked very stalwart, as though nothing — not even the occult power of moonlight — could rob him of his reality in my eyes. Perhaps, indeed, nothing could touch him since he had survived the assault of the dark powers. All was silent, all was still; even on the river the moonbeams slept as on a pool. It was the moment of high water, a moment of immobility that accentuated the utter isolation of this lost corner of the earth. The houses crowding along the wide shining sweep without ripple or glitter, stepping into the water in a line of jostling, vague, grey, silvery forms mingled with black masses of shadow, were like a spectral herd of shapeless creatures pressing forward to drink in a spectral and lifeless stream. Here and there a red gleam twinkled within the bamboo walls, warm, like a living spark, significant of human affections, of shelter, of repose.

‘He confessed to me that he often watched these tiny warm gleams go out one by one, that he loved to see people go to sleep under his eyes, confident in the security of to-morrow. “Peaceful here, eh?” he asked. He was not eloquent, but there was a deep meaning in the words that followed. “Look at these houses; there’s not one where I am not trusted. Jove! I told you I would hang on. Ask any man, woman, or child . . .” He paused. “Well, I am all right anyhow.”

‘I observed quickly that he had found that out in the end. I had been sure of it, I added. He shook his head. “Were you?” He pressed my arm lightly above the elbow. “Well, then — you were right.”

‘There was elation and pride, there was awe almost, in that low exclamation. “Jove!” he cried, “only think what it is to me.” Again he pressed my arm. “And you asked me whether I thought of leaving. Good God! I! want to leave! Especially now after what you told me of Mr. Stein’s . . . Leave! Why! That’s what I was afraid of. It would have been — it would have been harder than dying. No — on my word. Don’t laugh. I must feel — every day, every time I open my eyes — that I am trusted — that nobody has a right — don’t you know? Leave! For where? What for? To get what?”

‘I had told him (indeed it was the main object of my visit) that it was Stein’s intention to present him at once with the house and the stock of trading goods, on certain easy conditions which would make the transaction perfectly regular and valid.

He began to snort and plunge at first. "Confound your delicacy!" I shouted. "It isn't Stein at all. It's giving you what you had made for yourself. And in any case keep your remarks for McNeil — when you meet him in the other world. I hope it won't happen soon. . . ." He had to give in to my arguments, because all his conquests, the trust, the fame, the friendships, the love — all these things that made him master had made him a captive, too. He looked with an owner's eye at the peace of the evening, at the river, at the houses, at the everlasting life of the forests, at the life of the old mankind, at the secrets of the land, at the pride of his own heart; but it was they that possessed him and made him their own to the innermost thought, to the slightest stir of blood, to his last breath.

'It was something to be proud of. I, too, was proud — for him, if not so certain of the fabulous value of the bargain. It was wonderful. It was not so much of his fearlessness that I thought. It is strange how little account I took of it: as if it had been something too conventional to be at the root of the matter. No. I was more struck by the other gifts he had displayed. He had proved his grasp of the unfamiliar situation, his intellectual alertness in that field of thought. There was his readiness, too! Amazing. And all this had come to him in a manner like keen scent to a well-bred hound. He was not eloquent, but there was a dignity in this constitutional reticence, there was a high seriousness in his stammerings. He had still his old trick of stubborn blushing. Now and then, though, a word, a sentence, would escape him that showed how deeply, how solemnly, he felt about that work which had given him the certitude of rehabilitation. That is why he seemed to love the land and the people with a sort of fierce egoism, with a contemptuous tenderness.'

Chapter 25

“This is where I was prisoner for three days,” he murmured to me (it was on the occasion of our visit to the Rajah), while we were making our way slowly through a kind of awestruck riot of dependants across Tunku Allang’s courtyard. “Filthy place, isn’t it? And I couldn’t get anything to eat either, unless I made a row about it, and then it was only a small plate of rice and a fried fish not much bigger than a stickleback — confound them! Jove! I’ve been hungry prowling inside this stinking enclosure with some of these vagabonds shoving their mugs right under my nose. I had given up that famous revolver of yours at the first demand. Glad to get rid of the bally thing. Look like a fool walking about with an empty shooting-iron in my hand.” At that moment we came into the presence, and he became unflinchingly grave and complimentary with his late captor. Oh! magnificent! I want to laugh when I think of it. But I was impressed, too. The old disreputable Tunku Allang could not help showing his fear (he was no hero, for all the tales of his hot youth he was fond of telling); and at the same time there was a wistful confidence in his manner towards his late prisoner. Note! Even where he would be most hated he was still trusted. Jim — as far as I could follow the conversation — was improving the occasion by the delivery of a lecture. Some poor villagers had been waylaid and robbed while on their way to Doramin’s house with a few pieces of gum or beeswax which they wished to exchange for rice. “It was Doramin who was a thief,” burst out the Rajah. A shaking fury seemed to enter that old frail body. He writhed weirdly on his mat, gesticulating with his hands and feet, tossing the tangled strings of his mop — an impotent incarnation of rage. There were staring eyes and dropping jaws all around us. Jim began to speak. Resolutely, coolly, and for some time he enlarged upon the text that no man should be prevented from getting his food and his children’s food honestly. The other sat like a tailor at his board, one palm on each knee, his head low, and fixing Jim through the grey hair that fell over his very eyes. When Jim had done there was a great stillness. Nobody seemed to breathe even; no one made a sound till the old Rajah sighed faintly, and looking up, with a toss of his head, said quickly, “You hear, my people! No more of these little games.” This decree was received in profound silence. A rather heavy man, evidently in a position of confidence, with intelligent eyes, a bony, broad, very dark face, and a cheerily officious manner (I learned later on he was the executioner), presented to us two cups of coffee on a brass tray, which he took from the hands of an inferior attendant. “You needn’t drink,” muttered Jim very rapidly. I didn’t perceive the meaning at first, and only looked at him. He took a good sip and sat composedly, holding the saucer in his left hand. In a moment I felt excessively annoyed. “Why the devil,” I whispered,

smiling at him amiably, "do you expose me to such a stupid risk?" I drank, of course, there was nothing for it, while he gave no sign, and almost immediately afterwards we took our leave. While we were going down the courtyard to our boat, escorted by the intelligent and cheery executioner, Jim said he was very sorry. It was the barest chance, of course. Personally he thought nothing of poison. The remotest chance. He was — he assured me — considered to be infinitely more useful than dangerous, and so . . . "But the Rajah is afraid of you abominably. Anybody can see that," I argued with, I own, a certain peevishness, and all the time watching anxiously for the first twist of some sort of ghastly colic. I was awfully disgusted. "If I am to do any good here and preserve my position," he said, taking his seat by my side in the boat, "I must stand the risk: I take it once every month, at least. Many people trust me to do that — for them. Afraid of me! That's just it. Most likely he is afraid of me because I am not afraid of his coffee." Then showing me a place on the north front of the stockade where the pointed tops of several stakes were broken, "This is where I leaped over on my third day in Patusan. They haven't put new stakes there yet. Good leap, eh?" A moment later we passed the mouth of a muddy creek. "This is my second leap. I had a bit of a run and took this one flying, but fell short. Thought I would leave my skin there. Lost my shoes struggling. And all the time I was thinking to myself how beastly it would be to get a jab with a bally long spear while sticking in the mud like this. I remember how sick I felt wriggling in that slime. I mean really sick — as if I had bitten something rotten."

'That's how it was — and the opportunity ran by his side, leaped over the gap, floundered in the mud . . . still veiled. The unexpectedness of his coming was the only thing, you understand, that saved him from being at once dispatched with krisses and flung into the river. They had him, but it was like getting hold of an apparition, a wraith, a portent. What did it mean? What to do with it? Was it too late to conciliate him? Hadn't he better be killed without more delay? But what would happen then? Wretched old Allang went nearly mad with apprehension and through the difficulty of making up his mind. Several times the council was broken up, and the advisers made a break helter-skelter for the door and out on to the verandah. One — it is said — even jumped down to the ground — fifteen feet, I should judge — and broke his leg. The royal governor of Patusan had bizarre mannerisms, and one of them was to introduce boastful rhapsodies into every arduous discussion, when, getting gradually excited, he would end by flying off his perch with a kriss in his hand. But, barring such interruptions, the deliberations upon Jim's fate went on night and day.

'Meanwhile he wandered about the courtyard, shunned by some, glared at by others, but watched by all, and practically at the mercy of the first casual ragamuffin with a chopper, in there. He took possession of a small tumble-down shed to sleep in; the effluvia of filth and rotten matter incommoded him greatly: it seems he had not lost his appetite though, because — he told me — he had been hungry all the blessed time. Now and again "some fussy ass" deputed from the council-room would come out running to him, and in honeyed tones would administer amazing interrogatories: "Were

the Dutch coming to take the country? Would the white man like to go back down the river? What was the object of coming to such a miserable country? The Rajah wanted to know whether the white man could repair a watch?" They did actually bring out to him a nickel clock of New England make, and out of sheer unbearable boredom he busied himself in trying to get the alarum to work. It was apparently when thus occupied in his shed that the true perception of his extreme peril dawned upon him. He dropped the thing — he says — "like a hot potato," and walked out hastily, without the slightest idea of what he would, or indeed could, do. He only knew that the position was intolerable. He strolled aimlessly beyond a sort of ramshackle little granary on posts, and his eyes fell on the broken stakes of the palisade; and then — he says — at once, without any mental process as it were, without any stir of emotion, he set about his escape as if executing a plan matured for a month. He walked off carelessly to give himself a good run, and when he faced about there was some dignitary, with two spearmen in attendance, close at his elbow ready with a question. He started off "from under his very nose," went over "like a bird," and landed on the other side with a fall that jarred all his bones and seemed to split his head. He picked himself up instantly. He never thought of anything at the time; all he could remember — he said — was a great yell; the first houses of Patusan were before him four hundred yards away; he saw the creek, and as it were mechanically put on more pace. The earth seemed fairly to fly backwards under his feet. He took off from the last dry spot, felt himself flying through the air, felt himself, without any shock, planted upright in an extremely soft and sticky mudbank. It was only when he tried to move his legs and found he couldn't that, in his own words, "he came to himself." He began to think of the "bally long spears." As a matter of fact, considering that the people inside the stockade had to run to the gate, then get down to the landing-place, get into boats, and pull round a point of land, he had more advance than he imagined. Besides, it being low water, the creek was without water — you couldn't call it dry — and practically he was safe for a time from everything but a very long shot perhaps. The higher firm ground was about six feet in front of him. "I thought I would have to die there all the same," he said. He reached and grabbed desperately with his hands, and only succeeded in gathering a horrible cold shiny heap of slime against his breast — up to his very chin. It seemed to him he was burying himself alive, and then he struck out madly, scattering the mud with his fists. It fell on his head, on his face, over his eyes, into his mouth. He told me that he remembered suddenly the courtyard, as you remember a place where you had been very happy years ago. He longed — so he said — to be back there again, mending the clock. Mending the clock — that was the idea. He made efforts, tremendous sobbing, gasping efforts, efforts that seemed to burst his eyeballs in their sockets and make him blind, and culminating into one mighty supreme effort in the darkness to crack the earth asunder, to throw it off his limbs — and he felt himself creeping feebly up the bank. He lay full length on the firm ground and saw the light, the sky. Then as a sort of happy thought the notion came to him that he would go to sleep. He will have it that he did actually go to sleep; that he slept — perhaps for a

minute, perhaps for twenty seconds, or only for one second, but he recollects distinctly the violent convulsive start of awakening. He remained lying still for a while, and then he arose muddy from head to foot and stood there, thinking he was alone of his kind for hundreds of miles, alone, with no help, no sympathy, no pity to expect from any one, like a hunted animal. The first houses were not more than twenty yards from him; and it was the desperate screaming of a frightened woman trying to carry off a child that started him again. He pelted straight on in his socks, beplastered with filth out of all semblance to a human being. He traversed more than half the length of the settlement. The nimbler women fled right and left, the slower men just dropped whatever they had in their hands, and remained petrified with dropping jaws. He was a flying terror. He says he noticed the little children trying to run for life, falling on their little stomachs and kicking. He swerved between two houses up a slope, clambered in desperation over a barricade of felled trees (there wasn't a week without some fight in Patusan at that time), burst through a fence into a maize-patch, where a scared boy flung a stick at him, blundered upon a path, and ran all at once into the arms of several startled men. He just had breath enough to gasp out, "Doramin! Doramin!" He remembers being half-carried, half-rushed to the top of the slope, and in a vast enclosure with palms and fruit trees being run up to a large man sitting massively in a chair in the midst of the greatest possible commotion and excitement. He fumbled in mud and clothes to produce the ring, and, finding himself suddenly on his back, wondered who had knocked him down. They had simply let him go — don't you know? — but he couldn't stand. At the foot of the slope random shots were fired, and above the roofs of the settlement there rose a dull roar of amazement. But he was safe. Doramin's people were barricading the gate and pouring water down his throat; Doramin's old wife, full of business and commiseration, was issuing shrill orders to her girls. "The old woman," he said softly, "made a to-do over me as if I had been her own son. They put me into an immense bed — her state bed — and she ran in and out wiping her eyes to give me pats on the back. I must have been a pitiful object. I just lay there like a log for I don't know how long."

'He seemed to have a great liking for Doramin's old wife. She on her side had taken a motherly fancy to him. She had a round, nut-brown, soft face, all fine wrinkles, large, bright red lips (she chewed betel assiduously), and screwed up, winking, benevolent eyes. She was constantly in movement, scolding busily and ordering unceasingly a troop of young women with clear brown faces and big grave eyes, her daughters, her servants, her slave-girls. You know how it is in these households: it's generally impossible to tell the difference. She was very spare, and even her ample outer garment, fastened in front with jewelled clasps, had somehow a skimpy effect. Her dark bare feet were thrust into yellow straw slippers of Chinese make. I have seen her myself flitting about with her extremely thick, long, grey hair falling about her shoulders. She uttered homely shrewd sayings, was of noble birth, and was eccentric and arbitrary. In the afternoon she would sit in a very roomy arm-chair, opposite her husband, gazing steadily through a wide opening in the wall which gave an extensive view of the settlement and the river.

‘She invariably tucked up her feet under her, but old Doramin sat squarely, sat imposingly as a mountain sits on a plain. He was only of the nakhoda or merchant class, but the respect shown to him and the dignity of his bearing were very striking. He was the chief of the second power in Patusan. The immigrants from Celebes (about sixty families that, with dependants and so on, could muster some two hundred men “wearing the kriss”) had elected him years ago for their head. The men of that race are intelligent, enterprising, revengeful, but with a more frank courage than the other Malays, and restless under oppression. They formed the party opposed to the Rajah. Of course the quarrels were for trade. This was the primary cause of faction fights, of the sudden outbreaks that would fill this or that part of the settlement with smoke, flame, the noise of shots and shrieks. Villages were burnt, men were dragged into the Rajah’s stockade to be killed or tortured for the crime of trading with anybody else but himself. Only a day or two before Jim’s arrival several heads of households in the very fishing village that was afterwards taken under his especial protection had been driven over the cliffs by a party of the Rajah’s spearmen, on suspicion of having been collecting edible birds’ nests for a Celebes trader. Rajah Allang pretended to be the only trader in his country, and the penalty for the breach of the monopoly was death; but his idea of trading was indistinguishable from the commonest forms of robbery. His cruelty and rapacity had no other bounds than his cowardice, and he was afraid of the organised power of the Celebes men, only — till Jim came — he was not afraid enough to keep quiet. He struck at them through his subjects, and thought himself pathetically in the right. The situation was complicated by a wandering stranger, an Arab half-breed, who, I believe, on purely religious grounds, had incited the tribes in the interior (the bush-folk, as Jim himself called them) to rise, and had established himself in a fortified camp on the summit of one of the twin hills. He hung over the town of Patusan like a hawk over a poultry-yard, but he devastated the open country. Whole villages, deserted, rotted on their blackened posts over the banks of clear streams, dropping piecemeal into the water the grass of their walls, the leaves of their roofs, with a curious effect of natural decay as if they had been a form of vegetation stricken by a blight at its very root. The two parties in Patusan were not sure which one this partisan most desired to plunder. The Rajah intrigued with him feebly. Some of the Bugis settlers, weary with endless insecurity, were half inclined to call him in. The younger spirits amongst them, chaffing, advised to “get Sherif Ali with his wild men and drive the Rajah Allang out of the country.” Doramin restrained them with difficulty. He was growing old, and, though his influence had not diminished, the situation was getting beyond him. This was the state of affairs when Jim, bolting from the Rajah’s stockade, appeared before the chief of the Bugis, produced the ring, and was received, in a manner of speaking, into the heart of the community.’

Chapter 26

‘Doramin was one of the most remarkable men of his race I had ever seen. His bulk for a Malay was immense, but he did not look merely fat; he looked imposing, monumental. This motionless body, clad in rich stuffs, coloured silks, gold embroideries; this huge head, enfolded in a red-and-gold headkerchief; the flat, big, round face, wrinkled, furrowed, with two semicircular heavy folds starting on each side of wide, fierce nostrils, and enclosing a thick-lipped mouth; the throat like a bull; the vast corrugated brow overhanging the staring proud eyes — made a whole that, once seen, can never be forgotten. His impassive repose (he seldom stirred a limb when once he sat down) was like a display of dignity. He was never known to raise his voice. It was a hoarse and powerful murmur, slightly veiled as if heard from a distance. When he walked, two short, sturdy young fellows, naked to the waist, in white sarongs and with black skull-caps on the backs of their heads, sustained his elbows; they would ease him down and stand behind his chair till he wanted to rise, when he would turn his head slowly, as if with difficulty, to the right and to the left, and then they would catch him under his armpits and help him up. For all that, there was nothing of a cripple about him: on the contrary, all his ponderous movements were like manifestations of a mighty deliberate force. It was generally believed he consulted his wife as to public affairs; but nobody, as far as I know, had ever heard them exchange a single word. When they sat in state by the wide opening it was in silence. They could see below them in the declining light the vast expanse of the forest country, a dark sleeping sea of sombre green undulating as far as the violet and purple range of mountains; the shining sinuosity of the river like an immense letter S of beaten silver; the brown ribbon of houses following the sweep of both banks, overtopped by the twin hills uprising above the nearer tree-tops. They were wonderfully contrasted: she, light, delicate, spare, quick, a little witch-like, with a touch of motherly fussiness in her repose; he, facing her, immense and heavy, like a figure of a man roughly fashioned of stone, with something magnanimous and ruthless in his immobility. The son of these old people was a most distinguished youth.

‘They had him late in life. Perhaps he was not really so young as he looked. Four- or five-and-twenty is not so young when a man is already father of a family at eighteen. When he entered the large room, lined and carpeted with fine mats, and with a high ceiling of white sheeting, where the couple sat in state surrounded by a most deferential retinue, he would make his way straight to Doramin, to kiss his hand — which the other abandoned to him, majestically — and then would step across to stand by his mother’s chair. I suppose I may say they idolised him, but I never caught them giving him an overt glance. Those, it is true, were public functions. The room was generally

thronged. The solemn formality of greetings and leave-takings, the profound respect expressed in gestures, on the faces, in the low whispers, is simply indescribable. "It's well worth seeing," Jim had assured me while we were crossing the river, on our way back. "They are like people in a book, aren't they?" he said triumphantly. "And Dain Waris — their son — is the best friend (barring you) I ever had. What Mr. Stein would call a good 'war-comrade.' I was in luck. Jove! I was in luck when I tumbled amongst them at my last gasp." He meditated with bowed head, then rousing himself he added — "Of course I didn't go to sleep over it, but . . ." He paused again. "It seemed to come to me," he murmured. "All at once I saw what I had to do . . ."

'There was no doubt that it had come to him; and it had come through war, too, as is natural, since this power that came to him was the power to make peace. It is in this sense alone that might so often is right. You must not think he had seen his way at once. When he arrived the Bugis community was in a most critical position. "They were all afraid," he said to me — "each man afraid for himself; while I could see as plain as possible that they must do something at once, if they did not want to go under one after another, what between the Rajah and that vagabond Sherif." But to see that was nothing. When he got his idea he had to drive it into reluctant minds, through the bulwarks of fear, of selfishness. He drove it in at last. And that was nothing. He had to devise the means. He devised them — an audacious plan; and his task was only half done. He had to inspire with his own confidence a lot of people who had hidden and absurd reasons to hang back; he had to conciliate imbecile jealousies, and argue away all sorts of senseless mistrusts. Without the weight of Doramin's authority, and his son's fiery enthusiasm, he would have failed. Dain Waris, the distinguished youth, was the first to believe in him; theirs was one of those strange, profound, rare friendships between brown and white, in which the very difference of race seems to draw two human beings closer by some mystic element of sympathy. Of Dain Waris, his own people said with pride that he knew how to fight like a white man. This was true; he had that sort of courage — the courage in the open, I may say — but he had also a European mind. You meet them sometimes like that, and are surprised to discover unexpectedly a familiar turn of thought, an unobscured vision, a tenacity of purpose, a touch of altruism. Of small stature, but admirably well proportioned, Dain Waris had a proud carriage, a polished, easy bearing, a temperament like a clear flame. His dusky face, with big black eyes, was in action expressive, and in repose thoughtful. He was of a silent disposition; a firm glance, an ironic smile, a courteous deliberation of manner seemed to hint at great reserves of intelligence and power. Such beings open to the Western eye, so often concerned with mere surfaces, the hidden possibilities of races and lands over which hangs the mystery of unrecorded ages. He not only trusted Jim, he understood him, I firmly believe. I speak of him because he had captivated me. His — if I may say so — his caustic placidity, and, at the same time, his intelligent sympathy with Jim's aspirations, appealed to me. I seemed to behold the very origin of friendship. If Jim took the lead, the other had captivated his leader. In fact, Jim the leader was a captive in every sense. The land, the people, the friendship, the love,

were like the jealous guardians of his body. Every day added a link to the fetters of that strange freedom. I felt convinced of it, as from day to day I learned more of the story.

‘The story! Haven’t I heard the story? I’ve heard it on the march, in camp (he made me scour the country after invisible game); I’ve listened to a good part of it on one of the twin summits, after climbing the last hundred feet or so on my hands and knees. Our escort (we had volunteer followers from village to village) had camped meantime on a bit of level ground half-way up the slope, and in the still breathless evening the smell of wood-smoke reached our nostrils from below with the penetrating delicacy of some choice scent. Voices also ascended, wonderful in their distinct and immaterial clearness. Jim sat on the trunk of a felled tree, and pulling out his pipe began to smoke. A new growth of grass and bushes was springing up; there were traces of an earthwork under a mass of thorny twigs. “It all started from here,” he said, after a long and meditative silence. On the other hill, two hundred yards across a sombre precipice, I saw a line of high blackened stakes, showing here and there ruinously — the remnants of Sherif Ali’s impregnable camp.

‘But it had been taken, though. That had been his idea. He had mounted Doramin’s old ordnance on the top of that hill; two rusty iron 7-pounders, a lot of small brass cannon — currency cannon. But if the brass guns represent wealth, they can also, when crammed recklessly to the muzzle, send a solid shot to some little distance. The thing was to get them up there. He showed me where he had fastened the cables, explained how he had improvised a rude capstan out of a hollowed log turning upon a pointed stake, indicated with the bowl of his pipe the outline of the earthwork. The last hundred feet of the ascent had been the most difficult. He had made himself responsible for success on his own head. He had induced the war party to work hard all night. Big fires lighted at intervals blazed all down the slope, “but up here,” he explained, “the hoisting gang had to fly around in the dark.” From the top he saw men moving on the hillside like ants at work. He himself on that night had kept on rushing down and climbing up like a squirrel, directing, encouraging, watching all along the line. Old Doramin had himself carried up the hill in his arm-chair. They put him down on the level place upon the slope, and he sat there in the light of one of the big fires — “amazing old chap — real old chieftain,” said Jim, “with his little fierce eyes — a pair of immense flintlock pistols on his knees. Magnificent things, ebony, silver-mounted, with beautiful locks and a calibre like an old blunderbuss. A present from Stein, it seems — in exchange for that ring, you know. Used to belong to good old McNeil. God only knows how he came by them. There he sat, moving neither hand nor foot, a flame of dry brushwood behind him, and lots of people rushing about, shouting and pulling round him — the most solemn, imposing old chap you can imagine. He wouldn’t have had much chance if Sherif Ali had let his infernal crew loose at us and stampeded my lot. Eh? Anyhow, he had come up there to die if anything went wrong. No mistake! Jove! It thrilled me to see him there — like a rock. But the Sherif must have thought us mad, and never troubled to come and see how we got on. Nobody believed it could

be done. Why! I think the very chaps who pulled and shoved and sweated over it did not believe it could be done! Upon my word I don't think they did. . . ."

'He stood erect, the smouldering brier-wood in his clutch, with a smile on his lips and a sparkle in his boyish eyes. I sat on the stump of a tree at his feet, and below us stretched the land, the great expanse of the forests, sombre under the sunshine, rolling like a sea, with glints of winding rivers, the grey spots of villages, and here and there a clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree-tops. A brooding gloom lay over this vast and monotonous landscape; the light fell on it as if into an abyss. The land devoured the sunshine; only far off, along the coast, the empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel.

'And there I was with him, high in the sunshine on the top of that historic hill of his. He dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom. I don't know why he should always have appeared to me symbolic. Perhaps this is the real cause of my interest in his fate. I don't know whether it was exactly fair to him to remember the incident which had given a new direction to his life, but at that very moment I remembered very distinctly. It was like a shadow in the light.'

Chapter 27

‘Already the legend had gifted him with supernatural powers. Yes, it was said, there had been many ropes cunningly disposed, and a strange contrivance that turned by the efforts of many men, and each gun went up tearing slowly through the bushes, like a wild pig rooting its way in the undergrowth, but . . . and the wisest shook their heads. There was something occult in all this, no doubt; for what is the strength of ropes and of men’s arms? There is a rebellious soul in things which must be overcome by powerful charms and incantations. Thus old Sura — a very respectable householder of Patusan — with whom I had a quiet chat one evening. However, Sura was a professional sorcerer also, who attended all the rice sowings and reapings for miles around for the purpose of subduing the stubborn souls of things. This occupation he seemed to think a most arduous one, and perhaps the souls of things are more stubborn than the souls of men. As to the simple folk of outlying villages, they believed and said (as the most natural thing in the world) that Jim had carried the guns up the hill on his back — two at a time.

‘This would make Jim stamp his foot in vexation and exclaim with an exasperated little laugh, “What can you do with such silly beggars? They will sit up half the night talking bally rot, and the greater the lie the more they seem to like it.” You could trace the subtle influence of his surroundings in this irritation. It was part of his captivity. The earnestness of his denials was amusing, and at last I said, “My dear fellow, you don’t suppose I believe this.” He looked at me quite startled. “Well, no! I suppose not,” he said, and burst into a Homeric peal of laughter. “Well, anyhow the guns were there, and went off all together at sunrise. Jove! You should have seen the splinters fly,” he cried. By his side Dain Waris, listening with a quiet smile, dropped his eyelids and shuffled his feet a little. It appears that the success in mounting the guns had given Jim’s people such a feeling of confidence that he ventured to leave the battery under charge of two elderly Bugis who had seen some fighting in their day, and went to join Dain Waris and the storming party who were concealed in the ravine. In the small hours they began creeping up, and when two-thirds of the way up, lay in the wet grass waiting for the appearance of the sun, which was the agreed signal. He told me with what impatient anguishing emotion he watched the swift coming of the dawn; how, heated with the work and the climbing, he felt the cold dew chilling his very bones; how afraid he was he would begin to shiver and shake like a leaf before the time came for the advance. “It was the slowest half-hour in my life,” he declared. Gradually the silent stockade came out on the sky above him. Men scattered all down the slope were crouching amongst the dark stones and dripping bushes. Dain Waris was lying

flattened by his side. "We looked at each other," Jim said, resting a gentle hand on his friend's shoulder. "He smiled at me as cheery as you please, and I dared not stir my lips for fear I would break out into a shivering fit. 'Pon my word, it's true! I had been streaming with perspiration when we took cover — so you may imagine . . ." He declared, and I believe him, that he had no fears as to the result. He was only anxious as to his ability to repress these shivers. He didn't bother about the result. He was bound to get to the top of that hill and stay there, whatever might happen. There could be no going back for him. Those people had trusted him implicitly. Him alone! His bare word. . . .

'I remember how, at this point, he paused with his eyes fixed upon me. "As far as he knew, they never had an occasion to regret it yet," he said. "Never. He hoped to God they never would. Meantime — worse luck! — they had got into the habit of taking his word for anything and everything. I could have no idea! Why, only the other day an old fool he had never seen in his life came from some village miles away to find out if he should divorce his wife. Fact. Solemn word. That's the sort of thing. . . He wouldn't have believed it. Would I? Squatted on the verandah chewing betel-nut, sighing and spitting all over the place for more than an hour, and as glum as an undertaker before he came out with that dashed conundrum. That's the kind of thing that isn't so funny as it looks. What was a fellow to say? — Good wife? — Yes. Good wife — old though. Started a confounded long story about some brass pots. Been living together for fifteen years — twenty years — could not tell. A long, long time. Good wife. Beat her a little — not much — just a little, when she was young. Had to — for the sake of his honour. Suddenly in her old age she goes and lends three brass pots to her sister's son's wife, and begins to abuse him every day in a loud voice. His enemies jeered at him; his face was utterly blackened. Pots totally lost. Awfully cut up about it. Impossible to fathom a story like that; told him to go home, and promised to come along myself and settle it all. It's all very well to grin, but it was the dashedest nuisance! A day's journey through the forest, another day lost in coaxing a lot of silly villagers to get at the rights of the affair. There was the making of a sanguinary shindy in the thing. Every bally idiot took sides with one family or the other, and one half of the village was ready to go for the other half with anything that came handy. Honour bright! No joke! . . . Instead of attending to their bally crops. Got him the infernal pots back of course — and pacified all hands. No trouble to settle it. Of course not. Could settle the deadliest quarrel in the country by crooking his little finger. The trouble was to get at the truth of anything. Was not sure to this day whether he had been fair to all parties. It worried him. And the talk! Jove! There didn't seem to be any head or tail to it. Rather storm a twenty-foot-high old stockade any day. Much! Child's play to that other job. Wouldn't take so long either. Well, yes; a funny set out, upon the whole — the fool looked old enough to be his grandfather. But from another point of view it was no joke. His word decided everything — ever since the smashing of Sherif Ali. An awful responsibility," he repeated. "No, really — joking apart, had it been three lives instead of three rotten brass pots it would have been the same. . . ."

‘Thus he illustrated the moral effect of his victory in war. It was in truth immense. It had led him from strife to peace, and through death into the innermost life of the people; but the gloom of the land spread out under the sunshine preserved its appearance of inscrutable, of secular repose. The sound of his fresh young voice — it’s extraordinary how very few signs of wear he showed — floated lightly, and passed away over the unchanged face of the forests like the sound of the big guns on that cold dewy morning when he had no other concern on earth but the proper control of the chills in his body. With the first slant of sun-rays along these immovable tree-tops the summit of one hill wreathed itself, with heavy reports, in white clouds of smoke, and the other burst into an amazing noise of yells, war-cries, shouts of anger, of surprise, of dismay. Jim and Dain Waris were the first to lay their hands on the stakes. The popular story has it that Jim with a touch of one finger had thrown down the gate. He was, of course, anxious to disclaim this achievement. The whole stockade — he would insist on explaining to you — was a poor affair (Sherif Ali trusted mainly to the inaccessible position); and, anyway, the thing had been already knocked to pieces and only hung together by a miracle. He put his shoulder to it like a little fool and went in head over heels. Jove! If it hadn’t been for Dain Waris, a pock-marked tattooed vagabond would have pinned him with his spear to a baulk of timber like one of Stein’s beetles. The third man in, it seems, had been Tamb’ Itam, Jim’s own servant. This was a Malay from the north, a stranger who had wandered into Patusan, and had been forcibly detained by Rajah Allang as paddler of one of the state boats. He had made a bolt of it at the first opportunity, and finding a precarious refuge (but very little to eat) amongst the Bugis settlers, had attached himself to Jim’s person. His complexion was very dark, his face flat, his eyes prominent and injected with bile. There was something excessive, almost fanatical, in his devotion to his “white lord.” He was inseparable from Jim like a morose shadow. On state occasions he would tread on his master’s heels, one hand on the haft of his kriss, keeping the common people at a distance by his truculent brooding glances. Jim had made him the headman of his establishment, and all Patusan respected and courted him as a person of much influence. At the taking of the stockade he had distinguished himself greatly by the methodical ferocity of his fighting. The storming party had come on so quick — Jim said — that notwithstanding the panic of the garrison, there was a “hot five minutes hand-to-hand inside that stockade, till some bally ass set fire to the shelters of boughs and dry grass, and we all had to clear out for dear life.”

‘The rout, it seems, had been complete. Doramin, waiting immovably in his chair on the hillside, with the smoke of the guns spreading slowly above his big head, received the news with a deep grunt. When informed that his son was safe and leading the pursuit, he, without another sound, made a mighty effort to rise; his attendants hurried to his help, and, held up reverently, he shuffled with great dignity into a bit of shade, where he laid himself down to sleep, covered entirely with a piece of white sheeting. In Patusan the excitement was intense. Jim told me that from the hill, turning his back on the stockade with its embers, black ashes, and half-consumed corpses, he could see

time after time the open spaces between the houses on both sides of the stream fill suddenly with a seething rush of people and get empty in a moment. His ears caught feebly from below the tremendous din of gongs and drums; the wild shouts of the crowd reached him in bursts of faint roaring. A lot of streamers made a flutter as of little white, red, yellow birds amongst the brown ridges of roofs. "You must have enjoyed it," I murmured, feeling the stir of sympathetic emotion.

"It was . . . it was immense! Immense!" he cried aloud, flinging his arms open. The sudden movement startled me as though I had seen him bare the secrets of his breast to the sunshine, to the brooding forests, to the steely sea. Below us the town reposed in easy curves upon the banks of a stream whose current seemed to sleep. "Immense!" he repeated for a third time, speaking in a whisper, for himself alone.

'Immense! No doubt it was immense; the seal of success upon his words, the conquered ground for the soles of his feet, the blind trust of men, the belief in himself snatched from the fire, the solitude of his achievement. All this, as I've warned you, gets dwarfed in the telling. I can't with mere words convey to you the impression of his total and utter isolation. I know, of course, he was in every sense alone of his kind there, but the unsuspected qualities of his nature had brought him in such close touch with his surroundings that this isolation seemed only the effect of his power. His loneliness added to his stature. There was nothing within sight to compare him with, as though he had been one of those exceptional men who can be only measured by the greatness of their fame; and his fame, remember, was the greatest thing around for many a day's journey. You would have to paddle, pole, or track a long weary way through the jungle before you passed beyond the reach of its voice. Its voice was not the trumpeting of the disreputable goddess we all know — not blatant — not brazen. It took its tone from the stillness and gloom of the land without a past, where his word was the one truth of every passing day. It shared something of the nature of that silence through which it accompanied you into unexplored depths, heard continuously by your side, penetrating, far-reaching — tinged with wonder and mystery on the lips of whispering men.'

Chapter 28

‘The defeated Sherif Ali fled the country without making another stand, and when the miserable hunted villagers began to crawl out of the jungle back to their rotting houses, it was Jim who, in consultation with Dain Waris, appointed the headmen. Thus he became the virtual ruler of the land. As to old Tunku Allang, his fears at first had known no bounds. It is said that at the intelligence of the successful storming of the hill he flung himself, face down, on the bamboo floor of his audience-hall, and lay motionless for a whole night and a whole day, uttering stifled sounds of such an appalling nature that no man dared approach his prostrate form nearer than a spear’s length. Already he could see himself driven ignominiously out of Patusan, wandering abandoned, stripped, without opium, without his women, without followers, a fair game for the first comer to kill. After Sherif Ali his turn would come, and who could resist an attack led by such a devil? And indeed he owed his life and such authority as he still possessed at the time of my visit to Jim’s idea of what was fair alone. The Bugis had been extremely anxious to pay off old scores, and the impassive old Doramin cherished the hope of yet seeing his son ruler of Patusan. During one of our interviews he deliberately allowed me to get a glimpse of this secret ambition. Nothing could be finer in its way than the dignified wariness of his approaches. He himself — he began by declaring — had used his strength in his young days, but now he had grown old and tired. . . . With his imposing bulk and haughty little eyes darting sagacious, inquisitive glances, he reminded one irresistibly of a cunning old elephant; the slow rise and fall of his vast breast went on powerful and regular, like the heave of a calm sea. He too, as he protested, had an unbounded confidence in Tuan Jim’s wisdom. If he could only obtain a promise! One word would be enough! . . . His breathing silences, the low rumblings of his voice, recalled the last efforts of a spent thunderstorm.

‘I tried to put the subject aside. It was difficult, for there could be no question that Jim had the power; in his new sphere there did not seem to be anything that was not his to hold or to give. But that, I repeat, was nothing in comparison with the notion, which occurred to me, while I listened with a show of attention, that he seemed to have come very near at last to mastering his fate. Doramin was anxious about the future of the country, and I was struck by the turn he gave to the argument. The land remains where God had put it; but white men — he said — they come to us and in a little while they go. They go away. Those they leave behind do not know when to look for their return. They go to their own land, to their people, and so this white man too would. . . . I don’t know what induced me to commit myself at this point by a vigorous “No, no.” The whole extent of this indiscretion became apparent when

Doramin, turning full upon me his face, whose expression, fixed in rugged deep folds, remained unalterable, like a huge brown mask, said that this was good news indeed, reflectively; and then wanted to know why.

‘His little, motherly witch of a wife sat on my other hand, with her head covered and her feet tucked up, gazing through the great shutter-hole. I could only see a straying lock of grey hair, a high cheek-bone, the slight masticating motion of the sharp chin. Without removing her eyes from the vast prospect of forests stretching as far as the hills, she asked me in a pitying voice why was it that he so young had wandered from his home, coming so far, through so many dangers? Had he no household there, no kinsmen in his own country? Had he no old mother, who would always remember his face? . . .

‘I was completely unprepared for this. I could only mutter and shake my head vaguely. Afterwards I am perfectly aware I cut a very poor figure trying to extricate myself out of this difficulty. From that moment, however, the old nakhoda became taciturn. He was not very pleased, I fear, and evidently I had given him food for thought. Strangely enough, on the evening of that very day (which was my last in Patusan) I was once more confronted with the same question, with the unanswerable why of Jim’s fate. And this brings me to the story of his love.

‘I suppose you think it is a story that you can imagine for yourselves. We have heard so many such stories, and the majority of us don’t believe them to be stories of love at all. For the most part we look upon them as stories of opportunities: episodes of passion at best, or perhaps only of youth and temptation, doomed to forgetfulness in the end, even if they pass through the reality of tenderness and regret. This view mostly is right, and perhaps in this case too. . . . Yet I don’t know. To tell this story is by no means so easy as it should be — were the ordinary standpoint adequate. Apparently it is a story very much like the others: for me, however, there is visible in its background the melancholy figure of a woman, the shadow of a cruel wisdom buried in a lonely grave, looking on wistfully, helplessly, with sealed lips. The grave itself, as I came upon it during an early morning stroll, was a rather shapeless brown mound, with an inlaid neat border of white lumps of coral at the base, and enclosed within a circular fence made of split saplings, with the bark left on. A garland of leaves and flowers was woven about the heads of the slender posts — and the flowers were fresh.

‘Thus, whether the shadow is of my imagination or not, I can at all events point out the significant fact of an unforgotten grave. When I tell you besides that Jim with his own hands had worked at the rustic fence, you will perceive directly the difference, the individual side of the story. There is in his espousal of memory and affection belonging to another human being something characteristic of his seriousness. He had a conscience, and it was a romantic conscience. Through her whole life the wife of the unspeakable Cornelius had no other companion, confidant, and friend but her daughter. How the poor woman had come to marry the awful little Malacca Portuguese — after the separation from the father of her girl — and how that separation had been brought about, whether by death, which can be sometimes merciful, or by the merciless pressure

of conventions, is a mystery to me. From the little which Stein (who knew so many stories) had let drop in my hearing, I am convinced that she was no ordinary woman. Her own father had been a white; a high official; one of the brilliantly endowed men who are not dull enough to nurse a success, and whose careers so often end under a cloud. I suppose she too must have lacked the saving dullness — and her career ended in Patusan. Our common fate . . . for where is the man — I mean a real sentient man — who does not remember vaguely having been deserted in the fullness of possession by some one or something more precious than life? . . . our common fate fastens upon the women with a peculiar cruelty. It does not punish like a master, but inflicts lingering torment, as if to gratify a secret, unappeasable spite. One would think that, appointed to rule on earth, it seeks to revenge itself upon the beings that come nearest to rising above the trammels of earthly caution; for it is only women who manage to put at times into their love an element just palpable enough to give one a fright — an extra-terrestrial touch. I ask myself with wonder — how the world can look to them — whether it has the shape and substance we know, the air we breathe! Sometimes I fancy it must be a region of unreasonable sublimities seething with the excitement of their adventurous souls, lighted by the glory of all possible risks and renunciations. However, I suspect there are very few women in the world, though of course I am aware of the multitudes of mankind and of the equality of sexes — in point of numbers, that is. But I am sure that the mother was as much of a woman as the daughter seemed to be. I cannot help picturing to myself these two, at first the young woman and the child, then the old woman and the young girl, the awful sameness and the swift passage of time, the barrier of forest, the solitude and the turmoil round these two lonely lives, and every word spoken between them penetrated with sad meaning. There must have been confidences, not so much of fact, I suppose, as of innermost feelings — regrets — fears — warnings, no doubt: warnings that the younger did not fully understand till the elder was dead — and Jim came along. Then I am sure she understood much — not everything — the fear mostly, it seems. Jim called her by a word that means precious, in the sense of a precious gem — jewel. Pretty, isn't it? But he was capable of anything. He was equal to his fortune, as he — after all — must have been equal to his misfortune. Jewel he called her; and he would say this as he might have said "Jane," don't you know — with a marital, homelike, peaceful effect. I heard the name for the first time ten minutes after I had landed in his courtyard, when, after nearly shaking my arm off, he darted up the steps and began to make a joyous, boyish disturbance at the door under the heavy eaves. "Jewel! O Jewel! Quick! Here's a friend come," . . . and suddenly peering at me in the dim verandah, he mumbled earnestly, "You know — this — no confounded nonsense about it — can't tell you how much I owe to her — and so — you understand — I — exactly as if . . ." His hurried, anxious whispers were cut short by the flitting of a white form within the house, a faint exclamation, and a child-like but energetic little face with delicate features and a profound, attentive glance peeped out of the inner gloom, like a bird out of the recess of a nest. I was struck by the name, of course; but it was not till later on that I connected it with

an astonishing rumour that had met me on my journey, at a little place on the coast about 230 miles south of Patusan River. Stein's schooner, in which I had my passage, put in there, to collect some produce, and, going ashore, I found to my great surprise that the wretched locality could boast of a third-class deputy-assistant resident, a big, fat, greasy, blinking fellow of mixed descent, with turned-out, shiny lips. I found him lying extended on his back in a cane chair, odiously unbuttoned, with a large green leaf of some sort on the top of his steaming head, and another in his hand which he used lazily as a fan . . . Going to Patusan? Oh yes. Stein's Trading Company. He knew. Had a permission? No business of his. It was not so bad there now, he remarked negligently, and, he went on drawling, "There's some sort of white vagabond has got in there, I hear. . . . Eh? What you say? Friend of yours? So! . . . Then it was true there was one of these verdammte — What was he up to? Found his way in, the rascal. Eh? I had not been sure. Patusan — they cut throats there — no business of ours." He interrupted himself to groan. "Phoo! Almighty! The heat! The heat! Well, then, there might be something in the story too, after all, and . . ." He shut one of his beastly glassy eyes (the eyelid went on quivering) while he leered at me atrociously with the other. "Look here," says he mysteriously, "if — do you understand? — if he has really got hold of something fairly good — none of your bits of green glass — understand? — I am a Government official — you tell the rascal . . . Eh? What? Friend of yours?" . . . He continued wallowing calmly in the chair . . . "You said so; that's just it; and I am pleased to give you the hint. I suppose you too would like to get something out of it? Don't interrupt. You just tell him I've heard the tale, but to my Government I have made no report. Not yet. See? Why make a report? Eh? Tell him to come to me if they let him get alive out of the country. He had better look out for himself. Eh? I promise to ask no questions. On the quiet — you understand? You too — you shall get something from me. Small commission for the trouble. Don't interrupt. I am a Government official, and make no report. That's business. Understand? I know some good people that will buy anything worth having, and can give him more money than the scoundrel ever saw in his life. I know his sort." He fixed me steadfastly with both his eyes open, while I stood over him utterly amazed, and asking myself whether he was mad or drunk. He perspired, puffed, moaning feebly, and scratching himself with such horrible composure that I could not bear the sight long enough to find out. Next day, talking casually with the people of the little native court of the place, I discovered that a story was travelling slowly down the coast about a mysterious white man in Patusan who had got hold of an extraordinary gem — namely, an emerald of an enormous size, and altogether priceless. The emerald seems to appeal more to the Eastern imagination than any other precious stone. The white man had obtained it, I was told, partly by the exercise of his wonderful strength and partly by cunning, from the ruler of a distant country, whence he had fled instantly, arriving in Patusan in utmost distress, but frightening the people by his extreme ferocity, which nothing seemed able to subdue. Most of my informants were of the opinion that the stone was probably unlucky, — like the famous stone of the Sultan of Succadana, which in the

old times had brought wars and untold calamities upon that country. Perhaps it was the same stone — one couldn't say. Indeed the story of a fabulously large emerald is as old as the arrival of the first white men in the Archipelago; and the belief in it is so persistent that less than forty years ago there had been an official Dutch inquiry into the truth of it. Such a jewel — it was explained to me by the old fellow from whom I heard most of this amazing Jim-myth — a sort of scribe to the wretched little Rajah of the place; — such a jewel, he said, cocking his poor purblind eyes up at me (he was sitting on the cabin floor out of respect), is best preserved by being concealed about the person of a woman. Yet it is not every woman that would do. She must be young — he sighed deeply — and insensible to the seductions of love. He shook his head sceptically. But such a woman seemed to be actually in existence. He had been told of a tall girl, whom the white man treated with great respect and care, and who never went forth from the house unattended. People said the white man could be seen with her almost any day; they walked side by side, openly, he holding her arm under his — pressed to his side — thus — in a most extraordinary way. This might be a lie, he conceded, for it was indeed a strange thing for any one to do: on the other hand, there could be no doubt she wore the white man's jewel concealed upon her bosom.'

Chapter 29

‘This was the theory of Jim’s marital evening walks. I made a third on more than one occasion, unpleasantly aware every time of Cornelius, who nursed the aggrieved sense of his legal paternity, slinking in the neighbourhood with that peculiar twist of his mouth as if he were perpetually on the point of gnashing his teeth. But do you notice how, three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilisation wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art? Romance had singled Jim for its own — and that was the true part of the story, which otherwise was all wrong. He did not hide his jewel. In fact, he was extremely proud of it.

‘It comes to me now that I had, on the whole, seen very little of her. What I remember best is the even, olive pallor of her complexion, and the intense blue-black gleams of her hair, flowing abundantly from under a small crimson cap she wore far back on her shapely head. Her movements were free, assured, and she blushed a dusky red. While Jim and I were talking, she would come and go with rapid glances at us, leaving on her passage an impression of grace and charm and a distinct suggestion of watchfulness. Her manner presented a curious combination of shyness and audacity. Every pretty smile was succeeded swiftly by a look of silent, repressed anxiety, as if put to flight by the recollection of some abiding danger. At times she would sit down with us and, with her soft cheek dimpled by the knuckles of her little hand, she would listen to our talk; her big clear eyes would remain fastened on our lips, as though each pronounced word had a visible shape. Her mother had taught her to read and write; she had learned a good bit of English from Jim, and she spoke it most amusingly, with his own clipping, boyish intonation. Her tenderness hovered over him like a flutter of wings. She lived so completely in his contemplation that she had acquired something of his outward aspect, something that recalled him in her movements, in the way she stretched her arm, turned her head, directed her glances. Her vigilant affection had an intensity that made it almost perceptible to the senses; it seemed actually to exist in the ambient matter of space, to envelop him like a peculiar fragrance, to dwell in the sunshine like a tremulous, subdued, and impassioned note. I suppose you think that I too am romantic, but it is a mistake. I am relating to you the sober impressions of a bit of youth, of a strange uneasy romance that had come in my way. I observed with interest the work of his — well — good fortune. He was jealously loved, but why she should be jealous, and of what, I could not tell. The land, the people, the forests were her accomplices, guarding him with vigilant accord, with an air of seclusion, of mystery,

of invincible possession. There was no appeal, as it were; he was imprisoned within the very freedom of his power, and she, though ready to make a footstool of her head for his feet, guarded her conquest inflexibly — as though he were hard to keep. The very Tamb' Itam, marching on our journeys upon the heels of his white lord, with his head thrown back, truculent and be-weaponed like a janissary, with kriss, chopper, and lance (besides carrying Jim's gun); even Tamb' Itam allowed himself to put on the airs of uncompromising guardianship, like a surly devoted jailer ready to lay down his life for his captive. On the evenings when we sat up late, his silent, indistinct form would pass and repass under the verandah, with noiseless footsteps, or lifting my head I would unexpectedly make him out standing rigidly erect in the shadow. As a general rule he would vanish after a time, without a sound; but when we rose he would spring up close to us as if from the ground, ready for any orders Jim might wish to give. The girl too, I believe, never went to sleep till we had separated for the night. More than once I saw her and Jim through the window of my room come out together quietly and lean on the rough balustrade — two white forms very close, his arm about her waist, her head on his shoulder. Their soft murmurs reached me, penetrating, tender, with a calm sad note in the stillness of the night, like a self-communion of one being carried on in two tones. Later on, tossing on my bed under the mosquito-net, I was sure to hear slight creakings, faint breathing, a throat cleared cautiously — and I would know that Tamb' Itam was still on the prow. Though he had (by the favour of the white lord) a house in the compound, had "taken wife," and had lately been blessed with a child, I believe that, during my stay at all events, he slept on the verandah every night. It was very difficult to make this faithful and grim retainer talk. Even Jim himself was answered in jerky short sentences, under protest as it were. Talking, he seemed to imply, was no business of his. The longest speech I heard him volunteer was one morning when, suddenly extending his hand towards the courtyard, he pointed at Cornelius and said, "Here comes the Nazarene." I don't think he was addressing me, though I stood at his side; his object seemed rather to awaken the indignant attention of the universe. Some muttered allusions, which followed, to dogs and the smell of roast-meat, struck me as singularly felicitous. The courtyard, a large square space, was one torrid blaze of sunshine, and, bathed in intense light, Cornelius was creeping across in full view with an inexpressible effect of stealthiness, of dark and secret slinking. He reminded one of everything that is unsavoury. His slow laborious walk resembled the creeping of a repulsive beetle, the legs alone moving with horrid industry while the body glided evenly. I suppose he made straight enough for the place where he wanted to get to, but his progress with one shoulder carried forward seemed oblique. He was often seen circling slowly amongst the sheds, as if following a scent; passing before the verandah with upward stealthy glances; disappearing without haste round the corner of some hut. That he seemed free of the place demonstrated Jim's absurd carelessness or else his infinite disdain, for Cornelius had played a very dubious part (to say the least of it) in a certain episode which might have ended fatally for Jim. As a matter of fact, it had redounded to his glory. But everything redounded to his glory; and it was the

irony of his good fortune that he, who had been too careful of it once, seemed to bear a charmed life.

‘You must know he had left Doramin’s place very soon after his arrival — much too soon, in fact, for his safety, and of course a long time before the war. In this he was actuated by a sense of duty; he had to look after Stein’s business, he said. Hadn’t he? To that end, with an utter disregard of his personal safety, he crossed the river and took up his quarters with Cornelius. How the latter had managed to exist through the troubled times I can’t say. As Stein’s agent, after all, he must have had Doramin’s protection in a measure; and in one way or another he had managed to wriggle through all the deadly complications, while I have no doubt that his conduct, whatever line he was forced to take, was marked by that abjectness which was like the stamp of the man. That was his characteristic; he was fundamentally and outwardly abject, as other men are markedly of a generous, distinguished, or venerable appearance. It was the element of his nature which permeated all his acts and passions and emotions; he raged abjectly, smiled abjectly, was abjectly sad; his civilities and his indignations were alike abject. I am sure his love would have been the most abject of sentiments — but can one imagine a loathsome insect in love? And his loathsomeness, too, was abject, so that a simply disgusting person would have appeared noble by his side. He has his place neither in the background nor in the foreground of the story; he is simply seen skulking on its outskirts, enigmatical and unclean, tainting the fragrance of its youth and of its naiveness.

‘His position in any case could not have been other than extremely miserable, yet it may very well be that he found some advantages in it. Jim told me he had been received at first with an abject display of the most amicable sentiments. “The fellow apparently couldn’t contain himself for joy,” said Jim with disgust. “He flew at me every morning to shake both my hands — confound him! — but I could never tell whether there would be any breakfast. If I got three meals in two days I considered myself jolly lucky, and he made me sign a chit for ten dollars every week. Said he was sure Mr. Stein did not mean him to keep me for nothing. Well — he kept me on nothing as near as possible. Put it down to the unsettled state of the country, and made as if to tear his hair out, begging my pardon twenty times a day, so that I had at last to entreat him not to worry. It made me sick. Half the roof of his house had fallen in, and the whole place had a mangy look, with wisps of dry grass sticking out and the corners of broken mats flapping on every wall. He did his best to make out that Mr. Stein owed him money on the last three years’ trading, but his books were all torn, and some were missing. He tried to hint it was his late wife’s fault. Disgusting scoundrel! At last I had to forbid him to mention his late wife at all. It made Jewel cry. I couldn’t discover what became of all the trade-goods; there was nothing in the store but rats, having a high old time amongst a litter of brown paper and old sacking. I was assured on every hand that he had a lot of money buried somewhere, but of course could get nothing out of him. It was the most miserable existence I led there in that wretched house. I tried to do my duty by Stein, but I had also other matters to think of. When I escaped

to Doramin old Tunku Allang got frightened and returned all my things. It was done in a roundabout way, and with no end of mystery, through a Chinaman who keeps a small shop here; but as soon as I left the Bugis quarter and went to live with Cornelius it began to be said openly that the Rajah had made up his mind to have me killed before long. Pleasant, wasn't it? And I couldn't see what there was to prevent him if he really had made up his mind. The worst of it was, I couldn't help feeling I wasn't doing any good either for Stein or for myself. Oh! it was beastly — the whole six weeks of it.”

Chapter 30

‘He told me further that he didn’t know what made him hang on — but of course we may guess. He sympathised deeply with the defenceless girl, at the mercy of that “mean, cowardly scoundrel.” It appears Cornelius led her an awful life, stopping only short of actual ill-usage, for which he had not the pluck, I suppose. He insisted upon her calling him father — ”and with respect, too — with respect,” he would scream, shaking a little yellow fist in her face. “I am a respectable man, and what are you? Tell me — what are you? You think I am going to bring up somebody else’s child and not be treated with respect? You ought to be glad I let you. Come — say Yes, father. . . . No? . . . You wait a bit.” Thereupon he would begin to abuse the dead woman, till the girl would run off with her hands to her head. He pursued her, dashing in and out and round the house and amongst the sheds, would drive her into some corner, where she would fall on her knees stopping her ears, and then he would stand at a distance and declaim filthy denunciations at her back for half an hour at a stretch. “Your mother was a devil, a deceitful devil — and you too are a devil,” he would shriek in a final outburst, pick up a bit of dry earth or a handful of mud (there was plenty of mud around the house), and fling it into her hair. Sometimes, though, she would hold out full of scorn, confronting him in silence, her face sombre and contracted, and only now and then uttering a word or two that would make the other jump and writhe with the sting. Jim told me these scenes were terrible. It was indeed a strange thing to come upon in a wilderness. The endlessness of such a subtly cruel situation was appalling — if you think of it. The respectable Cornelius (Inchi ‘Nelyus the Malays called him, with a grimace that meant many things) was a much-disappointed man. I don’t know what he had expected would be done for him in consideration of his marriage; but evidently the liberty to steal, and embezzle, and appropriate to himself for many years and in any way that suited him best, the goods of Stein’s Trading Company (Stein kept the supply up unfalteringly as long as he could get his skippers to take it there) did not seem to him a fair equivalent for the sacrifice of his honourable name. Jim would have enjoyed exceedingly thrashing Cornelius within an inch of his life; on the other hand, the scenes were of so painful a character, so abominable, that his impulse would be to get out of earshot, in order to spare the girl’s feelings. They left her agitated, speechless, clutching her bosom now and then with a stony, desperate face, and then Jim would lounge up and say unhappily, “Now — come — really — what’s the use — you must try to eat a bit,” or give some such mark of sympathy. Cornelius would keep on slinking through the doorways, across the verandah and back again, as mute as a fish, and with malevolent, mistrustful, underhand glances. “I can stop his game,” Jim said to her

once. "Just say the word." And do you know what she answered? She said — Jim told me impressively — that if she had not been sure he was intensely wretched himself, she would have found the courage to kill him with her own hands. "Just fancy that! The poor devil of a girl, almost a child, being driven to talk like that," he exclaimed in horror. It seemed impossible to save her not only from that mean rascal but even from herself! It wasn't that he pitied her so much, he affirmed; it was more than pity; it was as if he had something on his conscience, while that life went on. To leave the house would have appeared a base desertion. He had understood at last that there was nothing to expect from a longer stay, neither accounts nor money, nor truth of any sort, but he stayed on, exasperating Cornelius to the verge, I won't say of insanity, but almost of courage. Meantime he felt all sorts of dangers gathering obscurely about him. Doramin had sent over twice a trusty servant to tell him seriously that he could do nothing for his safety unless he would recross the river again and live amongst the Bugis as at first. People of every condition used to call, often in the dead of night, in order to disclose to him plots for his assassination. He was to be poisoned. He was to be stabbed in the bath-house. Arrangements were being made to have him shot from a boat on the river. Each of these informants professed himself to be his very good friend. It was enough — he told me — to spoil a fellow's rest for ever. Something of the kind was extremely possible — nay, probable — but the lying warnings gave him only the sense of deadly scheming going on all around him, on all sides, in the dark. Nothing more calculated to shake the best of nerve. Finally, one night, Cornelius himself, with a great apparatus of alarm and secrecy, unfolded in solemn wheedling tones a little plan wherein for one hundred dollars — or even for eighty; let's say eighty — he, Cornelius, would procure a trustworthy man to smuggle Jim out of the river, all safe. There was nothing else for it now — if Jim cared a pin for his life. What's eighty dollars? A trifle. An insignificant sum. While he, Cornelius, who had to remain behind, was absolutely courting death by this proof of devotion to Mr. Stein's young friend. The sight of his abject grimacing was — Jim told me — very hard to bear: he clutched at his hair, beat his breast, rocked himself to and fro with his hands pressed to his stomach, and actually pretended to shed tears. "Your blood be on your own head," he squeaked at last, and rushed out. It is a curious question how far Cornelius was sincere in that performance. Jim confessed to me that he did not sleep a wink after the fellow had gone. He lay on his back on a thin mat spread over the bamboo flooring, trying idly to make out the bare rafters, and listening to the rustlings in the torn thatch. A star suddenly twinkled through a hole in the roof. His brain was in a whirl; but, nevertheless, it was on that very night that he matured his plan for overcoming Sherif Ali. It had been the thought of all the moments he could spare from the hopeless investigation into Stein's affairs, but the notion — he says — came to him then all at once. He could see, as it were, the guns mounted on the top of the hill. He got very hot and excited lying there; sleep was out of the question more than ever. He jumped up, and went out barefooted on the verandah. Walking silently, he came upon the girl, motionless against the wall, as if on the watch. In his then state of mind it did not surprise him to see her up, nor

yet to hear her ask in an anxious whisper where Cornelius could be. He simply said he did not know. She moaned a little, and peered into the campong. Everything was very quiet. He was possessed by his new idea, and so full of it that he could not help telling the girl all about it at once. She listened, clapped her hands lightly, whispered softly her admiration, but was evidently on the alert all the time. It seems he had been used to make a confidant of her all along — and that she on her part could and did give him a lot of useful hints as to Patusan affairs there is no doubt. He assured me more than once that he had never found himself the worse for her advice. At any rate, he was proceeding to explain his plan fully to her there and then, when she pressed his arm once, and vanished from his side. Then Cornelius appeared from somewhere, and, perceiving Jim, ducked sideways, as though he had been shot at, and afterwards stood very still in the dusk. At last he came forward prudently, like a suspicious cat. “There were some fishermen there — with fish,” he said in a shaky voice. “To sell fish — you understand.” . . . It must have been then two o’clock in the morning — a likely time for anybody to hawk fish about!

‘Jim, however, let the statement pass, and did not give it a single thought. Other matters occupied his mind, and besides he had neither seen nor heard anything. He contented himself by saying, “Oh!” absently, got a drink of water out of a pitcher standing there, and leaving Cornelius a prey to some inexplicable emotion — that made him embrace with both arms the worm-eaten rail of the verandah as if his legs had failed — went in again and lay down on his mat to think. By-and-by he heard stealthy footsteps. They stopped. A voice whispered tremulously through the wall, “Are you asleep?” “No! What is it?” he answered briskly, and there was an abrupt movement outside, and then all was still, as if the whisperer had been startled. Extremely annoyed at this, Jim came out impetuously, and Cornelius with a faint shriek fled along the verandah as far as the steps, where he hung on to the broken banister. Very puzzled, Jim called out to him from the distance to know what the devil he meant. “Have you given your consideration to what I spoke to you about?” asked Cornelius, pronouncing the words with difficulty, like a man in the cold fit of a fever. “No!” shouted Jim in a passion. “I have not, and I don’t intend to. I am going to live here, in Patusan.” “You shall d-d-die h-h-here,” answered Cornelius, still shaking violently, and in a sort of expiring voice. The whole performance was so absurd and provoking that Jim didn’t know whether he ought to be amused or angry. “Not till I have seen you tucked away, you bet,” he called out, exasperated yet ready to laugh. Half seriously (being excited with his own thoughts, you know) he went on shouting, “Nothing can touch me! You can do your damndest.” Somehow the shadowy Cornelius far off there seemed to be the hateful embodiment of all the annoyances and difficulties he had found in his path. He let himself go — his nerves had been over-wrought for days — and called him many pretty names, — swindler, liar, sorry rascal: in fact, carried on in an extraordinary way. He admits he passed all bounds, that he was quite beside himself — defied all Patusan to scare him away — declared he would make them all dance to his own tune yet, and so on, in a menacing, boasting strain. Perfectly bombastic and ridiculous, he said.

His ears burned at the bare recollection. Must have been off his chump in some way. . . . The girl, who was sitting with us, nodded her little head at me quickly, frowned faintly, and said, "I heard him," with child-like solemnity. He laughed and blushed. What stopped him at last, he said, was the silence, the complete deathlike silence, of the indistinct figure far over there, that seemed to hang collapsed, doubled over the rail in a weird immobility. He came to his senses, and ceasing suddenly, wondered greatly at himself. He watched for a while. Not a stir, not a sound. "Exactly as if the chap had died while I had been making all that noise," he said. He was so ashamed of himself that he went indoors in a hurry without another word, and flung himself down again. The row seemed to have done him good though, because he went to sleep for the rest of the night like a baby. Hadn't slept like that for weeks. "But I didn't sleep," struck in the girl, one elbow on the table and nursing her cheek. "I watched." Her big eyes flashed, rolling a little, and then she fixed them on my face intently.'

Chapter 31

‘You may imagine with what interest I listened. All these details were perceived to have some significance twenty-four hours later. In the morning Cornelius made no allusion to the events of the night. “I suppose you will come back to my poor house,” he muttered, surlily, slinking up just as Jim was entering the canoe to go over to Doramin’s campong. Jim only nodded, without looking at him. “You find it good fun, no doubt,” muttered the other in a sour tone. Jim spent the day with the old nakhoda, preaching the necessity of vigorous action to the principal men of the Bugis community, who had been summoned for a big talk. He remembered with pleasure how very eloquent and persuasive he had been. “I managed to put some backbone into them that time, and no mistake,” he said. Sherif Ali’s last raid had swept the outskirts of the settlement, and some women belonging to the town had been carried off to the stockade. Sherif Ali’s emissaries had been seen in the market-place the day before, strutting about haughtily in white cloaks, and boasting of the Rajah’s friendship for their master. One of them stood forward in the shade of a tree, and, leaning on the long barrel of a rifle, exhorted the people to prayer and repentance, advising them to kill all the strangers in their midst, some of whom, he said, were infidels and others even worse — children of Satan in the guise of Moslems. It was reported that several of the Rajah’s people amongst the listeners had loudly expressed their approbation. The terror amongst the common people was intense. Jim, immensely pleased with his day’s work, crossed the river again before sunset.

‘As he had got the Bugis irretrievably committed to action and had made himself responsible for success on his own head, he was so elated that in the lightness of his heart he absolutely tried to be civil with Cornelius. But Cornelius became wildly jovial in response, and it was almost more than he could stand, he says, to hear his little squeaks of false laughter, to see him wriggle and blink, and suddenly catch hold of his chin and crouch low over the table with a distracted stare. The girl did not show herself, and Jim retired early. When he rose to say good-night, Cornelius jumped up, knocking his chair over, and ducked out of sight as if to pick up something he had dropped. His good-night came huskily from under the table. Jim was amazed to see him emerge with a dropping jaw, and staring, stupidly frightened eyes. He clutched the edge of the table. “What’s the matter? Are you unwell?” asked Jim. “Yes, yes, yes. A great colic in my stomach,” says the other; and it is Jim’s opinion that it was perfectly true. If so, it was, in view of his contemplated action, an abject sign of a still imperfect callousness for which he must be given all due credit.

‘Be it as it may, Jim’s slumbers were disturbed by a dream of heavens like brass resounding with a great voice, which called upon him to Awake! Awake! so loud that, notwithstanding his desperate determination to sleep on, he did wake up in reality. The glare of a red spluttering conflagration going on in mid-air fell on his eyes. Coils of black thick smoke curved round the head of some apparition, some unearthly being, all in white, with a severe, drawn, anxious face. After a second or so he recognised the girl. She was holding a dammar torch at arm’s-length aloft, and in a persistent, urgent monotone she was repeating, “Get up! Get up! Get up!”

‘Suddenly he leaped to his feet; at once she put into his hand a revolver, his own revolver, which had been hanging on a nail, but loaded this time. He gripped it in silence, bewildered, blinking in the light. He wondered what he could do for her.

‘She asked rapidly and very low, “Can you face four men with this?” He laughed while narrating this part at the recollection of his polite alacrity. It seems he made a great display of it. “Certainly — of course — certainly — command me.” He was not properly awake, and had a notion of being very civil in these extraordinary circumstances, of showing his unquestioning, devoted readiness. She left the room, and he followed her; in the passage they disturbed an old hag who did the casual cooking of the household, though she was so decrepit as to be hardly able to understand human speech. She got up and hobbled behind them, mumbling toothlessly. On the verandah a hammock of sail-cloth, belonging to Cornelius, swayed lightly to the touch of Jim’s elbow. It was empty.

‘The Patusan establishment, like all the posts of Stein’s Trading Company, had originally consisted of four buildings. Two of them were represented by two heaps of sticks, broken bamboos, rotten thatch, over which the four corner-posts of hardwood leaned sadly at different angles: the principal storeroom, however, stood yet, facing the agent’s house. It was an oblong hut, built of mud and clay; it had at one end a wide door of stout planking, which so far had not come off the hinges, and in one of the side walls there was a square aperture, a sort of window, with three wooden bars. Before descending the few steps the girl turned her face over her shoulder and said quickly, “You were to be set upon while you slept.” Jim tells me he experienced a sense of deception. It was the old story. He was weary of these attempts upon his life. He had had his fill of these alarms. He was sick of them. He assured me he was angry with the girl for deceiving him. He had followed her under the impression that it was she who wanted his help, and now he had half a mind to turn on his heel and go back in disgust. “Do you know,” he commented profoundly, “I rather think I was not quite myself for whole weeks on end about that time.” “Oh yes. You were though,” I couldn’t help contradicting.

‘But she moved on swiftly, and he followed her into the courtyard. All its fences had fallen in a long time ago; the neighbours’ buffaloes would pace in the morning across the open space, snorting profoundly, without haste; the very jungle was invading it already. Jim and the girl stopped in the rank grass. The light in which they stood made a dense blackness all round, and only above their heads there was an opulent

glitter of stars. He told me it was a beautiful night — quite cool, with a little stir of breeze from the river. It seems he noticed its friendly beauty. Remember this is a love story I am telling you now. A lovely night seemed to breathe on them a soft caress. The flame of the torch streamed now and then with a fluttering noise like a flag, and for a time this was the only sound. “They are in the storeroom waiting,” whispered the girl; “they are waiting for the signal.” “Who’s to give it?” he asked. She shook the torch, which blazed up after a shower of sparks. “Only you have been sleeping so restlessly,” she continued in a murmur; “I watched your sleep, too.” “You!” he exclaimed, craning his neck to look about him. “You think I watched on this night only!” she said, with a sort of despairing indignation.

‘He says it was as if he had received a blow on the chest. He gasped. He thought he had been an awful brute somehow, and he felt remorseful, touched, happy, elated. This, let me remind you again, is a love story; you can see it by the imbecility, not a repulsive imbecility, the exalted imbecility of these proceedings, this station in torchlight, as if they had come there on purpose to have it out for the edification of concealed murderers. If Sherif Ali’s emissaries had been possessed — as Jim remarked — of a pennyworth of spunk, this was the time to make a rush. His heart was thumping — not with fear — but he seemed to hear the grass rustle, and he stepped smartly out of the light. Something dark, imperfectly seen, flitted rapidly out of sight. He called out in a strong voice, “Cornelius! O Cornelius!” A profound silence succeeded: his voice did not seem to have carried twenty feet. Again the girl was by his side. “Fly!” she said. The old woman was coming up; her broken figure hovered in crippled little jumps on the edge of the light; they heard her mumbling, and a light, moaning sigh. “Fly!” repeated the girl excitedly. “They are frightened now — this light — the voices. They know you are awake now — they know you are big, strong, fearless . . .” “If I am all that,” he began; but she interrupted him: “Yes — to-night! But what of to-morrow night? Of the next night? Of the night after — of all the many, many nights? Can I be always watching?” A sobbing catch of her breath affected him beyond the power of words.

‘He told me that he had never felt so small, so powerless — and as to courage, what was the good of it? he thought. He was so helpless that even flight seemed of no use; and though she kept on whispering, “Go to Doramin, go to Doramin,” with feverish insistence, he realised that for him there was no refuge from that loneliness which centupled all his dangers except — in her. “I thought,” he said to me, “that if I went away from her it would be the end of everything somehow.” Only as they couldn’t stop there for ever in the middle of that courtyard, he made up his mind to go and look into the storehouse. He let her follow him without thinking of any protest, as if they had been indissolubly united. “I am fearless — am I?” he muttered through his teeth. She restrained his arm. “Wait till you hear my voice,” she said, and, torch in hand, ran lightly round the corner. He remained alone in the darkness, his face to the door: not a sound, not a breath came from the other side. The old hag let out a dreary groan somewhere behind his back. He heard a high-pitched almost screaming call from the girl. “Now! Push!” He pushed violently; the door swung with a creak and a clatter,

disclosing to his intense astonishment the low dungeon-like interior illuminated by a lurid, wavering glare. A turmoil of smoke eddied down upon an empty wooden crate in the middle of the floor, a litter of rags and straw tried to soar, but only stirred feebly in the draught. She had thrust the light through the bars of the window. He saw her bare round arm extended and rigid, holding up the torch with the steadiness of an iron bracket. A conical ragged heap of old mats cumbered a distant corner almost to the ceiling, and that was all.

‘He explained to me that he was bitterly disappointed at this. His fortitude had been tried by so many warnings, he had been for weeks surrounded by so many hints of danger, that he wanted the relief of some reality, of something tangible that he could meet. “It would have cleared the air for a couple of hours at least, if you know what I mean,” he said to me. “Jove! I had been living for days with a stone on my chest.” Now at last he had thought he would get hold of something, and — nothing! Not a trace, not a sign of anybody. He had raised his weapon as the door flew open, but now his arm fell. “Fire! Defend yourself,” the girl outside cried in an agonising voice. She, being in the dark and with her arm thrust in to the shoulder through the small hole, couldn’t see what was going on, and she dared not withdraw the torch now to run round. “There’s nobody here!” yelled Jim contemptuously, but his impulse to burst into a resentful exasperated laugh died without a sound: he had perceived in the very act of turning away that he was exchanging glances with a pair of eyes in the heap of mats. He saw a shifting gleam of whites. “Come out!” he cried in a fury, a little doubtful, and a dark-faced head, a head without a body, shaped itself in the rubbish, a strangely detached head, that looked at him with a steady scowl. Next moment the whole mound stirred, and with a low grunt a man emerged swiftly, and bounded towards Jim. Behind him the mats as it were jumped and flew, his right arm was raised with a crooked elbow, and the dull blade of a kriss protruded from his fist held off, a little above his head. A cloth wound tight round his loins seemed dazzlingly white on his bronze skin; his naked body glistened as if wet.

‘Jim noted all this. He told me he was experiencing a feeling of unutterable relief, of vengeful elation. He held his shot, he says, deliberately. He held it for the tenth part of a second, for three strides of the man — an unconscionable time. He held it for the pleasure of saying to himself, That’s a dead man! He was absolutely positive and certain. He let him come on because it did not matter. A dead man, anyhow. He noticed the dilated nostrils, the wide eyes, the intent, eager stillness of the face, and then he fired.

‘The explosion in that confined space was stunning. He stepped back a pace. He saw the man jerk his head up, fling his arms forward, and drop the kriss. He ascertained afterwards that he had shot him through the mouth, a little upwards, the bullet coming out high at the back of the skull. With the impetus of his rush the man drove straight on, his face suddenly gaping disfigured, with his hands open before him gropingly, as though blinded, and landed with terrific violence on his forehead, just short of Jim’s bare toes. Jim says he didn’t lose the smallest detail of all this. He found himself

calm, appeased, without rancour, without uneasiness, as if the death of that man had atoned for everything. The place was getting very full of sooty smoke from the torch, in which the unswaying flame burned blood-red without a flicker. He walked in resolutely, striding over the dead body, and covered with his revolver another naked figure outlined vaguely at the other end. As he was about to pull the trigger, the man threw away with force a short heavy spear, and squatted submissively on his hams, his back to the wall and his clasped hands between his legs. "You want your life?" Jim said. The other made no sound. "How many more of you?" asked Jim again. "Two more, Tuan," said the man very softly, looking with big fascinated eyes into the muzzle of the revolver. Accordingly two more crawled from under the mats, holding out ostentatiously their empty hands.'

Chapter 32

‘Jim took up an advantageous position and shepherded them out in a bunch through the doorway: all that time the torch had remained vertical in the grip of a little hand, without so much as a tremble. The three men obeyed him, perfectly mute, moving automatically. He ranged them in a row. “Link arms!” he ordered. They did so. “The first who withdraws his arm or turns his head is a dead man,” he said. “March!” They stepped out together, rigidly; he followed, and at the side the girl, in a trailing white gown, her black hair falling as low as her waist, bore the light. Erect and swaying, she seemed to glide without touching the earth; the only sound was the silky swish and rustle of the long grass. “Stop!” cried Jim.

‘The river-bank was steep; a great freshness ascended, the light fell on the edge of smooth dark water frothing without a ripple; right and left the shapes of the houses ran together below the sharp outlines of the roofs. “Take my greetings to Sherif Ali — till I come myself,” said Jim. Not one head of the three budged. “Jump!” he thundered. The three splashes made one splash, a shower flew up, black heads bobbed convulsively, and disappeared; but a great blowing and spluttering went on, growing faint, for they were diving industriously in great fear of a parting shot. Jim turned to the girl, who had been a silent and attentive observer. His heart seemed suddenly to grow too big for his breast and choke him in the hollow of his throat. This probably made him speechless for so long, and after returning his gaze she flung the burning torch with a wide sweep of the arm into the river. The ruddy fiery glare, taking a long flight through the night, sank with a vicious hiss, and the calm soft starlight descended upon them, unchecked.

‘He did not tell me what it was he said when at last he recovered his voice. I don’t suppose he could be very eloquent. The world was still, the night breathed on them, one of those nights that seem created for the sheltering of tenderness, and there are moments when our souls, as if freed from their dark envelope, glow with an exquisite sensibility that makes certain silences more lucid than speeches. As to the girl, he told me, “She broke down a bit. Excitement — don’t you know. Reaction. Deucedly tired she must have been — and all that kind of thing. And — and — hang it all — she was fond of me, don’t you see. . . . I too . . . didn’t know, of course . . . never entered my head . . .”

‘Then he got up and began to walk about in some agitation. “I — I love her dearly. More than I can tell. Of course one cannot tell. You take a different view of your actions when you come to understand, when you are made to understand every day that your existence is necessary — you see, absolutely necessary — to another person.

I am made to feel that. Wonderful! But only try to think what her life has been. It is too extravagantly awful! Isn't it? And me finding her here like this — as you may go out for a stroll and come suddenly upon somebody drowning in a lonely dark place. Jove! No time to lose. Well, it is a trust too . . . I believe I am equal to it . . .”

‘I must tell you the girl had left us to ourselves some time before. He slapped his chest. “Yes! I feel that, but I believe I am equal to all my luck!” He had the gift of finding a special meaning in everything that happened to him. This was the view he took of his love affair; it was idyllic, a little solemn, and also true, since his belief had all the unshakable seriousness of youth. Some time after, on another occasion, he said to me, “I’ve been only two years here, and now, upon my word, I can’t conceive being able to live anywhere else. The very thought of the world outside is enough to give me a fright; because, don’t you see,” he continued, with downcast eyes watching the action of his boot busied in squashing thoroughly a tiny bit of dried mud (we were strolling on the river-bank) — ”because I have not forgotten why I came here. Not yet!”

‘I refrained from looking at him, but I think I heard a short sigh; we took a turn or two in silence. “Upon my soul and conscience,” he began again, “if such a thing can be forgotten, then I think I have a right to dismiss it from my mind. Ask any man here” . . . his voice changed. “Is it not strange,” he went on in a gentle, almost yearning tone, “that all these people, all these people who would do anything for me, can never be made to understand? Never! If you disbelieved me I could not call them up. It seems hard, somehow. I am stupid, am I not? What more can I want? If you ask them who is brave — who is true — who is just — who is it they would trust with their lives? — they would say, Tuan Jim. And yet they can never know the real, real truth . . .”

‘That’s what he said to me on my last day with him. I did not let a murmur escape me: I felt he was going to say more, and come no nearer to the root of the matter. The sun, whose concentrated glare dwarfs the earth into a restless mote of dust, had sunk behind the forest, and the diffused light from an opal sky seemed to cast upon a world without shadows and without brilliance the illusion of a calm and pensive greatness. I don’t know why, listening to him, I should have noted so distinctly the gradual darkening of the river, of the air; the irresistible slow work of the night settling silently on all the visible forms, effacing the outlines, burying the shapes deeper and deeper, like a steady fall of impalpable black dust.

““Jove!” he began abruptly, “there are days when a fellow is too absurd for anything; only I know I can tell you what I like. I talk about being done with it — with the bally thing at the back of my head . . . Forgetting . . . Hang me if I know! I can think of it quietly. After all, what has it proved? Nothing. I suppose you don’t think so . . .”

‘I made a protesting murmur.

““No matter,” he said. “I am satisfied . . . nearly. I’ve got to look only at the face of the first man that comes along, to regain my confidence. They can’t be made to understand what is going on in me. What of that? Come! I haven’t done so badly.”

““Not so badly,” I said.

““But all the same, you wouldn’t like to have me aboard your own ship hey?”

“Confound you!” I cried. “Stop this.”

“Aha! You see,” he said, crowing, as it were, over me placidly. “Only,” he went on, “you just try to tell this to any of them here. They would think you a fool, a liar, or worse. And so I can stand it. I’ve done a thing or two for them, but this is what they have done for me.”

“My dear chap,” I cried, “you shall always remain for them an insoluble mystery.” Thereupon we were silent.

“Mystery,” he repeated, before looking up. “Well, then let me always remain here.”

‘After the sun had set, the darkness seemed to drive upon us, borne in every faint puff of the breeze. In the middle of a hedged path I saw the arrested, gaunt, watchful, and apparently one-legged silhouette of Tamb’ Itam; and across the dusky space my eye detected something white moving to and fro behind the supports of the roof. As soon as Jim, with Tamb’ Itam at his heels, had started upon his evening rounds, I went up to the house alone, and, unexpectedly, found myself waylaid by the girl, who had been clearly waiting for this opportunity.

‘It is hard to tell you what it was precisely she wanted to wrest from me. Obviously it would be something very simple — the simplest impossibility in the world; as, for instance, the exact description of the form of a cloud. She wanted an assurance, a statement, a promise, an explanation — I don’t know how to call it: the thing has no name. It was dark under the projecting roof, and all I could see were the flowing lines of her gown, the pale small oval of her face, with the white flash of her teeth, and, turned towards me, the big sombre orbits of her eyes, where there seemed to be a faint stir, such as you may fancy you can detect when you plunge your gaze to the bottom of an immensely deep well. What is it that moves there? you ask yourself. Is it a blind monster or only a lost gleam from the universe? It occurred to me — don’t laugh — that all things being dissimilar, she was more inscrutable in her childish ignorance than the Sphinx propounding childish riddles to wayfarers. She had been carried off to Patusan before her eyes were open. She had grown up there; she had seen nothing, she had known nothing, she had no conception of anything. I ask myself whether she were sure that anything else existed. What notions she may have formed of the outside world is to me inconceivable: all that she knew of its inhabitants were a betrayed woman and a sinister pantaloon. Her lover also came to her from there, gifted with irresistible seductions; but what would become of her if he should return to these inconceivable regions that seemed always to claim back their own? Her mother had warned her of this with tears, before she died . . .

‘She had caught hold of my arm firmly, and as soon as I had stopped she had withdrawn her hand in haste. She was audacious and shrinking. She feared nothing, but she was checked by the profound incertitude and the extreme strangeness — a brave person groping in the dark. I belonged to this Unknown that might claim Jim for its own at any moment. I was, as it were, in the secret of its nature and of its intentions — the confidant of a threatening mystery — armed with its power perhaps! I believe she supposed I could with a word whisk Jim away out of her very arms; it is my

sober conviction she went through agonies of apprehension during my long talks with Jim; through a real and intolerable anguish that might have conceivably driven her into plotting my murder, had the fierceness of her soul been equal to the tremendous situation it had created. This is my impression, and it is all I can give you: the whole thing dawned gradually upon me, and as it got clearer and clearer I was overwhelmed by a slow incredulous amazement. She made me believe her, but there is no word that on my lips could render the effect of the headlong and vehement whisper, of the soft, passionate tones, of the sudden breathless pause and the appealing movement of the white arms extended swiftly. They fell; the ghostly figure swayed like a slender tree in the wind, the pale oval of the face drooped; it was impossible to distinguish her features, the darkness of the eyes was unfathomable; two wide sleeves uprose in the dark like unfolding wings, and she stood silent, holding her head in her hands.'

Chapter 33

‘I was immensely touched: her youth, her ignorance, her pretty beauty, which had the simple charm and the delicate vigour of a wild-flower, her pathetic pleading, her helplessness, appealed to me with almost the strength of her own unreasonable and natural fear. She feared the unknown as we all do, and her ignorance made the unknown infinitely vast. I stood for it, for myself, for you fellows, for all the world that neither cared for Jim nor needed him in the least. I would have been ready enough to answer for the indifference of the teeming earth but for the reflection that he too belonged to this mysterious unknown of her fears, and that, however much I stood for, I did not stand for him. This made me hesitate. A murmur of hopeless pain unsealed my lips. I began by protesting that I at least had come with no intention to take Jim away.

‘Why did I come, then? After a slight movement she was as still as a marble statue in the night. I tried to explain briefly: friendship, business; if I had any wish in the matter it was rather to see him stay. . . . “They always leave us,” she murmured. The breath of sad wisdom from the grave which her piety wreathed with flowers seemed to pass in a faint sigh. . . . Nothing, I said, could separate Jim from her.

‘It is my firm conviction now; it was my conviction at the time; it was the only possible conclusion from the facts of the case. It was not made more certain by her whispering in a tone in which one speaks to oneself, “He swore this to me.” “Did you ask him?” I said.

‘She made a step nearer. “No. Never!” She had asked him only to go away. It was that night on the river-bank, after he had killed the man — after she had flung the torch in the water because he was looking at her so. There was too much light, and the danger was over then — for a little time — for a little time. He said then he would not abandon her to Cornelius. She had insisted. She wanted him to leave her. He said that he could not — that it was impossible. He trembled while he said this. She had felt him tremble. . . . One does not require much imagination to see the scene, almost to hear their whispers. She was afraid for him too. I believe that then she saw in him only a predestined victim of dangers which she understood better than himself. Though by nothing but his mere presence he had mastered her heart, had filled all her thoughts, and had possessed himself of all her affections, she underestimated his chances of success. It is obvious that at about that time everybody was inclined to underestimate his chances. Strictly speaking he didn’t seem to have any. I know this was Cornelius’s view. He confessed that much to me in extenuation of the shady part he had played in Sherif Ali’s plot to do away with the infidel. Even Sherif Ali himself, as it seems certain now, had nothing but contempt for the white man. Jim was to

be murdered mainly on religious grounds, I believe. A simple act of piety (and so far infinitely meritorious), but otherwise without much importance. In the last part of this opinion Cornelius concurred. "Honourable sir," he argued abjectly on the only occasion he managed to have me to himself — "honourable sir, how was I to know? Who was he? What could he do to make people believe him? What did Mr. Stein mean sending a boy like that to talk big to an old servant? I was ready to save him for eighty dollars. Only eighty dollars. Why didn't the fool go? Was I to get stabbed myself for the sake of a stranger?" He grovelled in spirit before me, with his body doubled up insinuatingly and his hands hovering about my knees, as though he were ready to embrace my legs. "What's eighty dollars? An insignificant sum to give to a defenceless old man ruined for life by a deceased she-devil." Here he wept. But I anticipate. I didn't that night chance upon Cornelius till I had had it out with the girl.

'She was unselfish when she urged Jim to leave her, and even to leave the country. It was his danger that was foremost in her thoughts — even if she wanted to save herself too — perhaps unconsciously: but then look at the warning she had, look at the lesson that could be drawn from every moment of the recently ended life in which all her memories were centred. She fell at his feet — she told me so — there by the river, in the discreet light of stars which showed nothing except great masses of silent shadows, indefinite open spaces, and trembling faintly upon the broad stream made it appear as wide as the sea. He had lifted her up. He lifted her up, and then she would struggle no more. Of course not. Strong arms, a tender voice, a stalwart shoulder to rest her poor lonely little head upon. The need — the infinite need — of all this for the aching heart, for the bewildered mind; — the promptings of youth — the necessity of the moment. What would you have? One understands — unless one is incapable of understanding anything under the sun. And so she was content to be lifted up — and held. "You know — Jove! this is serious — no nonsense in it!" as Jim had whispered hurriedly with a troubled concerned face on the threshold of his house. I don't know so much about nonsense, but there was nothing light-hearted in their romance: they came together under the shadow of a life's disaster, like knight and maiden meeting to exchange vows amongst haunted ruins. The starlight was good enough for that story, a light so faint and remote that it cannot resolve shadows into shapes, and show the other shore of a stream. I did look upon the stream that night and from the very place; it rolled silent and as black as Styx: the next day I went away, but I am not likely to forget what it was she wanted to be saved from when she entreated him to leave her while there was time. She told me what it was, calmed — she was now too passionately interested for mere excitement — in a voice as quiet in the obscurity as her white half-lost figure. She told me, "I didn't want to die weeping." I thought I had not heard aright.

"You did not want to die weeping?" I repeated after her. "Like my mother," she added readily. The outlines of her white shape did not stir in the least. "My mother had wept bitterly before she died," she explained. An inconceivable calmness seemed to have risen from the ground around us, imperceptibly, like the still rise of a flood in

the night, obliterating the familiar landmarks of emotions. There came upon me, as though I had felt myself losing my footing in the midst of waters, a sudden dread, the dread of the unknown depths. She went on explaining that, during the last moments, being alone with her mother, she had to leave the side of the couch to go and set her back against the door, in order to keep Cornelius out. He desired to get in, and kept on drumming with both fists, only desisting now and again to shout huskily, "Let me in! Let me in! Let me in!" In a far corner upon a few mats the moribund woman, already speechless and unable to lift her arm, rolled her head over, and with a feeble movement of her hand seemed to command — "No! No!" and the obedient daughter, setting her shoulders with all her strength against the door, was looking on. "The tears fell from her eyes — and then she died," concluded the girl in an imperturbable monotone, which more than anything else, more than the white statuesque immobility of her person, more than mere words could do, troubled my mind profoundly with the passive, irremediable horror of the scene. It had the power to drive me out of my conception of existence, out of that shelter each of us makes for himself to creep under in moments of danger, as a tortoise withdraws within its shell. For a moment I had a view of a world that seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, in truth, thanks to our unwearied efforts, it is as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive. But still — it was only a moment: I went back into my shell directly. One must — don't you know? — though I seemed to have lost all my words in the chaos of dark thoughts I had contemplated for a second or two beyond the pale. These came back, too, very soon, for words also belong to the sheltering conception of light and order which is our refuge. I had them ready at my disposal before she whispered softly, "He swore he would never leave me, when we stood there alone! He swore to me!". . . "And it is possible that you — you! do not believe him?" I asked, sincerely reproachful, genuinely shocked. Why couldn't she believe? Wherefore this craving for incertitude, this clinging to fear, as if incertitude and fear had been the safeguards of her love. It was monstrous. She should have made for herself a shelter of inexpugnable peace out of that honest affection. She had not the knowledge — not the skill perhaps. The night had come on apace; it had grown pitch-dark where we were, so that without stirring she had faded like the intangible form of a wistful and perverse spirit. And suddenly I heard her quiet whisper again, "Other men had sworn the same thing." It was like a meditative comment on some thoughts full of sadness, of awe. And she added, still lower if possible, "My father did." She paused the time to draw an inaudible breath. "Her father too." . . . These were the things she knew! At once I said, "Ah! but he is not like that." This, it seemed, she did not intend to dispute; but after a time the strange still whisper wandering dreamily in the air stole into my ears. "Why is he different? Is he better? Is he . . ." "Upon my word of honour," I broke in, "I believe he is." We subdued our tones to a mysterious pitch. Amongst the huts of Jim's workmen (they were mostly liberated slaves from the Sheriff's stockade) somebody started a shrill, drawling song. Across the river a big fire (at Doramin's, I think) made a glowing ball, completely isolated in the

night. "Is he more true?" she murmured. "Yes," I said. "More true than any other man," she repeated in lingering accents. "Nobody here," I said, "would dream of doubting his word — nobody would dare — except you."

'I think she made a movement at this. "More brave," she went on in a changed tone. "Fear will never drive him away from you," I said a little nervously. The song stopped short on a shrill note, and was succeeded by several voices talking in the distance. Jim's voice too. I was struck by her silence. "What has he been telling you? He has been telling you something?" I asked. There was no answer. "What is it he told you?" I insisted.

"Do you think I can tell you? How am I to know? How am I to understand?" she cried at last. There was a stir. I believe she was wringing her hands. "There is something he can never forget."

"So much the better for you," I said gloomily.

"What is it? What is it?" She put an extraordinary force of appeal into her supplicating tone. "He says he had been afraid. How can I believe this? Am I a mad woman to believe this? You all remember something! You all go back to it. What is it? You tell me! What is this thing? Is it alive? — is it dead? I hate it. It is cruel. Has it got a face and a voice — this calamity? Will he see it — will he hear it? In his sleep perhaps when he cannot see me — and then arise and go. Ah! I shall never forgive him. My mother had forgiven — but I, never! Will it be a sign — a call?"

'It was a wonderful experience. She mistrusted his very slumbers — and she seemed to think I could tell her why! Thus a poor mortal seduced by the charm of an apparition might have tried to wring from another ghost the tremendous secret of the claim the other world holds over a disembodied soul astray amongst the passions of this earth. The very ground on which I stood seemed to melt under my feet. And it was so simple too; but if the spirits evoked by our fears and our unrest have ever to vouch for each other's constancy before the forlorn magicians that we are, then I — I alone of us dwellers in the flesh — have shuddered in the hopeless chill of such a task. A sign, a call! How telling in its expression was her ignorance. A few words! How she came to know them, how she came to pronounce them, I can't imagine. Women find their inspiration in the stress of moments that for us are merely awful, absurd, or futile. To discover that she had a voice at all was enough to strike awe into the heart. Had a spurned stone cried out in pain it could not have appeared a greater and more pitiful miracle. These few sounds wandering in the dark had made their two benighted lives tragic to my mind. It was impossible to make her understand. I chafed silently at my impotence. And Jim, too — poor devil! Who would need him? Who would remember him? He had what he wanted. His very existence probably had been forgotten by this time. They had mastered their fates. They were tragic.

'Her immobility before me was clearly expectant, and my part was to speak for my brother from the realm of forgetful shade. I was deeply moved at my responsibility and at her distress. I would have given anything for the power to soothe her frail soul, tormenting itself in its invincible ignorance like a small bird beating about the cruel

wires of a cage. Nothing easier than to say, Have no fear! Nothing more difficult. How does one kill fear, I wonder? How do you shoot a spectre through the heart, slash off its spectral head, take it by its spectral throat? It is an enterprise you rush into while you dream, and are glad to make your escape with wet hair and every limb shaking. The bullet is not run, the blade not forged, the man not born; even the winged words of truth drop at your feet like lumps of lead. You require for such a desperate encounter an enchanted and poisoned shaft dipped in a lie too subtle to be found on earth. An enterprise for a dream, my masters!

'I began my exorcism with a heavy heart, with a sort of sullen anger in it too. Jim's voice, suddenly raised with a stern intonation, carried across the courtyard, reproving the carelessness of some dumb sinner by the river-side. Nothing — I said, speaking in a distinct murmur — there could be nothing, in that unknown world she fancied so eager to rob her of her happiness, there was nothing, neither living nor dead, there was no face, no voice, no power, that could tear Jim from her side. I drew breath and she whispered softly, "He told me so." "He told you the truth," I said. "Nothing," she sighed out, and abruptly turned upon me with a barely audible intensity of tone: "Why did you come to us from out there? He speaks of you too often. You make me afraid. Do you — do you want him?" A sort of stealthy fierceness had crept into our hurried mutters. "I shall never come again," I said bitterly. "And I don't want him. No one wants him." "No one," she repeated in a tone of doubt. "No one," I affirmed, feeling myself swayed by some strange excitement. "You think him strong, wise, courageous, great — why not believe him to be true too? I shall go to-morrow — and that is the end. You shall never be troubled by a voice from there again. This world you don't know is too big to miss him. You understand? Too big. You've got his heart in your hand. You must feel that. You must know that." "Yes, I know that," she breathed out, hard and still, as a statue might whisper.

'I felt I had done nothing. And what is it that I had wished to do? I am not sure now. At the time I was animated by an inexplicable ardour, as if before some great and necessary task — the influence of the moment upon my mental and emotional state. There are in all our lives such moments, such influences, coming from the outside, as it were, irresistible, incomprehensible — as if brought about by the mysterious conjunctions of the planets. She owned, as I had put it to her, his heart. She had that and everything else — if she could only believe it. What I had to tell her was that in the whole world there was no one who ever would need his heart, his mind, his hand. It was a common fate, and yet it seemed an awful thing to say of any man. She listened without a word, and her stillness now was like the protest of an invincible unbelief. What need she care for the world beyond the forests? I asked. From all the multitudes that peopled the vastness of that unknown there would come, I assured her, as long as he lived, neither a call nor a sign for him. Never. I was carried away. Never! Never! I remember with wonder the sort of dogged fierceness I displayed. I had the illusion of having got the spectre by the throat at last. Indeed the whole real thing has left behind the detailed and amazing impression of a dream. Why should she fear? She

knew him to be strong, true, wise, brave. He was all that. Certainly. He was more. He was great — invincible — and the world did not want him, it had forgotten him, it would not even know him.

‘I stopped; the silence over Patusan was profound, and the feeble dry sound of a paddle striking the side of a canoe somewhere in the middle of the river seemed to make it infinite. “Why?” she murmured. I felt that sort of rage one feels during a hard tussle. The spectre was trying to slip out of my grasp. “Why?” she repeated louder; “tell me!” And as I remained confounded, she stamped with her foot like a spoilt child. “Why? Speak.” “You want to know?” I asked in a fury. “Yes!” she cried. “Because he is not good enough,” I said brutally. During the moment’s pause I noticed the fire on the other shore blaze up, dilating the circle of its glow like an amazed stare, and contract suddenly to a red pin-point. I only knew how close to me she had been when I felt the clutch of her fingers on my forearm. Without raising her voice, she threw into it an infinity of scathing contempt, bitterness, and despair.

““This is the very thing he said. . . . You lie!”

‘The last two words she cried at me in the native dialect. “Hear me out!” I entreated; she caught her breath tremulously, flung my arm away. “Nobody, nobody is good enough,” I began with the greatest earnestness. I could hear the sobbing labour of her breath frightfully quickened. I hung my head. What was the use? Footsteps were approaching; I slipped away without another word. . . .’

Chapter 34

Marlow swung his legs out, got up quickly, and staggered a little, as though he had been set down after a rush through space. He leaned his back against the balustrade and faced a disordered array of long cane chairs. The bodies prone in them seemed startled out of their torpor by his movement. One or two sat up as if alarmed; here and there a cigar glowed yet; Marlow looked at them all with the eyes of a man returning from the excessive remoteness of a dream. A throat was cleared; a calm voice encouraged negligently, 'Well.'

'Nothing,' said Marlow with a slight start. 'He had told her — that's all. She did not believe him — nothing more. As to myself, I do not know whether it be just, proper, decent for me to rejoice or to be sorry. For my part, I cannot say what I believed — indeed I don't know to this day, and never shall probably. But what did the poor devil believe himself? Truth shall prevail — don't you know *Magna est veritas* el . . . Yes, when it gets a chance. There is a law, no doubt — and likewise a law regulates your luck in the throwing of dice. It is not Justice the servant of men, but accident, hazard, Fortune — the ally of patient Time — that holds an even and scrupulous balance. Both of us had said the very same thing. Did we both speak the truth — or one of us did — or neither? . . .'

Marlow paused, crossed his arms on his breast, and in a changed tone —

'She said we lied. Poor soul! Well — let's leave it to Chance, whose ally is Time, that cannot be hurried, and whose enemy is Death, that will not wait. I had retreated — a little cowed, I must own. I had tried a fall with fear itself and got thrown — of course. I had only succeeded in adding to her anguish the hint of some mysterious collusion, of an inexplicable and incomprehensible conspiracy to keep her for ever in the dark. And it had come easily, naturally, unavoidably, by his act, by her own act! It was as though I had been shown the working of the implacable destiny of which we are the victims — and the tools. It was appalling to think of the girl whom I had left standing there motionless; Jim's footsteps had a fateful sound as he tramped by, without seeing me, in his heavy laced boots. "What? No lights!" he said in a loud, surprised voice. "What are you doing in the dark — you two?" Next moment he caught sight of her, I suppose. "Hallo, girl!" he cried cheerily. "Hallo, boy!" she answered at once, with amazing pluck.

'This was their usual greeting to each other, and the bit of swagger she would put into her rather high but sweet voice was very droll, pretty, and childlike. It delighted Jim greatly. This was the last occasion on which I heard them exchange this familiar hail, and it struck a chill into my heart. There was the high sweet voice, the pretty effort, the swagger; but it all seemed to die out prematurely, and the playful call sounded

like a moan. It was too confoundedly awful. "What have you done with Marlow?" Jim was asking; and then, "Gone down — has he? Funny I didn't meet him. . . . You there, Marlow?"

'I didn't answer. I wasn't going in — not yet at any rate. I really couldn't. While he was calling me I was engaged in making my escape through a little gate leading out upon a stretch of newly cleared ground. No; I couldn't face them yet. I walked hastily with lowered head along a trodden path. The ground rose gently, the few big trees had been felled, the undergrowth had been cut down and the grass fired. He had a mind to try a coffee-plantation there. The big hill, rearing its double summit coal-black in the clear yellow glow of the rising moon, seemed to cast its shadow upon the ground prepared for that experiment. He was going to try ever so many experiments; I had admired his energy, his enterprise, and his shrewdness. Nothing on earth seemed less real now than his plans, his energy, and his enthusiasm; and raising my eyes, I saw part of the moon glittering through the bushes at the bottom of the chasm. For a moment it looked as though the smooth disc, falling from its place in the sky upon the earth, had rolled to the bottom of that precipice: its ascending movement was like a leisurely rebound; it disengaged itself from the tangle of twigs; the bare contorted limb of some tree, growing on the slope, made a black crack right across its face. It threw its level rays afar as if from a cavern, and in this mournful eclipse-like light the stumps of felled trees uprose very dark, the heavy shadows fell at my feet on all sides, my own moving shadow, and across my path the shadow of the solitary grave perpetually garlanded with flowers. In the darkened moonlight the interlaced blossoms took on shapes foreign to one's memory and colours indefinable to the eye, as though they had been special flowers gathered by no man, grown not in this world, and destined for the use of the dead alone. Their powerful scent hung in the warm air, making it thick and heavy like the fumes of incense. The lumps of white coral shone round the dark mound like a chaplet of bleached skulls, and everything around was so quiet that when I stood still all sound and all movement in the world seemed to come to an end.

'It was a great peace, as if the earth had been one grave, and for a time I stood there thinking mostly of the living who, buried in remote places out of the knowledge of mankind, still are fated to share in its tragic or grotesque miseries. In its noble struggles too — who knows? The human heart is vast enough to contain all the world. It is valiant enough to bear the burden, but where is the courage that would cast it off?

'I suppose I must have fallen into a sentimental mood; I only know that I stood there long enough for the sense of utter solitude to get hold of me so completely that all I had lately seen, all I had heard, and the very human speech itself, seemed to have passed away out of existence, living only for a while longer in my memory, as though I had been the last of mankind. It was a strange and melancholy illusion, evolved half-consciously like all our illusions, which I suspect only to be visions of remote unattainable truth, seen dimly. This was, indeed, one of the lost, forgotten, unknown places of the earth; I had looked under its obscure surface; and I felt that when to-

morrow I had left it for ever, it would slip out of existence, to live only in my memory till I myself passed into oblivion. I have that feeling about me now; perhaps it is that feeling which has incited me to tell you the story, to try to hand over to you, as it were, its very existence, its reality — the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion.

‘Cornelius broke upon it. He bolted out, vermin-like, from the long grass growing in a depression of the ground. I believe his house was rotting somewhere near by, though I’ve never seen it, not having been far enough in that direction. He ran towards me upon the path; his feet, shod in dirty white shoes, twinkled on the dark earth; he pulled himself up, and began to whine and cringe under a tall stove-pipe hat. His dried-up little carcass was swallowed up, totally lost, in a suit of black broadcloth. That was his costume for holidays and ceremonies, and it reminded me that this was the fourth Sunday I had spent in Patusan. All the time of my stay I had been vaguely aware of his desire to confide in me, if he only could get me all to himself. He hung about with an eager craving look on his sour yellow little face; but his timidity had kept him back as much as my natural reluctance to have anything to do with such an unsavoury creature. He would have succeeded, nevertheless, had he not been so ready to slink off as soon as you looked at him. He would slink off before Jim’s severe gaze, before my own, which I tried to make indifferent, even before Tamb’ Itam’s surly, superior glance. He was perpetually slinking away; whenever seen he was seen moving off deviously, his face over his shoulder, with either a mistrustful snarl or a woe-begone, piteous, mute aspect; but no assumed expression could conceal this innate irremediable abjectness of his nature, any more than an arrangement of clothing can conceal some monstrous deformity of the body.

‘I don’t know whether it was the demoralisation of my utter defeat in my encounter with a spectre of fear less than an hour ago, but I let him capture me without even a show of resistance. I was doomed to be the recipient of confidences, and to be confronted with unanswerable questions. It was trying; but the contempt, the unreasoned contempt, the man’s appearance provoked, made it easier to bear. He couldn’t possibly matter. Nothing mattered, since I had made up my mind that Jim, for whom alone I cared, had at last mastered his fate. He had told me he was satisfied . . . nearly. This is going further than most of us dare. I — who have the right to think myself good enough — dare not. Neither does any of you here, I suppose? . . .’

Marlow paused, as if expecting an answer. Nobody spoke.

‘Quite right,’ he began again. ‘Let no soul know, since the truth can be wrung out of us only by some cruel, little, awful catastrophe. But he is one of us, and he could say he was satisfied . . . nearly. Just fancy this! Nearly satisfied. One could almost envy him his catastrophe. Nearly satisfied. After this nothing could matter. It did not matter who suspected him, who trusted him, who loved him, who hated him — especially as it was Cornelius who hated him.

‘Yet after all this was a kind of recognition. You shall judge of a man by his foes as well as by his friends, and this enemy of Jim was such as no decent man would be ashamed to own, without, however, making too much of him. This was the view Jim

took, and in which I shared; but Jim disregarded him on general grounds. "My dear Marlow," he said, "I feel that if I go straight nothing can touch me. Indeed I do. Now you have been long enough here to have a good look round — and, frankly, don't you think I am pretty safe? It all depends upon me, and, by Jove! I have lots of confidence in myself. The worst thing he could do would be to kill me, I suppose. I don't think for a moment he would. He couldn't, you know — not if I were myself to hand him a loaded rifle for the purpose, and then turn my back on him. That's the sort of thing he is. And suppose he would — suppose he could? Well — what of that? I didn't come here flying for my life — did I? I came here to set my back against the wall, and I am going to stay here . . ."

"Till you are quite satisfied," I struck in.

'We were sitting at the time under the roof in the stern of his boat; twenty paddles flashed like one, ten on a side, striking the water with a single splash, while behind our backs Tamb' Itam dipped silently right and left, and stared right down the river, attentive to keep the long canoe in the greatest strength of the current. Jim bowed his head, and our last talk seemed to flicker out for good. He was seeing me off as far as the mouth of the river. The schooner had left the day before, working down and drifting on the ebb, while I had prolonged my stay overnight. And now he was seeing me off.

'Jim had been a little angry with me for mentioning Cornelius at all. I had not, in truth, said much. The man was too insignificant to be dangerous, though he was as full of hate as he could hold. He had called me "honourable sir" at every second sentence, and had whined at my elbow as he followed me from the grave of his "late wife" to the gate of Jim's compound. He declared himself the most unhappy of men, a victim, crushed like a worm; he entreated me to look at him. I wouldn't turn my head to do so; but I could see out of the corner of my eye his obsequious shadow gliding after mine, while the moon, suspended on our right hand, seemed to gloat serenely upon the spectacle. He tried to explain — as I've told you — his share in the events of the memorable night. It was a matter of expediency. How could he know who was going to get the upper hand? "I would have saved him, honourable sir! I would have saved him for eighty dollars," he protested in dulcet tones, keeping a pace behind me. "He has saved himself," I said, "and he has forgiven you." I heard a sort of tittering, and turned upon him; at once he appeared ready to take to his heels. "What are you laughing at?" I asked, standing still. "Don't be deceived, honourable sir!" he shrieked, seemingly losing all control over his feelings. "He save himself! He knows nothing, honourable sir — nothing whatever. Who is he? What does he want here — the big thief? What does he want here? He throws dust into everybody's eyes; he throws dust into your eyes, honourable sir; but he can't throw dust into my eyes. He is a big fool, honourable sir." I laughed contemptuously, and, turning on my heel, began to walk on again. He ran up to my elbow and whispered forcibly, "He's no more than a little child here — like a little child — a little child." Of course I didn't take the slightest notice, and seeing the time pressed, because we were approaching the bamboo fence that glittered over

the blackened ground of the clearing, he came to the point. He commenced by being abjectly lachrymose. His great misfortunes had affected his head. He hoped I would kindly forget what nothing but his troubles made him say. He didn't mean anything by it; only the honourable sir did not know what it was to be ruined, broken down, trampled upon. After this introduction he approached the matter near his heart, but in such a rambling, ejaculatory, craven fashion, that for a long time I couldn't make out what he was driving at. He wanted me to intercede with Jim in his favour. It seemed, too, to be some sort of money affair. I heard time and again the words, "Moderate provision — suitable present." He seemed to be claiming value for something, and he even went the length of saying with some warmth that life was not worth having if a man were to be robbed of everything. I did not breathe a word, of course, but neither did I stop my ears. The gist of the affair, which became clear to me gradually, was in this, that he regarded himself as entitled to some money in exchange for the girl. He had brought her up. Somebody else's child. Great trouble and pains — old man now — suitable present. If the honourable sir would say a word. . . . I stood still to look at him with curiosity, and fearful lest I should think him extortionate, I suppose, he hastily brought himself to make a concession. In consideration of a "suitable present" given at once, he would, he declared, be willing to undertake the charge of the girl, "without any other provision — when the time came for the gentleman to go home." His little yellow face, all crumpled as though it had been squeezed together, expressed the most anxious, eager avarice. His voice whined coaxingly, "No more trouble — natural guardian — a sum of money . . ."

'I stood there and marvelled. That kind of thing, with him, was evidently a vocation. I discovered suddenly in his cringing attitude a sort of assurance, as though he had been all his life dealing in certitudes. He must have thought I was dispassionately considering his proposal, because he became as sweet as honey. "Every gentleman made a provision when the time came to go home," he began insinuatingly. I slammed the little gate. "In this case, Mr. Cornelius," I said, "the time will never come." He took a few seconds to gather this in. "What!" he fairly squealed. "Why," I continued from my side of the gate, "haven't you heard him say so himself? He will never go home." "Oh! this is too much," he shouted. He would not address me as "honoured sir" any more. He was very still for a time, and then without a trace of humility began very low: "Never go — ah! He — he — he comes here devil knows from where — comes here — devil knows why — to trample on me till I die — ah — trample" (he stamped softly with both feet), "trample like this — nobody knows why — till I die. . . ." His voice became quite extinct; he was bothered by a little cough; he came up close to the fence and told me, dropping into a confidential and piteous tone, that he would not be trampled upon. "Patience — patience," he muttered, striking his breast. I had done laughing at him, but unexpectedly he treated me to a wild cracked burst of it. "Ha! ha! ha! We shall see! We shall see! What! Steal from me! Steal from me everything! Everything! Everything!" His head drooped on one shoulder, his hands were hanging before him lightly clasped. One would have thought he had cherished the girl with surpassing love, that his spirit had

been crushed and his heart broken by the most cruel of spoliations. Suddenly he lifted his head and shot out an infamous word. "Like her mother — she is like her deceitful mother. Exactly. In her face, too. In her face. The devil!" He leaned his forehead against the fence, and in that position uttered threats and horrible blasphemies in Portuguese in very weak ejaculations, mingled with miserable complaints and groans, coming out with a heave of the shoulders as though he had been overtaken by a deadly fit of sickness. It was an inexpressibly grotesque and vile performance, and I hastened away. He tried to shout something after me. Some disparagement of Jim, I believe — not too loud though, we were too near the house. All I heard distinctly was, "No more than a little child — a little child."

Chapter 35

‘But next morning, at the first bend of the river shutting off the houses of Patusan, all this dropped out of my sight bodily, with its colour, its design, and its meaning, like a picture created by fancy on a canvas, upon which, after long contemplation, you turn your back for the last time. It remains in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested, in an unchanging light. There are the ambitions, the fears, the hate, the hopes, and they remain in my mind just as I had seen them — intense and as if for ever suspended in their expression. I had turned away from the picture and was going back to the world where events move, men change, light flickers, life flows in a clear stream, no matter whether over mud or over stones. I wasn’t going to dive into it; I would have enough to do to keep my head above the surface. But as to what I was leaving behind, I cannot imagine any alteration. The immense and magnanimous Doramin and his little motherly witch of a wife, gazing together upon the land and nursing secretly their dreams of parental ambition; Tunku Allang, wizened and greatly perplexed; Dain Waris, intelligent and brave, with his faith in Jim, with his firm glance and his ironic friendliness; the girl, absorbed in her frightened, suspicious adoration; Tamb’ Itam, surly and faithful; Cornelius, leaning his forehead against the fence under the moonlight — I am certain of them. They exist as if under an enchanter’s wand. But the figure round which all these are grouped — that one lives, and I am not certain of him. No magician’s wand can immobilise him under my eyes. He is one of us.

‘Jim, as I’ve told you, accompanied me on the first stage of my journey back to the world he had renounced, and the way at times seemed to lead through the very heart of untouched wilderness. The empty reaches sparkled under the high sun; between the high walls of vegetation the heat drowsed upon the water, and the boat, impelled vigorously, cut her way through the air that seemed to have settled dense and warm under the shelter of lofty trees.

‘The shadow of the impending separation had already put an immense space between us, and when we spoke it was with an effort, as if to force our low voices across a vast and increasing distance. The boat fairly flew; we sweltered side by side in the stagnant superheated air; the smell of mud, of mush, the primeval smell of fecund earth, seemed to sting our faces; till suddenly at a bend it was as if a great hand far away had lifted a heavy curtain, had flung open an immense portal. The light itself seemed to stir, the sky above our heads widened, a far-off murmur reached our ears, a freshness enveloped us, filled our lungs, quickened our thoughts, our blood, our regrets — and, straight ahead, the forests sank down against the dark-blue ridge of the sea.

‘I breathed deeply, I revelled in the vastness of the opened horizon, in the different atmosphere that seemed to vibrate with the toil of life, with the energy of an impeccable world. This sky and this sea were open to me. The girl was right — there was a sign, a call in them — something to which I responded with every fibre of my being. I let my eyes roam through space, like a man released from bonds who stretches his cramped limbs, runs, leaps, responds to the inspiring elation of freedom. “This is glorious!” I cried, and then I looked at the sinner by my side. He sat with his head sunk on his breast and said “Yes,” without raising his eyes, as if afraid to see writ large on the clear sky of the offing the reproach of his romantic conscience.

‘I remember the smallest details of that afternoon. We landed on a bit of white beach. It was backed by a low cliff wooded on the brow, draped in creepers to the very foot. Below us the plain of the sea, of a serene and intense blue, stretched with a slight upward tilt to the thread-like horizon drawn at the height of our eyes. Great waves of glitter blew lightly along the pitted dark surface, as swift as feathers chased by the breeze. A chain of islands sat broken and massive facing the wide estuary, displayed in a sheet of pale glassy water reflecting faithfully the contour of the shore. High in the colourless sunshine a solitary bird, all black, hovered, dropping and soaring above the same spot with a slight rocking motion of the wings. A ragged, sooty bunch of flimsy mat hovels was perched over its own inverted image upon a crooked multitude of high piles the colour of ebony. A tiny black canoe put off from amongst them with two tiny men, all black, who toiled exceedingly, striking down at the pale water: and the canoe seemed to slide painfully on a mirror. This bunch of miserable hovels was the fishing village that boasted of the white lord’s especial protection, and the two men crossing over were the old headman and his son-in-law. They landed and walked up to us on the white sand, lean, dark-brown as if dried in smoke, with ashy patches on the skin of their naked shoulders and breasts. Their heads were bound in dirty but carefully folded headkerchiefs, and the old man began at once to state a complaint, voluble, stretching a lank arm, screwing up at Jim his old bleared eyes confidently. The Rajah’s people would not leave them alone; there had been some trouble about a lot of turtles’ eggs his people had collected on the islets there — and leaning at arm’s-length upon his paddle, he pointed with a brown skinny hand over the sea. Jim listened for a time without looking up, and at last told him gently to wait. He would hear him by-and-by. They withdrew obediently to some little distance, and sat on their heels, with their paddles lying before them on the sand; the silvery gleams in their eyes followed our movements patiently; and the immensity of the outspread sea, the stillness of the coast, passing north and south beyond the limits of my vision, made up one colossal Presence watching us four dwarfs isolated on a strip of glistening sand.

“The trouble is,” remarked Jim moodily, “that for generations these beggars of fishermen in that village there had been considered as the Rajah’s personal slaves — and the old rip can’t get it into his head that . . .”

‘He paused. “That you have changed all that,” I said.

“Yes I’ve changed all that,” he muttered in a gloomy voice.

“You have had your opportunity,” I pursued.

“Have I?” he said. “Well, yes. I suppose so. Yes. I have got back my confidence in myself — a good name — yet sometimes I wish . . . No! I shall hold what I’ve got. Can’t expect anything more.” He flung his arm out towards the sea. “Not out there anyhow.” He stamped his foot upon the sand. “This is my limit, because nothing less will do.”

‘We continued pacing the beach. “Yes, I’ve changed all that,” he went on, with a sidelong glance at the two patient squatting fishermen; “but only try to think what it would be if I went away. Jove! can’t you see it? Hell loose. No! To-morrow I shall go and take my chance of drinking that silly old Tunku Allang’s coffee, and I shall make no end of fuss over these rotten turtles’ eggs. No. I can’t say — enough. Never. I must go on, go on for ever holding up my end, to feel sure that nothing can touch me. I must stick to their belief in me to feel safe and to — to” . . . He cast about for a word, seemed to look for it on the sea . . . “to keep in touch with” . . . His voice sank suddenly to a murmur . . . “with those whom, perhaps, I shall never see any more. With — with — you, for instance.”

‘I was profoundly humbled by his words. “For God’s sake,” I said, “don’t set me up, my dear fellow; just look to yourself.” I felt a gratitude, an affection, for that straggler whose eyes had singled me out, keeping my place in the ranks of an insignificant multitude. How little that was to boast of, after all! I turned my burning face away; under the low sun, glowing, darkened and crimson, like an ember snatched from the fire, the sea lay outspread, offering all its immense stillness to the approach of the fiery orb. Twice he was going to speak, but checked himself; at last, as if he had found a formula —

“I shall be faithful,” he said quietly. “I shall be faithful,” he repeated, without looking at me, but for the first time letting his eyes wander upon the waters, whose blueness had changed to a gloomy purple under the fires of sunset. Ah! he was romantic, romantic. I recalled some words of Stein’s. . . . “In the destructive element immerse! . . . To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream — and so — always — usque ad finem . . .” He was romantic, but none the less true. Who could tell what forms, what visions, what faces, what forgiveness he could see in the glow of the west! . . . A small boat, leaving the schooner, moved slowly, with a regular beat of two oars, towards the sandbank to take me off. “And then there’s Jewel,” he said, out of the great silence of earth, sky, and sea, which had mastered my very thoughts so that his voice made me start. “There’s Jewel.” “Yes,” I murmured. “I need not tell you what she is to me,” he pursued. “You’ve seen. In time she will come to understand . . .” “I hope so,” I interrupted. “She trusts me, too,” he mused, and then changed his tone. “When shall we meet next, I wonder?” he said.

“Never — unless you come out,” I answered, avoiding his glance. He didn’t seem to be surprised; he kept very quiet for a while.

“Good-bye, then,” he said, after a pause. “Perhaps it’s just as well.”

‘We shook hands, and I walked to the boat, which waited with her nose on the beach. The schooner, her mainsail set and jib-sheet to windward, curveted on the purple sea; there was a rosy tinge on her sails. “Will you be going home again soon?” asked Jim, just as I swung my leg over the gunwale. “In a year or so if I live,” I said. The forefoot grated on the sand, the boat floated, the wet oars flashed and dipped once, twice. Jim, at the water’s edge, raised his voice. “Tell them . . .” he began. I signed to the men to cease rowing, and waited in wonder. Tell who? The half-submerged sun faced him; I could see its red gleam in his eyes that looked dumbly at me. . . . “No — nothing,” he said, and with a slight wave of his hand motioned the boat away. I did not look again at the shore till I had clambered on board the schooner.

‘By that time the sun had set. The twilight lay over the east, and the coast, turned black, extended infinitely its sombre wall that seemed the very stronghold of the night; the western horizon was one great blaze of gold and crimson in which a big detached cloud floated dark and still, casting a slaty shadow on the water beneath, and I saw Jim on the beach watching the schooner fall off and gather headway.

‘The two half-naked fishermen had arisen as soon as I had gone; they were no doubt pouring the plaint of their trifling, miserable, oppressed lives into the ears of the white lord, and no doubt he was listening to it, making it his own, for was it not a part of his luck — the luck “from the word Go” — the luck to which he had assured me he was so completely equal? They, too, I should think, were in luck, and I was sure their pertinacity would be equal to it. Their dark-skinned bodies vanished on the dark background long before I had lost sight of their protector. He was white from head to foot, and remained persistently visible with the stronghold of the night at his back, the sea at his feet, the opportunity by his side — still veiled. What do you say? Was it still veiled? I don’t know. For me that white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma. The twilight was ebbing fast from the sky above his head, the strip of sand had sunk already under his feet, he himself appeared no bigger than a child — then only a speck, a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world. . . . And, suddenly, I lost him. . . .

Chapter 36

With these words Marlow had ended his narrative, and his audience had broken up forthwith, under his abstract, pensive gaze. Men drifted off the verandah in pairs or alone without loss of time, without offering a remark, as if the last image of that incomplete story, its incompleteness itself, and the very tone of the speaker, had made discussion in vain and comment impossible. Each of them seemed to carry away his own impression, to carry it away with him like a secret; but there was only one man of all these listeners who was ever to hear the last word of the story. It came to him at home, more than two years later, and it came contained in a thick packet addressed in Marlow's upright and angular handwriting.

The privileged man opened the packet, looked in, then, laying it down, went to the window. His rooms were in the highest flat of a lofty building, and his glance could travel afar beyond the clear panes of glass, as though he were looking out of the lantern of a lighthouse. The slopes of the roofs glistened, the dark broken ridges succeeded each other without end like sombre, uncrested waves, and from the depths of the town under his feet ascended a confused and unceasing mutter. The spires of churches, numerous, scattered haphazard, uprose like beacons on a maze of shoals without a channel; the driving rain mingled with the falling dusk of a winter's evening; and the booming of a big clock on a tower, striking the hour, rolled past in voluminous, austere bursts of sound, with a shrill vibrating cry at the core. He drew the heavy curtains.

The light of his shaded reading-lamp slept like a sheltered pool, his footfalls made no sound on the carpet, his wandering days were over. No more horizons as boundless as hope, no more twilights within the forests as solemn as temples, in the hot quest for the Ever-undiscovered Country over the hill, across the stream, beyond the wave. The hour was striking! No more! No more! — but the opened packet under the lamp brought back the sounds, the visions, the very savour of the past — a multitude of fading faces, a tumult of low voices, dying away upon the shores of distant seas under a passionate and unconsoling sunshine. He sighed and sat down to read.

At first he saw three distinct enclosures. A good many pages closely blackened and pinned together; a loose square sheet of greyish paper with a few words traced in a handwriting he had never seen before, and an explanatory letter from Marlow. From this last fell another letter, yellowed by time and frayed on the folds. He picked it up and, laying it aside, turned to Marlow's message, ran swiftly over the opening lines, and, checking himself, thereafter read on deliberately, like one approaching with slow feet and alert eyes the glimpse of an undiscovered country.

‘. . . I don’t suppose you’ve forgotten,’ went on the letter. ‘You alone have showed an interest in him that survived the telling of his story, though I remember well you would not admit he had mastered his fate. You prophesied for him the disaster of weariness and of disgust with acquired honour, with the self-appointed task, with the love sprung from pity and youth. You had said you knew so well “that kind of thing,” its illusory satisfaction, its unavoidable deception. You said also — I call to mind — that “giving your life up to them” (them meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour) “was like selling your soul to a brute.” You contended that “that kind of thing” was only enduring and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially our own, in whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. “We want its strength at our backs,” you had said. “We want a belief in its necessity and its justice, to make a worthy and conscious sacrifice of our lives. Without it the sacrifice is only forgetfulness, the way of offering is no better than the way to perdition.” In other words, you maintained that we must fight in the ranks or our lives don’t count. Possibly! You ought to know — be it said without malice — you who have rushed into one or two places single-handed and came out cleverly, without singeing your wings. The point, however, is that of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself, and the question is whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress.

‘I affirm nothing. Perhaps you may pronounce — after you’ve read. There is much truth — after all — in the common expression “under a cloud.” It is impossible to see him clearly — especially as it is through the eyes of others that we take our last look at him. I have no hesitation in imparting to you all I know of the last episode that, as he used to say, had “come to him.” One wonders whether this was perhaps that supreme opportunity, that last and satisfying test for which I had always suspected him to be waiting, before he could frame a message to the impeccable world. You remember that when I was leaving him for the last time he had asked whether I would be going home soon, and suddenly cried after me, “Tell them . . .” I had waited — curious I’ll own, and hopeful too — only to hear him shout, “No — nothing.” That was all then — and there will be nothing more; there will be no message, unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts, that are so often more enigmatic than the craftiest arrangement of words. He made, it is true, one more attempt to deliver himself; but that too failed, as you may perceive if you look at the sheet of greyish foolscap enclosed here. He had tried to write; do you notice the commonplace hand? It is headed “The Fort, Patusan.” I suppose he had carried out his intention of making out of his house a place of defence. It was an excellent plan: a deep ditch, an earth wall topped by a palisade, and at the angles guns mounted on platforms to sweep each side of the square. Doramin had agreed to furnish him the guns; and so each man of his party would know there was a place of safety, upon which every faithful partisan could rally in case of some sudden danger. All this showed his judicious foresight, his faith in the future. What he called “my own people” — the liberated captives of the Sheriff — were to make a distinct quarter of Patusan, with their huts and little plots of ground

under the walls of the stronghold. Within he would be an invincible host in himself "The Fort, Patusan." No date, as you observe. What is a number and a name to a day of days? It is also impossible to say whom he had in his mind when he seized the pen: Stein — myself — the world at large — or was this only the aimless startled cry of a solitary man confronted by his fate? "An awful thing has happened," he wrote before he flung the pen down for the first time; look at the ink blot resembling the head of an arrow under these words. After a while he had tried again, scrawling heavily, as if with a hand of lead, another line. "I must now at once . . ." The pen had spluttered, and that time he gave it up. There's nothing more; he had seen a broad gulf that neither eye nor voice could span. I can understand this. He was overwhelmed by the inexplicable; he was overwhelmed by his own personality — the gift of that destiny which he had done his best to master.

'I send you also an old letter — a very old letter. It was found carefully preserved in his writing-case. It is from his father, and by the date you can see he must have received it a few days before he joined the Patna. Thus it must be the last letter he ever had from home. He had treasured it all these years. The good old parson fancied his sailor son. I've looked in at a sentence here and there. There is nothing in it except just affection. He tells his "dear James" that the last long letter from him was very "honest and entertaining." He would not have him "judge men harshly or hastily." There are four pages of it, easy morality and family news. Tom had "taken orders." Carrie's husband had "money losses." The old chap goes on equably trusting Providence and the established order of the universe, but alive to its small dangers and its small mercies. One can almost see him, grey-haired and serene in the inviolable shelter of his book-lined, faded, and comfortable study, where for forty years he had conscientiously gone over and over again the round of his little thoughts about faith and virtue, about the conduct of life and the only proper manner of dying; where he had written so many sermons, where he sits talking to his boy, over there, on the other side of the earth. But what of the distance? Virtue is one all over the world, and there is only one faith, one conceivable conduct of life, one manner of dying. He hopes his "dear James" will never forget that "who once gives way to temptation, in the very instant hazards his total depravity and everlasting ruin. Therefore resolve fixedly never, through any possible motives, to do anything which you believe to be wrong." There is also some news of a favourite dog; and a pony, "which all you boys used to ride," had gone blind from old age and had to be shot. The old chap invokes Heaven's blessing; the mother and all the girls then at home send their love. . . . No, there is nothing much in that yellow frayed letter fluttering out of his cherishing grasp after so many years. It was never answered, but who can say what converse he may have held with all these placid, colourless forms of men and women peopling that quiet corner of the world as free of danger or strife as a tomb, and breathing equably the air of undisturbed rectitude. It seems amazing that he should belong to it, he to whom so many things "had come." Nothing ever came to them; they would never be taken unawares, and never be called upon to grapple with fate. Here they all are, evoked by the mild gossip of the father, all these brothers and

sisters, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, gazing with clear unconscious eyes, while I seem to see him, returned at last, no longer a mere white speck at the heart of an immense mystery, but of full stature, standing disregarded amongst their untroubled shapes, with a stern and romantic aspect, but always mute, dark — under a cloud.

‘The story of the last events you will find in the few pages enclosed here. You must admit that it is romantic beyond the wildest dreams of his boyhood, and yet there is to my mind a sort of profound and terrifying logic in it, as if it were our imagination alone that could set loose upon us the might of an overwhelming destiny. The imprudence of our thoughts recoils upon our heads; who toys with the sword shall perish by the sword. This astounding adventure, of which the most astounding part is that it is true, comes on as an unavoidable consequence. Something of the sort had to happen. You repeat this to yourself while you marvel that such a thing could happen in the year of grace before last. But it has happened — and there is no disputing its logic.

‘I put it down here for you as though I had been an eyewitness. My information was fragmentary, but I’ve fitted the pieces together, and there is enough of them to make an intelligible picture. I wonder how he would have related it himself. He has confided so much in me that at times it seems as though he must come in presently and tell the story in his own words, in his careless yet feeling voice, with his offhand manner, a little puzzled, a little bothered, a little hurt, but now and then by a word or a phrase giving one of these glimpses of his very own self that were never any good for purposes of orientation. It’s difficult to believe he will never come. I shall never hear his voice again, nor shall I see his smooth tan-and-pink face with a white line on the forehead, and the youthful eyes darkened by excitement to a profound, unfathomable blue.’

Chapter 37

‘It all begins with a remarkable exploit of a man called Brown, who stole with complete success a Spanish schooner out of a small bay near Zamboanga. Till I discovered the fellow my information was incomplete, but most unexpectedly I did come upon him a few hours before he gave up his arrogant ghost. Fortunately he was willing and able to talk between the choking fits of asthma, and his racked body writhed with malicious exultation at the bare thought of Jim. He exulted thus at the idea that he had “paid out the stuck-up beggar after all.” He gloated over his action. I had to bear the sunken glare of his fierce crow-footed eyes if I wanted to know; and so I bore it, reflecting how much certain forms of evil are akin to madness, derived from intense egoism, inflamed by resistance, tearing the soul to pieces, and giving factitious vigour to the body. The story also reveals unsuspected depths of cunning in the wretched Cornelius, whose abject and intense hate acts like a subtle inspiration, pointing out an unerring way towards revenge.

“I could see directly I set my eyes on him what sort of a fool he was,” gasped the dying Brown. “He a man! Hell! He was a hollow sham. As if he couldn’t have said straight out, ‘Hands off my plunder!’ blast him! That would have been like a man! Rot his superior soul! He had me there — but he hadn’t devil enough in him to make an end of me. Not he! A thing like that letting me off as if I wasn’t worth a kick! . . .” Brown struggled desperately for breath. . . . “Fraud. . . . Letting me off. . . . And so I did make an end of him after all. . . .” He choked again. . . . “I expect this thing’ll kill me, but I shall die easy now. You . . . you here . . . I don’t know your name — I would give you a five-pound note if — if I had it — for the news — or my name’s not Brown. . . .” He grinned horribly. . . . “Gentleman Brown.”

‘He said all these things in profound gasps, staring at me with his yellow eyes out of a long, ravaged, brown face; he jerked his left arm; a pepper-and-salt matted beard hung almost into his lap; a dirty ragged blanket covered his legs. I had found him out in Bangkok through that busybody Schomberg, the hotel-keeper, who had, confidentially, directed me where to look. It appears that a sort of loafing, fuddled vagabond — a white man living amongst the natives with a Siamese woman — had considered it a great privilege to give a shelter to the last days of the famous Gentleman Brown. While he was talking to me in the wretched hovel, and, as it were, fighting for every minute of his life, the Siamese woman, with big bare legs and a stupid coarse face, sat in a dark corner chewing betel stolidly. Now and then she would get up for the purpose of shooing a chicken away from the door. The whole hut shook when she walked. An ugly

yellow child, naked and pot-bellied like a little heathen god, stood at the foot of the couch, finger in mouth, lost in a profound and calm contemplation of the dying man.

‘He talked feverishly; but in the middle of a word, perhaps, an invisible hand would take him by the throat, and he would look at me dumbly with an expression of doubt and anguish. He seemed to fear that I would get tired of waiting and go away, leaving him with his tale untold, with his exultation unexpressed. He died during the night, I believe, but by that time I had nothing more to learn.

‘So much as to Brown, for the present.

‘Eight months before this, coming into Samarang, I went as usual to see Stein. On the garden side of the house a Malay on the verandah greeted me shyly, and I remembered that I had seen him in Patusan, in Jim’s house, amongst other Bugis men who used to come in the evening to talk interminably over their war reminiscences and to discuss State affairs. Jim had pointed him out to me once as a respectable petty trader owning a small seagoing native craft, who had showed himself “one of the best at the taking of the stockade.” I was not very surprised to see him, since any Patusan trader venturing as far as Samarang would naturally find his way to Stein’s house. I returned his greeting and passed on. At the door of Stein’s room I came upon another Malay in whom I recognised Tamb’ Itam.

‘I asked him at once what he was doing there; it occurred to me that Jim might have come on a visit. I own I was pleased and excited at the thought. Tamb’ Itam looked as if he did not know what to say. “Is Tuan Jim inside?” I asked impatiently. “No,” he mumbled, hanging his head for a moment, and then with sudden earnestness, “He would not fight. He would not fight,” he repeated twice. As he seemed unable to say anything else, I pushed him aside and went in.

‘Stein, tall and stooping, stood alone in the middle of the room between the rows of butterfly cases. “Ach! is it you, my friend?” he said sadly, peering through his glasses. A drab sack-coat of alpaca hung, unbuttoned, down to his knees. He had a Panama hat on his head, and there were deep furrows on his pale cheeks. “What’s the matter now?” I asked nervously. “There’s Tamb’ Itam there. . . .” “Come and see the girl. Come and see the girl. She is here,” he said, with a half-hearted show of activity. I tried to detain him, but with gentle obstinacy he would take no notice of my eager questions. “She is here, she is here,” he repeated, in great perturbation. “They came here two days ago. An old man like me, a stranger — sehen Sie — cannot do much. . . . Come this way. . . . Young hearts are unforgiving. . . .” I could see he was in utmost distress. . . . “The strength of life in them, the cruel strength of life. . . .” He mumbled, leading me round the house; I followed him, lost in dismal and angry conjectures. At the door of the drawing-room he barred my way. “He loved her very much,” he said interrogatively, and I only nodded, feeling so bitterly disappointed that I would not trust myself to speak. “Very frightful,” he murmured. “She can’t understand me. I am only a strange old man. Perhaps you . . . she knows you. Talk to her. We can’t leave it like this. Tell her to forgive him. It was very frightful.” “No doubt,” I said, exasperated at being in

the dark; "but have you forgiven him?" He looked at me queerly. "You shall hear," he said, and opening the door, absolutely pushed me in.

'You know Stein's big house and the two immense reception-rooms, uninhabited and uninhabitable, clean, full of solitude and of shining things that look as if never beheld by the eye of man? They are cool on the hottest days, and you enter them as you would a scrubbed cave underground. I passed through one, and in the other I saw the girl sitting at the end of a big mahogany table, on which she rested her head, the face hidden in her arms. The waxed floor reflected her dimly as though it had been a sheet of frozen water. The rattan screens were down, and through the strange greenish gloom made by the foliage of the trees outside a strong wind blew in gusts, swaying the long draperies of windows and doorways. Her white figure seemed shaped in snow; the pendent crystals of a great chandelier clicked above her head like glittering icicles. She looked up and watched my approach. I was chilled as if these vast apartments had been the cold abode of despair.

'She recognised me at once, and as soon as I had stopped, looking down at her: "He has left me," she said quietly; "you always leave us — for your own ends." Her face was set. All the heat of life seemed withdrawn within some inaccessible spot in her breast. "It would have been easy to die with him," she went on, and made a slight weary gesture as if giving up the incomprehensible. "He would not! It was like a blindness — and yet it was I who was speaking to him; it was I who stood before his eyes; it was at me that he looked all the time! Ah! you are hard, treacherous, without truth, without compassion. What makes you so wicked? Or is it that you are all mad?"

'I took her hand; it did not respond, and when I dropped it, it hung down to the floor. That indifference, more awful than tears, cries, and reproaches, seemed to defy time and consolation. You felt that nothing you could say would reach the seat of the still and benumbing pain.

'Stein had said, "You shall hear." I did hear. I heard it all, listening with amazement, with awe, to the tones of her inflexible weariness. She could not grasp the real sense of what she was telling me, and her resentment filled me with pity for her — for him too. I stood rooted to the spot after she had finished. Leaning on her arm, she stared with hard eyes, and the wind passed in gusts, the crystals kept on clicking in the greenish gloom. She went on whispering to herself: "And yet he was looking at me! He could see my face, hear my voice, hear my grief! When I used to sit at his feet, with my cheek against his knee and his hand on my head, the curse of cruelty and madness was already within him, waiting for the day. The day came! . . . and before the sun had set he could not see me any more — he was made blind and deaf and without pity, as you all are. He shall have no tears from me. Never, never. Not one tear. I will not! He went away from me as if I had been worse than death. He fled as if driven by some accursed thing he had heard or seen in his sleep. . . ."

'Her steady eyes seemed to strain after the shape of a man torn out of her arms by the strength of a dream. She made no sign to my silent bow. I was glad to escape.

‘I saw her once again, the same afternoon. On leaving her I had gone in search of Stein, whom I could not find indoors; and I wandered out, pursued by distressful thoughts, into the gardens, those famous gardens of Stein, in which you can find every plant and tree of tropical lowlands. I followed the course of the canalised stream, and sat for a long time on a shaded bench near the ornamental pond, where some waterfowl with clipped wings were diving and splashing noisily. The branches of casuarina trees behind me swayed lightly, incessantly, reminding me of the souging of fir trees at home.

‘This mournful and restless sound was a fit accompaniment to my meditations. She had said he had been driven away from her by a dream, — and there was no answer one could make her — there seemed to be no forgiveness for such a transgression. And yet is not mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the dark paths of excessive cruelty and of excessive devotion? And what is the pursuit of truth, after all?

‘When I rose to get back to the house I caught sight of Stein’s drab coat through a gap in the foliage, and very soon at a turn of the path I came upon him walking with the girl. Her little hand rested on his forearm, and under the broad, flat rim of his Panama hat he bent over her, grey-haired, paternal, with compassionate and chivalrous deference. I stood aside, but they stopped, facing me. His gaze was bent on the ground at his feet; the girl, erect and slight on his arm, stared sombrely beyond my shoulder with black, clear, motionless eyes. “Schrecklich,” he murmured. “Terrible! Terrible! What can one do?” He seemed to be appealing to me, but her youth, the length of the days suspended over her head, appealed to me more; and suddenly, even as I realised that nothing could be said, I found myself pleading his cause for her sake. “You must forgive him,” I concluded, and my own voice seemed to me muffled, lost in an irresponsive deaf immensity. “We all want to be forgiven,” I added after a while.

“What have I done?” she asked with her lips only.

“You always mistrusted him,” I said.

“He was like the others,” she pronounced slowly.

“Not like the others,” I protested, but she continued evenly, without any feeling —

“He was false.” And suddenly Stein broke in. “No! no! no! My poor child! . . .” He patted her hand lying passively on his sleeve. “No! no! Not false! True! True! True!” He tried to look into her stony face. “You don’t understand. Ach! Why you do not understand? . . . Terrible,” he said to me. “Some day she shall understand.”

“Will you explain?” I asked, looking hard at him. They moved on.

‘I watched them. Her gown trailed on the path, her black hair fell loose. She walked upright and light by the side of the tall man, whose long shapeless coat hung in perpendicular folds from the stooping shoulders, whose feet moved slowly. They disappeared beyond that spinney (you may remember) where sixteen different kinds of bamboo grow together, all distinguishable to the learned eye. For my part, I was fascinated by the exquisite grace and beauty of that fluted grove, crowned with pointed leaves and feathery heads, the lightness, the vigour, the charm as distinct as a voice of that

unperplexed luxuriating life. I remember staying to look at it for a long time, as one would linger within reach of a consoling whisper. The sky was pearly grey. It was one of those overcast days so rare in the tropics, in which memories crowd upon one, memories of other shores, of other faces.

‘I drove back to town the same afternoon, taking with me Tamb’ Itam and the other Malay, in whose seagoing craft they had escaped in the bewilderment, fear, and gloom of the disaster. The shock of it seemed to have changed their natures. It had turned her passion into stone, and it made the surly taciturn Tamb’ Itam almost loquacious. His surliness, too, was subdued into puzzled humility, as though he had seen the failure of a potent charm in a supreme moment. The Bugis trader, a shy hesitating man, was very clear in the little he had to say. Both were evidently over-awed by a sense of deep inexpressible wonder, by the touch of an inscrutable mystery.’

There with Marlow’s signature the letter proper ended. The privileged reader screwed up his lamp, and solitary above the billowy roofs of the town, like a lighthouse-keeper above the sea, he turned to the pages of the story.

Chapter 38

‘It all begins, as I’ve told you, with the man called Brown,’ ran the opening sentence of Marlow’s narrative. ‘You who have knocked about the Western Pacific must have heard of him. He was the show ruffian on the Australian coast — not that he was often to be seen there, but because he was always trotted out in the stories of lawless life a visitor from home is treated to; and the mildest of these stories which were told about him from Cape York to Eden Bay was more than enough to hang a man if told in the right place. They never failed to let you know, too, that he was supposed to be the son of a baronet. Be it as it may, it is certain he had deserted from a home ship in the early gold-digging days, and in a few years became talked about as the terror of this or that group of islands in Polynesia. He would kidnap natives, he would strip some lonely white trader to the very pyjamas he stood in, and after he had robbed the poor devil, he would as likely as not invite him to fight a duel with shot-guns on the beach — which would have been fair enough as these things go, if the other man hadn’t been by that time already half-dead with fright. Brown was a latter-day buccaneer, sorry enough, like his more celebrated prototypes; but what distinguished him from his contemporary brother ruffians, like Bully Hayes or the mellifluous Pease, or that perfumed, Dundreary-whiskered, dandified scoundrel known as Dirty Dick, was the arrogant temper of his misdeeds and a vehement scorn for mankind at large and for his victims in particular. The others were merely vulgar and greedy brutes, but he seemed moved by some complex intention. He would rob a man as if only to demonstrate his poor opinion of the creature, and he would bring to the shooting or maiming of some quiet, unoffending stranger a savage and vengeful earnestness fit to terrify the most reckless of desperadoes. In the days of his greatest glory he owned an armed barque, manned by a mixed crew of Kanakas and runaway whalers, and boasted, I don’t know with what truth, of being financed on the quiet by a most respectable firm of copra merchants. Later on he ran off — it was reported — with the wife of a missionary, a very young girl from Clapham way, who had married the mild, flat-footed fellow in a moment of enthusiasm, and, suddenly transplanted to Melanesia, lost her bearings somehow. It was a dark story. She was ill at the time he carried her off, and died on board his ship. It is said — as the most wonderful part of the tale — that over her body he gave way to an outburst of sombre and violent grief. His luck left him, too, very soon after. He lost his ship on some rocks off Malaita, and disappeared for a time as though he had gone down with her. He is heard of next at Nuka-Hiva, where he bought an old French schooner out of Government service. What creditable enterprise he might have had in view when he made that purchase I can’t say, but it

is evident that what with High Commissioners, consuls, men-of-war, and international control, the South Seas were getting too hot to hold gentlemen of his kidney. Clearly he must have shifted the scene of his operations farther west, because a year later he plays an incredibly audacious, but not a very profitable part, in a serio-comic business in Manila Bay, in which a peculating governor and an absconding treasurer are the principal figures; thereafter he seems to have hung around the Philippines in his rotten schooner battling with an adverse fortune, till at last, running his appointed course, he sails into Jim's history, a blind accomplice of the Dark Powers.

'His tale goes that when a Spanish patrol cutter captured him he was simply trying to run a few guns for the insurgents. If so, then I can't understand what he was doing off the south coast of Mindanao. My belief, however, is that he was blackmailing the native villages along the coast. The principal thing is that the cutter, throwing a guard on board, made him sail in company towards Zamboanga. On the way, for some reason or other, both vessels had to call at one of these new Spanish settlements — which never came to anything in the end — where there was not only a civil official in charge on shore, but a good stout coasting schooner lying at anchor in the little bay; and this craft, in every way much better than his own, Brown made up his mind to steal.

'He was down on his luck — as he told me himself. The world he had bullied for twenty years with fierce, aggressive disdain, had yielded him nothing in the way of material advantage except a small bag of silver dollars, which was concealed in his cabin so that "the devil himself couldn't smell it out." And that was all — absolutely all. He was tired of his life, and not afraid of death. But this man, who would stake his existence on a whim with a bitter and jeering recklessness, stood in mortal fear of imprisonment. He had an unreasoning cold-sweat, nerve-shaking, blood-to-water-turning sort of horror at the bare possibility of being locked up — the sort of terror a superstitious man would feel at the thought of being embraced by a spectre. Therefore the civil official who came on board to make a preliminary investigation into the capture, investigated arduously all day long, and only went ashore after dark, muffled up in a cloak, and taking great care not to let Brown's little all clink in its bag. Afterwards, being a man of his word, he contrived (the very next evening, I believe) to send off the Government cutter on some urgent bit of special service. As her commander could not spare a prize crew, he contented himself by taking away before he left all the sails of Brown's schooner to the very last rag, and took good care to tow his two boats on to the beach a couple of miles off.

'But in Brown's crew there was a Solomon Islander, kidnapped in his youth and devoted to Brown, who was the best man of the whole gang. That fellow swam off to the coaster — five hundred yards or so — with the end of a warp made up of all the running gear unrove for the purpose. The water was smooth, and the bay dark, "like the inside of a cow," as Brown described it. The Solomon Islander clambered over the bulwarks with the end of the rope in his teeth. The crew of the coaster — all Tagals — were ashore having a jollification in the native village. The two shipkeepers left on board woke up suddenly and saw the devil. It had glittering eyes and leaped quick

as lightning about the deck. They fell on their knees, paralysed with fear, crossing themselves and mumbling prayers. With a long knife he found in the caboose the Solomon Islander, without interrupting their orisons, stabbed first one, then the other; with the same knife he set to sawing patiently at the coir cable till suddenly it parted under the blade with a splash. Then in the silence of the bay he let out a cautious shout, and Brown's gang, who meantime had been peering and straining their hopeful ears in the darkness, began to pull gently at their end of the warp. In less than five minutes the two schooners came together with a slight shock and a creak of spars.

'Brown's crowd transferred themselves without losing an instant, taking with them their firearms and a large supply of ammunition. They were sixteen in all: two runaway blue-jackets, a lanky deserter from a Yankee man-of-war, a couple of simple, blond Scandinavians, a mulatto of sorts, one bland Chinaman who cooked — and the rest of the nondescript spawn of the South Seas. None of them cared; Brown bent them to his will, and Brown, indifferent to gallows, was running away from the spectre of a Spanish prison. He didn't give them the time to trans-ship enough provisions; the weather was calm, the air was charged with dew, and when they cast off the ropes and set sail to a faint off-shore draught there was no flutter in the damp canvas; their old schooner seemed to detach itself gently from the stolen craft and slip away silently, together with the black mass of the coast, into the night.

'They got clear away. Brown related to me in detail their passage down the Straits of Macassar. It is a harrowing and desperate story. They were short of food and water; they boarded several native craft and got a little from each. With a stolen ship Brown did not dare to put into any port, of course. He had no money to buy anything, no papers to show, and no lie plausible enough to get him out again. An Arab barque, under the Dutch flag, surprised one night at anchor off Poulo Laut, yielded a little dirty rice, a bunch of bananas, and a cask of water; three days of squally, misty weather from the north-east shot the schooner across the Java Sea. The yellow muddy waves drenched that collection of hungry ruffians. They sighted mail-boats moving on their appointed routes; passed well-found home ships with rusty iron sides anchored in the shallow sea waiting for a change of weather or the turn of the tide; an English gunboat, white and trim, with two slim masts, crossed their bows one day in the distance; and on another occasion a Dutch corvette, black and heavily sparred, loomed up on their quarter, steaming dead slow in the mist. They slipped through unseen or disregarded, a wan, sallow-faced band of utter outcasts, enraged with hunger and hunted by fear. Brown's idea was to make for Madagascar, where he expected, on grounds not altogether illusory, to sell the schooner in Tamatave, and no questions asked, or perhaps obtain some more or less forged papers for her. Yet before he could face the long passage across the Indian Ocean food was wanted — water too.

'Perhaps he had heard of Patusan — or perhaps he just only happened to see the name written in small letters on the chart — probably that of a largish village up a river in a native state, perfectly defenceless, far from the beaten tracks of the sea and from the ends of submarine cables. He had done that kind of thing before — in the

way of business; and this now was an absolute necessity, a question of life and death — or rather of liberty. Of liberty! He was sure to get provisions — bullocks — rice — sweet-potatoes. The sorry gang licked their chops. A cargo of produce for the schooner perhaps could be extorted — and, who knows? — some real ringing coined money! Some of these chiefs and village headmen can be made to part freely. He told me he would have roasted their toes rather than be baulked. I believe him. His men believed him too. They didn't cheer aloud, being a dumb pack, but made ready wolfishly.

'Luck served him as to weather. A few days of calm would have brought unmentionable horrors on board that schooner, but with the help of land and sea breezes, in less than a week after clearing the Sunda Straits, he anchored off the Batu Kring mouth within a pistol-shot of the fishing village.

'Fourteen of them packed into the schooner's long-boat (which was big, having been used for cargo-work) and started up the river, while two remained in charge of the schooner with food enough to keep starvation off for ten days. The tide and wind helped, and early one afternoon the big white boat under a ragged sail shouldered its way before the sea breeze into Patusan Reach, manned by fourteen assorted scarecrows glaring hungrily ahead, and fingering the breech-blocks of cheap rifles. Brown calculated upon the terrifying surprise of his appearance. They sailed in with the last of the flood; the Rajah's stockade gave no sign; the first houses on both sides of the stream seemed deserted. A few canoes were seen up the reach in full flight. Brown was astonished at the size of the place. A profound silence reigned. The wind dropped between the houses; two oars were got out and the boat held on up-stream, the idea being to effect a lodgment in the centre of the town before the inhabitants could think of resistance.

'It seems, however, that the headman of the fishing village at Batu Kring had managed to send off a timely warning. When the long-boat came abreast of the mosque (which Doramin had built: a structure with gables and roof finials of carved coral) the open space before it was full of people. A shout went up, and was followed by a clash of gongs all up the river. From a point above two little brass 6-pounders were discharged, and the round-shot came skipping down the empty reach, spurting glittering jets of water in the sunshine. In front of the mosque a shouting lot of men began firing in volleys that whipped athwart the current of the river; an irregular, rolling fusillade was opened on the boat from both banks, and Brown's men replied with a wild, rapid fire. The oars had been got in.

'The turn of the tide at high water comes on very quickly in that river, and the boat in mid-stream, nearly hidden in smoke, began to drift back stern foremost. Along both shores the smoke thickened also, lying below the roofs in a level streak as you may see a long cloud cutting the slope of a mountain. A tumult of war-cries, the vibrating clang of gongs, the deep snoring of drums, yells of rage, crashes of volley-firing, made an awful din, in which Brown sat confounded but steady at the tiller, working himself into a fury of hate and rage against those people who dared to defend themselves. Two of his men had been wounded, and he saw his retreat cut off below the town by some boats that had put off from Tunku Allang's stockade. There were six of them, full of

men. While he was thus beset he perceived the entrance of the narrow creek (the same which Jim had jumped at low water). It was then brim full. Steering the long-boat in, they landed, and, to make a long story short, they established themselves on a little knoll about 900 yards from the stockade, which, in fact, they commanded from that position. The slopes of the knoll were bare, but there were a few trees on the summit. They went to work cutting these down for a breastwork, and were fairly intrenched before dark; meantime the Rajah's boats remained in the river with curious neutrality. When the sun set the glare of many brushwood blazes lighted on the river-front, and between the double line of houses on the land side threw into black relief the roofs, the groups of slender palms, the heavy clumps of fruit trees. Brown ordered the grass round his position to be fired; a low ring of thin flames under the slow ascending smoke wriggled rapidly down the slopes of the knoll; here and there a dry bush caught with a tall, vicious roar. The conflagration made a clear zone of fire for the rifles of the small party, and expired smouldering on the edge of the forests and along the muddy bank of the creek. A strip of jungle luxuriating in a damp hollow between the knoll and the Rajah's stockade stopped it on that side with a great crackling and detonations of bursting bamboo stems. The sky was sombre, velvety, and swarming with stars. The blackened ground smoked quietly with low creeping wisps, till a little breeze came on and blew everything away. Brown expected an attack to be delivered as soon as the tide had flowed enough again to enable the war-boats which had cut off his retreat to enter the creek. At any rate he was sure there would be an attempt to carry off his long-boat, which lay below the hill, a dark high lump on the feeble sheen of a wet mud-flat. But no move of any sort was made by the boats in the river. Over the stockade and the Rajah's buildings Brown saw their lights on the water. They seemed to be anchored across the stream. Other lights afloat were moving in the reach, crossing and recrossing from side to side. There were also lights twinkling motionless upon the long walls of houses up the reach, as far as the bend, and more still beyond, others isolated inland. The loom of the big fires disclosed buildings, roofs, black piles as far as he could see. It was an immense place. The fourteen desperate invaders lying flat behind the felled trees raised their chins to look over at the stir of that town that seemed to extend up-river for miles and swarm with thousands of angry men. They did not speak to each other. Now and then they would hear a loud yell, or a single shot rang out, fired very far somewhere. But round their position everything was still, dark, silent. They seemed to be forgotten, as if the excitement keeping awake all the population had nothing to do with them, as if they had been dead already.'

Chapter 39

‘All the events of that night have a great importance, since they brought about a situation which remained unchanged till Jim’s return. Jim had been away in the interior for more than a week, and it was Dain Waris who had directed the first repulse. That brave and intelligent youth (“who knew how to fight after the manner of white men”) wished to settle the business off-hand, but his people were too much for him. He had not Jim’s racial prestige and the reputation of invincible, supernatural power. He was not the visible, tangible incarnation of unfailing truth and of unfailing victory. Beloved, trusted, and admired as he was, he was still one of them, while Jim was one of us. Moreover, the white man, a tower of strength in himself, was invulnerable, while Dain Waris could be killed. Those unexpressed thoughts guided the opinions of the chief men of the town, who elected to assemble in Jim’s fort for deliberation upon the emergency, as if expecting to find wisdom and courage in the dwelling of the absent white man. The shooting of Brown’s ruffians was so far good, or lucky, that there had been half-a-dozen casualties amongst the defenders. The wounded were lying on the verandah tended by their women-folk. The women and children from the lower part of the town had been sent into the fort at the first alarm. There Jewel was in command, very efficient and high-spirited, obeyed by Jim’s “own people,” who, quitting in a body their little settlement under the stockade, had gone in to form the garrison. The refugees crowded round her; and through the whole affair, to the very disastrous last, she showed an extraordinary martial ardour. It was to her that Dain Waris had gone at once at the first intelligence of danger, for you must know that Jim was the only one in Patusan who possessed a store of gunpowder. Stein, with whom he had kept up intimate relations by letters, had obtained from the Dutch Government a special authorisation to export five hundred kegs of it to Patusan. The powder-magazine was a small hut of rough logs covered entirely with earth, and in Jim’s absence the girl had the key. In the council, held at eleven o’clock in the evening in Jim’s dining-room, she backed up Waris’s advice for immediate and vigorous action. I am told that she stood up by the side of Jim’s empty chair at the head of the long table and made a warlike impassioned speech, which for the moment extorted murmurs of approbation from the assembled headmen. Old Doramin, who had not showed himself outside his own gate for more than a year, had been brought across with great difficulty. He was, of course, the chief man there. The temper of the council was very unforgiving, and the old man’s word would have been decisive; but it is my opinion that, well aware of his son’s fiery courage, he dared not pronounce the word. More dilatory counsels prevailed. A certain Haji Saman pointed out at great length that “these tyrannical and

ferocious men had delivered themselves to a certain death in any case. They would stand fast on their hill and starve, or they would try to regain their boat and be shot from ambushes across the creek, or they would break and fly into the forest and perish singly there.” He argued that by the use of proper stratagems these evil-minded strangers could be destroyed without the risk of a battle, and his words had a great weight, especially with the Patusan men proper. What unsettled the minds of the townsfolk was the failure of the Rajah’s boats to act at the decisive moment. It was the diplomatic Kassim who represented the Rajah at the council. He spoke very little, listened smilingly, very friendly and impenetrable. During the sitting messengers kept arriving every few minutes almost, with reports of the invaders’ proceedings. Wild and exaggerated rumours were flying: there was a large ship at the mouth of the river with big guns and many more men — some white, others with black skins and of bloodthirsty appearance. They were coming with many more boats to exterminate every living thing. A sense of near, incomprehensible danger affected the common people. At one moment there was a panic in the courtyard amongst the women; shrieking; a rush; children crying — Haji Sunan went out to quiet them. Then a fort sentry fired at something moving on the river, and nearly killed a villager bringing in his women-folk in a canoe together with the best of his domestic utensils and a dozen fowls. This caused more confusion. Meantime the palaver inside Jim’s house went on in the presence of the girl. Doramin sat fierce-faced, heavy, looking at the speakers in turn, and breathing slow like a bull. He didn’t speak till the last, after Kassim had declared that the Rajah’s boats would be called in because the men were required to defend his master’s stockade. Dain Waris in his father’s presence would offer no opinion, though the girl entreated him in Jim’s name to speak out. She offered him Jim’s own men in her anxiety to have these intruders driven out at once. He only shook his head, after a glance or two at Doramin. Finally, when the council broke up it had been decided that the houses nearest the creek should be strongly occupied to obtain the command of the enemy’s boat. The boat itself was not to be interfered with openly, so that the robbers on the hill should be tempted to embark, when a well-directed fire would kill most of them, no doubt. To cut off the escape of those who might survive, and to prevent more of them coming up, Dain Waris was ordered by Doramin to take an armed party of Bugis down the river to a certain spot ten miles below Patusan, and there form a camp on the shore and blockade the stream with the canoes. I don’t believe for a moment that Doramin feared the arrival of fresh forces. My opinion is that his conduct was guided solely by his wish to keep his son out of harm’s way. To prevent a rush being made into the town the construction of a stockade was to be commenced at daylight at the end of the street on the left bank. The old nakhoda declared his intention to command there himself. A distribution of powder, bullets, and percussion-caps was made immediately under the girl’s supervision. Several messengers were to be dispatched in different directions after Jim, whose exact whereabouts were unknown. These men started at dawn, but before that time Kassim had managed to open communications with the besieged Brown.

‘That accomplished diplomatist and confidant of the Rajah, on leaving the fort to go back to his master, took into his boat Cornelius, whom he found slinking mutely amongst the people in the courtyard. Kassim had a little plan of his own and wanted him for an interpreter. Thus it came about that towards morning Brown, reflecting upon the desperate nature of his position, heard from the marshy overgrown hollow an amicable, quavering, strained voice crying — in English — for permission to come up, under a promise of personal safety and on a very important errand. He was overjoyed. If he was spoken to he was no longer a hunted wild beast. These friendly sounds took off at once the awful stress of vigilant watchfulness as of so many blind men not knowing whence the deathblow might come. He pretended a great reluctance. The voice declared itself “a white man — a poor, ruined, old man who had been living here for years.” A mist, wet and chilly, lay on the slopes of the hill, and after some more shouting from one to the other, Brown called out, “Come on, then, but alone, mind!” As a matter of fact — he told me, writhing with rage at the recollection of his helplessness — it made no difference. They couldn’t see more than a few yards before them, and no treachery could make their position worse. By-and-by Cornelius, in his week-day attire of a ragged dirty shirt and pants, barefooted, with a broken-rimmed pith hat on his head, was made out vaguely, sidling up to the defences, hesitating, stopping to listen in a peering posture. “Come along! You are safe,” yelled Brown, while his men stared. All their hopes of life became suddenly centered in that dilapidated, mean newcomer, who in profound silence clambered clumsily over a felled tree-trunk, and shivering, with his sour, mistrustful face, looked about at the knot of bearded, anxious, sleepless desperadoes.

‘Half an hour’s confidential talk with Cornelius opened Brown’s eyes as to the home affairs of Patusan. He was on the alert at once. There were possibilities, immense possibilities; but before he would talk over Cornelius’s proposals he demanded that some food should be sent up as a guarantee of good faith. Cornelius went off, creeping sluggishly down the hill on the side of the Rajah’s palace, and after some delay a few of Tunku Allang’s men came up, bringing a scanty supply of rice, chillies, and dried fish. This was immeasurably better than nothing. Later on Cornelius returned accompanying Kassim, who stepped out with an air of perfect good-humoured trustfulness, in sandals, and muffled up from neck to ankles in dark-blue sheeting. He shook hands with Brown discreetly, and the three drew aside for a conference. Brown’s men, recovering their confidence, were slapping each other on the back, and cast knowing glances at their captain while they busied themselves with preparations for cooking.

‘Kassim disliked Doramin and his Bugis very much, but he hated the new order of things still more. It had occurred to him that these whites, together with the Rajah’s followers, could attack and defeat the Bugis before Jim’s return. Then, he reasoned, general defection of the townsfolk was sure to follow, and the reign of the white man who protected poor people would be over. Afterwards the new allies could be dealt with. They would have no friends. The fellow was perfectly able to perceive the difference of character, and had seen enough of white men to know that these newcomers were

outcasts, men without country. Brown preserved a stern and inscrutable demeanour. When he first heard Cornelius's voice demanding admittance, it brought merely the hope of a loophole for escape. In less than an hour other thoughts were seething in his head. Urged by an extreme necessity, he had come there to steal food, a few tons of rubber or gum may be, perhaps a handful of dollars, and had found himself enmeshed by deadly dangers. Now in consequence of these overtures from Kassim he began to think of stealing the whole country. Some confounded fellow had apparently accomplished something of the kind — single-handed at that. Couldn't have done it very well though. Perhaps they could work together — squeeze everything dry and then go out quietly. In the course of his negotiations with Kassim he became aware that he was supposed to have a big ship with plenty of men outside. Kassim begged him earnestly to have this big ship with his many guns and men brought up the river without delay for the Rajah's service. Brown professed himself willing, and on this basis the negotiation was carried on with mutual distrust. Three times in the course of the morning the courteous and active Kassim went down to consult the Rajah and came up busily with his long stride. Brown, while bargaining, had a sort of grim enjoyment in thinking of his wretched schooner, with nothing but a heap of dirt in her hold, that stood for an armed ship, and a Chinaman and a lame ex-beachcomber of Levuka on board, who represented all his many men. In the afternoon he obtained further doles of food, a promise of some money, and a supply of mats for his men to make shelters for themselves. They lay down and snored, protected from the burning sunshine; but Brown, sitting fully exposed on one of the felled trees, feasted his eyes upon the view of the town and the river. There was much loot there. Cornelius, who had made himself at home in the camp, talked at his elbow, pointing out the localities, imparting advice, giving his own version of Jim's character, and commenting in his own fashion upon the events of the last three years. Brown, who, apparently indifferent and gazing away, listened with attention to every word, could not make out clearly what sort of man this Jim could be. "What's his name? Jim! Jim! That's not enough for a man's name." "They call him," said Cornelius scornfully, "Tuan Jim here. As you may say Lord Jim." "What is he? Where does he come from?" inquired Brown. "What sort of man is he? Is he an Englishman?" "Yes, yes, he's an Englishman. I am an Englishman too. From Malacca. He is a fool. All you have to do is to kill him and then you are king here. Everything belongs to him," explained Cornelius. "It strikes me he may be made to share with somebody before very long," commented Brown half aloud. "No, no. The proper way is to kill him the first chance you get, and then you can do what you like," Cornelius would insist earnestly. "I have lived for many years here, and I am giving you a friend's advice."

'In such converse and in gloating over the view of Patusan, which he had determined in his mind should become his prey, Brown whiled away most of the afternoon, his men, meantime, resting. On that day Dain Waris's fleet of canoes stole one by one under the shore farthest from the creek, and went down to close the river against his retreat. Of this Brown was not aware, and Kassim, who came up the knoll an hour before

sunset, took good care not to enlighten him. He wanted the white man's ship to come up the river, and this news, he feared, would be discouraging. He was very pressing with Brown to send the "order," offering at the same time a trusty messenger, who for greater secrecy (as he explained) would make his way by land to the mouth of the river and deliver the "order" on board. After some reflection Brown judged it expedient to tear a page out of his pocket-book, on which he simply wrote, "We are getting on. Big job. Detain the man." The stolid youth selected by Kassim for that service performed it faithfully, and was rewarded by being suddenly tipped, head first, into the schooner's empty hold by the ex-beachcomber and the Chinaman, who thereupon hastened to put on the hatches. What became of him afterwards Brown did not say.'

Chapter 40

‘Brown’s object was to gain time by fooling with Kassim’s diplomacy. For doing a real stroke of business he could not help thinking the white man was the person to work with. He could not imagine such a chap (who must be confoundedly clever after all to get hold of the natives like that) refusing a help that would do away with the necessity for slow, cautious, risky cheating, that imposed itself as the only possible line of conduct for a single-handed man. He, Brown, would offer him the power. No man could hesitate. Everything was in coming to a clear understanding. Of course they would share. The idea of there being a fort — all ready to his hand — a real fort, with artillery (he knew this from Cornelius), excited him. Let him only once get in and . . . He would impose modest conditions. Not too low, though. The man was no fool, it seemed. They would work like brothers till . . . till the time came for a quarrel and a shot that would settle all accounts. With grim impatience of plunder he wished himself to be talking with the man now. The land already seemed to be his to tear to pieces, squeeze, and throw away. Meantime Kassim had to be fooled for the sake of food first — and for a second string. But the principal thing was to get something to eat from day to day. Besides, he was not averse to begin fighting on that Rajah’s account, and teach a lesson to those people who had received him with shots. The lust of battle was upon him.

‘I am sorry that I can’t give you this part of the story, which of course I have mainly from Brown, in Brown’s own words. There was in the broken, violent speech of that man, unveiling before me his thoughts with the very hand of Death upon his throat, an undisguised ruthlessness of purpose, a strange vengeful attitude towards his own past, and a blind belief in the righteousness of his will against all mankind, something of that feeling which could induce the leader of a horde of wandering cut-throats to call himself proudly the Scourge of God. No doubt the natural senseless ferocity which is the basis of such a character was exasperated by failure, ill-luck, and the recent privations, as well as by the desperate position in which he found himself; but what was most remarkable of all was this, that while he planned treacherous alliances, had already settled in his own mind the fate of the white man, and intrigued in an overbearing, offhand manner with Kassim, one could perceive that what he had really desired, almost in spite of himself, was to play havoc with that jungle town which had defied him, to see it strewn over with corpses and enveloped in flames. Listening to his pitiless, panting voice, I could imagine how he must have looked at it from the hillock, peopling it with images of murder and rapine. The part nearest to the creek wore an abandoned aspect, though as a matter of fact every house concealed a few

armed men on the alert. Suddenly beyond the stretch of waste ground, interspersed with small patches of low dense bush, excavations, heaps of rubbish, with trodden paths between, a man, solitary and looking very small, strolled out into the deserted opening of the street between the shut-up, dark, lifeless buildings at the end. Perhaps one of the inhabitants, who had fled to the other bank of the river, coming back for some object of domestic use. Evidently he supposed himself quite safe at that distance from the hill on the other side of the creek. A light stockade, set up hastily, was just round the turn of the street, full of his friends. He moved leisurely. Brown saw him, and instantly called to his side the Yankee deserter, who acted as a sort of second in command. This lanky, loose-jointed fellow came forward, wooden-faced, trailing his rifle lazily. When he understood what was wanted from him a homicidal and conceited smile uncovered his teeth, making two deep folds down his sallow, leathery cheeks. He prided himself on being a dead shot. He dropped on one knee, and taking aim from a steady rest through the unlopped branches of a felled tree, fired, and at once stood up to look. The man, far away, turned his head to the report, made another step forward, seemed to hesitate, and abruptly got down on his hands and knees. In the silence that fell upon the sharp crack of the rifle, the dead shot, keeping his eyes fixed upon the quarry, guessed that "this there coon's health would never be a source of anxiety to his friends any more." The man's limbs were seen to move rapidly under his body in an endeavour to run on all-fours. In that empty space arose a multitudinous shout of dismay and surprise. The man sank flat, face down, and moved no more. "That showed them what we could do," said Brown to me. "Struck the fear of sudden death into them. That was what we wanted. They were two hundred to one, and this gave them something to think over for the night. Not one of them had an idea of such a long shot before. That beggar belonging to the Rajah scooted down-hill with his eyes hanging out of his head."

'As he was telling me this he tried with a shaking hand to wipe the thin foam on his blue lips. "Two hundred to one. Two hundred to one . . . strike terror, . . . terror, terror, I tell you. . . ." His own eyes were starting out of their sockets. He fell back, clawing the air with skinny fingers, sat up again, bowed and hairy, glared at me sideways like some man-beast of folk-lore, with open mouth in his miserable and awful agony before he got his speech back after that fit. There are sights one never forgets.

'Furthermore, to draw the enemy's fire and locate such parties as might have been hiding in the bushes along the creek, Brown ordered the Solomon Islander to go down to the boat and bring an oar, as you send a spaniel after a stick into the water. This failed, and the fellow came back without a single shot having been fired at him from anywhere. "There's nobody," opined some of the men. It is "onnatural," remarked the Yankee. Kassim had gone, by that time, very much impressed, pleased too, and also uneasy. Pursuing his tortuous policy, he had dispatched a message to Dain Waris warning him to look out for the white men's ship, which, he had had information, was about to come up the river. He minimised its strength and exhorted him to oppose its passage. This double-dealing answered his purpose, which was to keep the Bugis

forces divided and to weaken them by fighting. On the other hand, he had in the course of that day sent word to the assembled Bugis chiefs in town, assuring them that he was trying to induce the invaders to retire; his messages to the fort asked earnestly for powder for the Rajah's men. It was a long time since Tunku Allang had had ammunition for the score or so of old muskets rusting in their arm-racks in the audience-hall. The open intercourse between the hill and the palace unsettled all the minds. It was already time for men to take sides, it began to be said. There would soon be much bloodshed, and thereafter great trouble for many people. The social fabric of orderly, peaceful life, when every man was sure of to-morrow, the edifice raised by Jim's hands, seemed on that evening ready to collapse into a ruin reeking with blood. The poorer folk were already taking to the bush or flying up the river. A good many of the upper class judged it necessary to go and pay their court to the Rajah. The Rajah's youths jostled them rudely. Old Tunku Allang, almost out of his mind with fear and indecision, either kept a sullen silence or abused them violently for daring to come with empty hands: they departed very much frightened; only old Doramin kept his countrymen together and pursued his tactics inflexibly. Enthroned in a big chair behind the improvised stockade, he issued his orders in a deep veiled rumble, unmoved, like a deaf man, in the flying rumours.

'Dusk fell, hiding first the body of the dead man, which had been left lying with arms outstretched as if nailed to the ground, and then the revolving sphere of the night rolled smoothly over Patusan and came to a rest, showering the glitter of countless worlds upon the earth. Again, in the exposed part of the town big fires blazed along the only street, revealing from distance to distance upon their glares the falling straight lines of roofs, the fragments of wattled walls jumbled in confusion, here and there a whole hut elevated in the glow upon the vertical black stripes of a group of high piles and all this line of dwellings, revealed in patches by the swaying flames, seemed to flicker tortuously away up-river into the gloom at the heart of the land. A great silence, in which the looms of successive fires played without noise, extended into the darkness at the foot of the hill; but the other bank of the river, all dark save for a solitary bonfire at the river-front before the fort, sent out into the air an increasing tremor that might have been the stamping of a multitude of feet, the hum of many voices, or the fall of an immensely distant waterfall. It was then, Brown confessed to me, while, turning his back on his men, he sat looking at it all, that notwithstanding his disdain, his ruthless faith in himself, a feeling came over him that at last he had run his head against a stone wall. Had his boat been afloat at the time, he believed he would have tried to steal away, taking his chances of a long chase down the river and of starvation at sea. It is very doubtful whether he would have succeeded in getting away. However, he didn't try this. For another moment he had a passing thought of trying to rush the town, but he perceived very well that in the end he would find himself in the lighted street, where they would be shot down like dogs from the houses. They were two hundred to one — he thought, while his men, huddling round two heaps of

smouldering embers, munched the last of the bananas and roasted the few yams they owed to Kassim's diplomacy. Cornelius sat amongst them dozing sulkily.

'Then one of the whites remembered that some tobacco had been left in the boat, and, encouraged by the impunity of the Solomon Islander, said he would go to fetch it. At this all the others shook off their despondency. Brown applied to, said, "Go, and be d — d to you," scornfully. He didn't think there was any danger in going to the creek in the dark. The man threw a leg over the tree-trunk and disappeared. A moment later he was heard clambering into the boat and then clambering out. "I've got it," he cried. A flash and a report at the very foot of the hill followed. "I am hit," yelled the man. "Look out, look out — I am hit," and instantly all the rifles went off. The hill squirted fire and noise into the night like a little volcano, and when Brown and the Yankee with curses and cuffs stopped the panic-stricken firing, a profound, weary groan floated up from the creek, succeeded by a plaint whose heartrending sadness was like some poison turning the blood cold in the veins. Then a strong voice pronounced several distinct incomprehensible words somewhere beyond the creek. "Let no one fire," shouted Brown. "What does it mean?" . . . "Do you hear on the hill? Do you hear? Do you hear?" repeated the voice three times. Cornelius translated, and then prompted the answer. "Speak," cried Brown, "we hear." Then the voice, declaiming in the sonorous inflated tone of a herald, and shifting continually on the edge of the vague waste-land, proclaimed that between the men of the Bugis nation living in Patusan and the white men on the hill and those with them, there would be no faith, no compassion, no speech, no peace. A bush rustled; a haphazard volley rang out. "Dam' foolishness," muttered the Yankee, vexedly grounding the butt. Cornelius translated. The wounded man below the hill, after crying out twice, "Take me up! take me up!" went on complaining in moans. While he had kept on the blackened earth of the slope, and afterwards crouching in the boat, he had been safe enough. It seems that in his joy at finding the tobacco he forgot himself and jumped out on her off-side, as it were. The white boat, lying high and dry, showed him up; the creek was no more than seven yards wide in that place, and there happened to be a man crouching in the bush on the other bank.

'He was a Bugis of Tondano only lately come to Patusan, and a relation of the man shot in the afternoon. That famous long shot had indeed appalled the beholders. The man in utter security had been struck down, in full view of his friends, dropping with a joke on his lips, and they seemed to see in the act an atrocity which had stirred a bitter rage. That relation of his, Si-Lapa by name, was then with Doramin in the stockade only a few feet away. You who know these chaps must admit that the fellow showed an unusual pluck by volunteering to carry the message, alone, in the dark. Creeping across the open ground, he had deviated to the left and found himself opposite the boat. He was startled when Brown's man shouted. He came to a sitting position with his gun to his shoulder, and when the other jumped out, exposing himself, he pulled the trigger and lodged three jagged slugs point-blank into the poor wretch's stomach. Then, lying flat on his face, he gave himself up for dead, while a thin hail of lead chopped and swished the bushes close on his right hand; afterwards he delivered his speech shouting,

bent double, dodging all the time in cover. With the last word he leaped sideways, lay close for a while, and afterwards got back to the houses unharmed, having achieved on that night such a renown as his children will not willingly allow to die.

‘And on the hill the forlorn band let the two little heaps of embers go out under their bowed heads. They sat dejected on the ground with compressed lips and downcast eyes, listening to their comrade below. He was a strong man and died hard, with moans now loud, now sinking to a strange confidential note of pain. Sometimes he shrieked, and again, after a period of silence, he could be heard muttering deliriously a long and unintelligible complaint. Never for a moment did he cease.

“‘What’s the good?’” Brown had said unmoved once, seeing the Yankee, who had been swearing under his breath, prepare to go down. “‘That’s so,’” assented the deserter, reluctantly desisting. “‘There’s no encouragement for wounded men here. Only his noise is calculated to make all the others think too much of the hereafter, cap’n.” “‘Water!’” cried the wounded man in an extraordinarily clear vigorous voice, and then went off moaning feebly. “‘Ay, water. Water will do it,’” muttered the other to himself, resignedly. “‘Plenty by-and-by. The tide is flowing.’”

‘At last the tide flowed, silencing the plaint and the cries of pain, and the dawn was near when Brown, sitting with his chin in the palm of his hand before Patusan, as one might stare at the unscalable side of a mountain, heard the brief ringing bark of a brass 6-pounder far away in town somewhere. “‘What’s this?’” he asked of Cornelius, who hung about him. Cornelius listened. A muffled roaring shout rolled down-river over the town; a big drum began to throb, and others responded, pulsating and droning. Tiny scattered lights began to twinkle in the dark half of the town, while the part lighted by the loom of fires hummed with a deep and prolonged murmur. “‘He has come,’” said Cornelius. “‘What? Already? Are you sure?’” Brown asked. “‘Yes! yes! Sure. Listen to the noise.’” “‘What are they making that row about?’” pursued Brown. “‘For joy,’” snorted Cornelius; “‘he is a very great man, but all the same, he knows no more than a child, and so they make a great noise to please him, because they know no better.’” “‘Look here,’” said Brown, “‘how is one to get at him?’” “‘He shall come to talk to you,’” Cornelius declared. “‘What do you mean? Come down here strolling as it were?’” Cornelius nodded vigorously in the dark. “‘Yes. He will come straight here and talk to you. He is just like a fool. You shall see what a fool he is.’” Brown was incredulous. “‘You shall see; you shall see,’” repeated Cornelius. “‘He is not afraid — not afraid of anything. He will come and order you to leave his people alone. Everybody must leave his people alone. He is like a little child. He will come to you straight.’” Alas! he knew Jim well — that “‘mean little skunk,’” as Brown called him to me. “‘Yes, certainly,’” he pursued with ardour, “‘and then, captain, you tell that tall man with a gun to shoot him. Just you kill him, and you will frighten everybody so much that you can do anything you like with them afterwards — get what you like — go away when you like. Ha! ha! ha! Fine . . .’” He almost danced with impatience and eagerness; and Brown, looking over his shoulder at him, could see, shown up by the pitiless dawn, his men drenched with

dew, sitting amongst the cold ashes and the litter of the camp, haggard, cowed, and in rags.'

Chapter 41

‘To the very last moment, till the full day came upon them with a spring, the fires on the west bank blazed bright and clear; and then Brown saw in a knot of coloured figures motionless between the advanced houses a man in European clothes, in a helmet, all white. “That’s him; look! look!” Cornelius said excitedly. All Brown’s men had sprung up and crowded at his back with lustreless eyes. The group of vivid colours and dark faces with the white figure in their midst were observing the knoll. Brown could see naked arms being raised to shade the eyes and other brown arms pointing. What should he do? He looked around, and the forests that faced him on all sides walled the cock-pit of an unequal contest. He looked once more at his men. A contempt, a weariness, the desire of life, the wish to try for one more chance — for some other grave — struggled in his breast. From the outline the figure presented it seemed to him that the white man there, backed up by all the power of the land, was examining his position through binoculars. Brown jumped up on the log, throwing his arms up, the palms outwards. The coloured group closed round the white man, and fell back twice before he got clear of them, walking slowly alone. Brown remained standing on the log till Jim, appearing and disappearing between the patches of thorny scrub, had nearly reached the creek; then Brown jumped off and went down to meet him on his side.

‘They met, I should think, not very far from the place, perhaps on the very spot, where Jim took the second desperate leap of his life — the leap that landed him into the life of Patusan, into the trust, the love, the confidence of the people. They faced each other across the creek, and with steady eyes tried to understand each other before they opened their lips. Their antagonism must have been expressed in their glances; I know that Brown hated Jim at first sight. Whatever hopes he might have had vanished at once. This was not the man he had expected to see. He hated him for this — and in a checked flannel shirt with sleeves cut off at the elbows, grey bearded, with a sunken, sun-blackened face — he cursed in his heart the other’s youth and assurance, his clear eyes and his untroubled bearing. That fellow had got in a long way before him! He did not look like a man who would be willing to give anything for assistance. He had all the advantages on his side — possession, security, power; he was on the side of an overwhelming force! He was not hungry and desperate, and he did not seem in the least afraid. And there was something in the very neatness of Jim’s clothes, from the white helmet to the canvas leggings and the pipeclayed shoes, which in Brown’s sombre irritated eyes seemed to belong to things he had in the very shaping of his life condemned and flouted.

“Who are you?” asked Jim at last, speaking in his usual voice. “My name’s Brown,” answered the other loudly; “Captain Brown. What’s yours?” and Jim after a little pause went on quietly, as if he had not heard: “What made you come here?” “You want to know,” said Brown bitterly. “It’s easy to tell. Hunger. And what made you?”

“The fellow started at this,” said Brown, relating to me the opening of this strange conversation between those two men, separated only by the muddy bed of a creek, but standing on the opposite poles of that conception of life which includes all mankind — “The fellow started at this and got very red in the face. Too big to be questioned, I suppose. I told him that if he looked upon me as a dead man with whom you may take liberties, he himself was not a whit better off really. I had a fellow up there who had a bead drawn on him all the time, and only waited for a sign from me. There was nothing to be shocked at in this. He had come down of his own free will. ‘Let us agree,’ said I, ‘that we are both dead men, and let us talk on that basis, as equals. We are all equal before death,’ I said. I admitted I was there like a rat in a trap, but we had been driven to it, and even a trapped rat can give a bite. He caught me up in a moment. ‘Not if you don’t go near the trap till the rat is dead.’ I told him that sort of game was good enough for these native friends of his, but I would have thought him too white to serve even a rat so. Yes, I had wanted to talk with him. Not to beg for my life, though. My fellows were — well — what they were — men like himself, anyhow. All we wanted from him was to come on in the devil’s name and have it out. ‘God d — n it,’ said I, while he stood there as still as a wooden post, ‘you don’t want to come out here every day with your glasses to count how many of us are left on our feet. Come. Either bring your infernal crowd along or let us go out and starve in the open sea, by God! You have been white once, for all your tall talk of this being your own people and you being one with them. Are you? And what the devil do you get for it; what is it you’ve found here that is so d — d precious? Hey? You don’t want us to come down here perhaps — do you? You are two hundred to one. You don’t want us to come down into the open. Ah! I promise you we shall give you some sport before you’ve done. You talk about me making a cowardly set upon unoffending people. What’s that to me that they are unoffending, when I am starving for next to no offence? But I am not a coward. Don’t you be one. Bring them along or, by all the fiends, we shall yet manage to send half your unoffending town to heaven with us in smoke!”

‘He was terrible — relating this to me — this tortured skeleton of a man drawn up together with his face over his knees, upon a miserable bed in that wretched hovel, and lifting his head to look at me with malignant triumph.

“That’s what I told him — I knew what to say,” he began again, feebly at first, but working himself up with incredible speed into a fiery utterance of his scorn. “We aren’t going into the forest to wander like a string of living skeletons dropping one after another for ants to go to work upon us before we are fairly dead. Oh no! . . . ‘You don’t deserve a better fate,’ he said. ‘And what do you deserve,’ I shouted at him, ‘you that I find skulking here with your mouth full of your responsibility, of innocent lives, of your infernal duty? What do you know more of me than I know of you? I came here

for food. D'ye hear? — food to fill our bellies. And what did you come for? What did you ask for when you came here? We don't ask you for anything but to give us a fight or a clear road to go back whence we came. . . . 'I would fight with you now,' says he, pulling at his little moustache. 'And I would let you shoot me, and welcome,' I said. 'This is as good a jumping-off place for me as another. I am sick of my infernal luck. But it would be too easy. There are my men in the same boat — and, by God, I am not the sort to jump out of trouble and leave them in a d — d lurch,' I said. He stood thinking for a while and then wanted to know what I had done ('out there' he says, tossing his head down-stream) to be hazed about so. 'Have we met to tell each other the story of our lives?' I asked him. 'Suppose you begin. No? Well, I am sure I don't want to hear. Keep it to yourself. I know it is no better than mine. I've lived — and so did you, though you talk as if you were one of those people that should have wings so as to go about without touching the dirty earth. Well — it is dirty. I haven't got any wings. I am here because I was afraid once in my life. Want to know what of? Of a prison. That scares me, and you may know it — if it's any good to you. I won't ask you what scared you into this infernal hole, where you seem to have found pretty pickings. That's your luck and this is mine — the privilege to beg for the favour of being shot quickly, or else kicked out to go free and starve in my own way.' . . ."

'His debilitated body shook with an exultation so vehement, so assured, and so malicious that it seemed to have driven off the death waiting for him in that hut. The corpse of his mad self-love arose from rags and destitution as from the dark horrors of a tomb. It is impossible to say how much he lied to Jim then, how much he lied to me now — and to himself always. Vanity plays lurid tricks with our memory, and the truth of every passion wants some pretence to make it live. Standing at the gate of the other world in the guise of a beggar, he had slapped this world's face, he had spat on it, he had thrown upon it an immensity of scorn and revolt at the bottom of his misdeeds. He had overcome them all — men, women, savages, traders, ruffians, missionaries — and Jim — "that beefy-faced beggar." I did not begrudge him this triumph in articulo mortis, this almost posthumous illusion of having trampled all the earth under his feet. While he was boasting to me, in his sordid and repulsive agony, I couldn't help thinking of the chuckling talk relating to the time of his greatest splendour when, during a year or more, Gentleman Brown's ship was to be seen, for many days on end, hovering off an islet befringed with green upon azure, with the dark dot of the mission-house on a white beach; while Gentleman Brown, ashore, was casting his spells over a romantic girl for whom Melanesia had been too much, and giving hopes of a remarkable conversion to her husband. The poor man, some time or other, had been heard to express the intention of winning "Captain Brown to a better way of life." . . . "Bag Gentleman Brown for Glory" — as a leery-eyed loafer expressed it once — "just to let them see up above what a Western Pacific trading skipper looks like." And this was the man, too, who had run off with a dying woman, and had shed tears over her body. "Carried on like a big baby," his then mate was never tired of telling, "and where the fun came in may I be kicked to death by diseased Kanakas if I

know. Why, gents! she was too far gone when he brought her aboard to know him; she just lay there on her back in his bunk staring at the beam with awful shining eyes — and then she died. Dam' bad sort of fever, I guess. . . ." I remembered all these stories while, wiping his matted lump of a beard with a livid hand, he was telling me from his noisome couch how he got round, got in, got home, on that confounded, immaculate, don't-you-touch-me sort of fellow. He admitted that he couldn't be scared, but there was a way, "as broad as a turnpike, to get in and shake his twopenny soul around and inside out and upside down — by God!"

Chapter 42

‘I don’t think he could do more than perhaps look upon that straight path. He seemed to have been puzzled by what he saw, for he interrupted himself in his narrative more than once to exclaim, “He nearly slipped from me there. I could not make him out. Who was he?” And after glaring at me wildly he would go on, jubilating and sneering. To me the conversation of these two across the creek appears now as the deadliest kind of duel on which Fate looked on with her cold-eyed knowledge of the end. No, he didn’t turn Jim’s soul inside out, but I am much mistaken if the spirit so utterly out of his reach had not been made to taste to the full the bitterness of that contest. These were the emissaries with whom the world he had renounced was pursuing him in his retreat — white men from “out there” where he did not think himself good enough to live. This was all that came to him — a menace, a shock, a danger to his work. I suppose it is this sad, half-resentful, half-resigned feeling, piercing through the few words Jim said now and then, that puzzled Brown so much in the reading of his character. Some great men owe most of their greatness to the ability of detecting in those they destine for their tools the exact quality of strength that matters for their work; and Brown, as though he had been really great, had a satanic gift of finding out the best and the weakest spot in his victims. He admitted to me that Jim wasn’t of the sort that can be got over by truckling, and accordingly he took care to show himself as a man confronting without dismay ill-luck, censure, and disaster. The smuggling of a few guns was no great crime, he pointed out. As to coming to Patusan, who had the right to say he hadn’t come to beg? The infernal people here let loose at him from both banks without staying to ask questions. He made the point brazenly, for, in truth, Dain Waris’s energetic action had prevented the greatest calamities; because Brown told me distinctly that, perceiving the size of the place, he had resolved instantly in his mind that as soon as he had gained a footing he would set fire right and left, and begin by shooting down everything living in sight, in order to cow and terrify the population. The disproportion of forces was so great that this was the only way giving him the slightest chance of attaining his ends — he argued in a fit of coughing. But he didn’t tell Jim this. As to the hardships and starvation they had gone through, these had been very real; it was enough to look at his band. He made, at the sound of a shrill whistle, all his men appear standing in a row on the logs in full view, so that Jim could see them. For the killing of the man, it had been done — well, it had — but was not this war, bloody war — in a corner? and the fellow had been killed cleanly, shot through the chest, not like that poor devil of his lying now in the creek. They had to listen to him dying for six hours, with his entrails torn with slugs. At any rate this

was a life for a life. . . . And all this was said with the weariness, with the recklessness of a man spurred on and on by ill-luck till he cares not where he runs. When he asked Jim, with a sort of brusque despairing frankness, whether he himself — straight now — didn't understand that when "it came to saving one's life in the dark, one didn't care who else went — three, thirty, three hundred people" — it was as if a demon had been whispering advice in his ear. "I made him wince," boasted Brown to me. "He very soon left off coming the righteous over me. He just stood there with nothing to say, and looking as black as thunder — not at me — on the ground." He asked Jim whether he had nothing fishy in his life to remember that he was so damnedly hard upon a man trying to get out of a deadly hole by the first means that came to hand — and so on, and so on. And there ran through the rough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts.

'At last Brown threw himself down full length and watched Jim out of the corners of his eyes. Jim on his side of the creek stood thinking and switching his leg. The houses in view were silent, as if a pestilence had swept them clean of every breath of life; but many invisible eyes were turned, from within, upon the two men with the creek between them, a stranded white boat, and the body of the third man half sunk in the mud. On the river canoes were moving again, for Patusan was recovering its belief in the stability of earthly institutions since the return of the white lord. The right bank, the platforms of the houses, the rafts moored along the shores, even the roofs of bathing-huts, were covered with people that, far away out of earshot and almost out of sight, were straining their eyes towards the knoll beyond the Rajah's stockade. Within the wide irregular ring of forests, broken in two places by the sheen of the river, there was a silence. "Will you promise to leave the coast?" Jim asked. Brown lifted and let fall his hand, giving everything up as it were — accepting the inevitable. "And surrender your arms?" Jim went on. Brown sat up and glared across. "Surrender our arms! Not till you come to take them out of our stiff hands. You think I am gone crazy with funk? Oh no! That and the rags I stand in is all I have got in the world, besides a few more breechloaders on board; and I expect to sell the lot in Madagascar, if I ever get so far — begging my way from ship to ship."

'Jim said nothing to this. At last, throwing away the switch he held in his hand, he said, as if speaking to himself, "I don't know whether I have the power." . . . "You don't know! And you wanted me just now to give up my arms! That's good, too," cried Brown; "Suppose they say one thing to you, and do the other thing to me." He calmed down markedly. "I dare say you have the power, or what's the meaning of all this talk?" he continued. "What did you come down here for? To pass the time of day?"

"Very well," said Jim, lifting his head suddenly after a long silence. "You shall have a clear road or else a clear fight." He turned on his heel and walked away.

'Brown got up at once, but he did not go up the hill till he had seen Jim disappear between the first houses. He never set his eyes on him again. On his way back he

met Cornelius slouching down with his head between his shoulders. He stopped before Brown. "Why didn't you kill him?" he demanded in a sour, discontented voice. "Because I could do better than that," Brown said with an amused smile. "Never! never!" protested Cornelius with energy. "Couldn't. I have lived here for many years." Brown looked up at him curiously. There were many sides to the life of that place in arms against him; things he would never find out. Cornelius slunk past dejectedly in the direction of the river. He was now leaving his new friends; he accepted the disappointing course of events with a sulky obstinacy which seemed to draw more together his little yellow old face; and as he went down he glanced askant here and there, never giving up his fixed idea.

'Henceforth events move fast without a check, flowing from the very hearts of men like a stream from a dark source, and we see Jim amongst them, mostly through Tamb' Itam's eyes. The girl's eyes had watched him too, but her life is too much entwined with his: there is her passion, her wonder, her anger, and, above all, her fear and her unforgiving love. Of the faithful servant, uncomprehending as the rest of them, it is the fidelity alone that comes into play; a fidelity and a belief in his lord so strong that even amazement is subdued to a sort of saddened acceptance of a mysterious failure. He has eyes only for one figure, and through all the mazes of bewilderment he preserves his air of guardianship, of obedience, of care.

'His master came back from his talk with the white men, walking slowly towards the stockade in the street. Everybody was rejoiced to see him return, for while he was away every man had been afraid not only of him being killed, but also of what would come after. Jim went into one of the houses, where old Doramin had retired, and remained alone for a long time with the head of the Bugis settlers. No doubt he discussed the course to follow with him then, but no man was present at the conversation. Only Tamb' Itam, keeping as close to the door as he could, heard his master say, "Yes. I shall let all the people know that such is my wish; but I spoke to you, O Doramin, before all the others, and alone; for you know my heart as well as I know yours and its greatest desire. And you know well also that I have no thought but for the people's good." Then his master, lifting the sheeting in the doorway, went out, and he, Tamb' Itam, had a glimpse of old Doramin within, sitting in the chair with his hands on his knees, and looking between his feet. Afterwards he followed his master to the fort, where all the principal Bugis and Patusan inhabitants had been summoned for a talk. Tamb' Itam himself hoped there would be some fighting. "What was it but the taking of another hill?" he exclaimed regretfully. However, in the town many hoped that the rapacious strangers would be induced, by the sight of so many brave men making ready to fight, to go away. It would be a good thing if they went away. Since Jim's arrival had been made known before daylight by the gun fired from the fort and the beating of the big drum there, the fear that had hung over Patusan had broken and subsided like a wave on a rock, leaving the seething foam of excitement, curiosity, and endless speculation. Half of the population had been ousted out of their homes for purposes of defence, and were living in the street on the left side of the river,

crowding round the fort, and in momentary expectation of seeing their abandoned dwellings on the threatened bank burst into flames. The general anxiety was to see the matter settled quickly. Food, through Jewel's care, had been served out to the refugees. Nobody knew what their white man would do. Some remarked that it was worse than in Sherif Ali's war. Then many people did not care; now everybody had something to lose. The movements of canoes passing to and fro between the two parts of the town were watched with interest. A couple of Bugis war-boats lay anchored in the middle of the stream to protect the river, and a thread of smoke stood at the bow of each; the men in them were cooking their midday rice when Jim, after his interviews with Brown and Doramin, crossed the river and entered by the water-gate of his fort. The people inside crowded round him, so that he could hardly make his way to the house. They had not seen him before, because on his arrival during the night he had only exchanged a few words with the girl, who had come down to the landing-stage for the purpose, and had then gone on at once to join the chiefs and the fighting men on the other bank. People shouted greetings after him. One old woman raised a laugh by pushing her way to the front madly and enjoining him in a scolding voice to see to it that her two sons, who were with Doramin, did not come to harm at the hands of the robbers. Several of the bystanders tried to pull her away, but she struggled and cried, "Let me go. What is this, O Muslims? This laughter is unseemly. Are they not cruel, bloodthirsty robbers bent on killing?" "Let her be," said Jim, and as a silence fell suddenly, he said slowly, "Everybody shall be safe." He entered the house before the great sigh, and the loud murmurs of satisfaction, had died out.

'There's no doubt his mind was made up that Brown should have his way clear back to the sea. His fate, revolted, was forcing his hand. He had for the first time to affirm his will in the face of outspoken opposition. "There was much talk, and at first my master was silent," Tamb' Itam said. "Darkness came, and then I lit the candles on the long table. The chiefs sat on each side, and the lady remained by my master's right hand."

'When he began to speak, the unaccustomed difficulty seemed only to fix his resolve more immovably. The white men were now waiting for his answer on the hill. Their chief had spoken to him in the language of his own people, making clear many things difficult to explain in any other speech. They were erring men whom suffering had made blind to right and wrong. It is true that lives had been lost already, but why lose more? He declared to his hearers, the assembled heads of the people, that their welfare was his welfare, their losses his losses, their mourning his mourning. He looked round at the grave listening faces and told them to remember that they had fought and worked side by side. They knew his courage . . . Here a murmur interrupted him . . . And that he had never deceived them. For many years they had dwelt together. He loved the land and the people living in it with a very great love. He was ready to answer with his life for any harm that should come to them if the white men with beards were allowed to retire. They were evil-doers, but their destiny had been evil, too. Had he ever advised them ill? Had his words ever brought suffering to the people?

he asked. He believed that it would be best to let these whites and their followers go with their lives. It would be a small gift. "I whom you have tried and found always true ask you to let them go." He turned to Doramin. The old nakhoda made no movement. "Then," said Jim, "call in Dain Waris, your son, my friend, for in this business I shall not lead."

Chapter 43

‘Tamb’ Itam behind his chair was thunderstruck. The declaration produced an immense sensation. “Let them go because this is best in my knowledge which has never deceived you,” Jim insisted. There was a silence. In the darkness of the courtyard could be heard the subdued whispering, shuffling noise of many people. Doramin raised his heavy head and said that there was no more reading of hearts than touching the sky with the hand, but — he consented. The others gave their opinion in turn. “It is best,” “Let them go,” and so on. But most of them simply said that they “believed Tuan Jim.”

‘In this simple form of assent to his will lies the whole gist of the situation; their creed, his truth; and the testimony to that faithfulness which made him in his own eyes the equal of the impeccable men who never fall out of the ranks. Stein’s words, “Romantic! — Romantic!” seem to ring over those distances that will never give him up now to a world indifferent to his failings and his virtues, and to that ardent and clinging affection that refuses him the dole of tears in the bewilderment of a great grief and of eternal separation. From the moment the sheer truthfulness of his last three years of life carries the day against the ignorance, the fear, and the anger of men, he appears no longer to me as I saw him last — a white speck catching all the dim light left upon a sombre coast and the darkened sea — but greater and more pitiful in the loneliness of his soul, that remains even for her who loved him best a cruel and insoluble mystery.

‘It is evident that he did not mistrust Brown; there was no reason to doubt the story, whose truth seemed warranted by the rough frankness, by a sort of virile sincerity in accepting the morality and the consequences of his acts. But Jim did not know the almost inconceivable egotism of the man which made him, when resisted and foiled in his will, mad with the indignant and revengeful rage of a thwarted autocrat. But if Jim did not mistrust Brown, he was evidently anxious that some misunderstanding should not occur, ending perhaps in collision and bloodshed. It was for this reason that directly the Malay chiefs had gone he asked Jewel to get him something to eat, as he was going out of the fort to take command in the town. On her remonstrating against this on the score of his fatigue, he said that something might happen for which he would never forgive himself. “I am responsible for every life in the land,” he said. He was moody at first; she served him with her own hands, taking the plates and dishes (of the dinner-service presented him by Stein) from Tamb’ Itam. He brightened up after a while; told her she would be again in command of the fort for another night. “There’s no sleep for us, old girl,” he said, “while our people are in danger.” Later on he said jokingly that she was the best man of them all. “If you and Dain Waris had

done what you wanted, not one of these poor devils would be alive to-day." "Are they very bad?" she asked, leaning over his chair. "Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others," he said after some hesitation.

'Tamb' Itam followed his master to the landing-stage outside the fort. The night was clear but without a moon, and the middle of the river was dark, while the water under each bank reflected the light of many fires "as on a night of Ramadan," Tamb' Itam said. War-boats drifted silently in the dark lane or, anchored, floated motionless with a loud ripple. That night there was much paddling in a canoe and walking at his master's heels for Tamb' Itam: up and down the street they tramped, where the fires were burning, inland on the outskirts of the town where small parties of men kept guard in the fields. Tuan Jim gave his orders and was obeyed. Last of all they went to the Rajah's stockade, which a detachment of Jim's people manned on that night. The old Rajah had fled early in the morning with most of his women to a small house he had near a jungle village on a tributary stream. Kassim, left behind, had attended the council with his air of diligent activity to explain away the diplomacy of the day before. He was considerably cold-shouldered, but managed to preserve his smiling, quiet alertness, and professed himself highly delighted when Jim told him sternly that he proposed to occupy the stockade on that night with his own men. After the council broke up he was heard outside accosting this and that deputing chief, and speaking in a loud, gratified tone of the Rajah's property being protected in the Rajah's absence.

'About ten or so Jim's men marched in. The stockade commanded the mouth of the creek, and Jim meant to remain there till Brown had passed below. A small fire was lit on the flat, grassy point outside the wall of stakes, and Tamb' Itam placed a little folding-stool for his master. Jim told him to try and sleep. Tamb' Itam got a mat and lay down a little way off; but he could not sleep, though he knew he had to go on an important journey before the night was out. His master walked to and fro before the fire with bowed head and with his hands behind his back. His face was sad. Whenever his master approached him Tamb' Itam pretended to sleep, not wishing his master to know he had been watched. At last his master stood still, looking down on him as he lay, and said softly, "It is time."

'Tamb' Itam arose directly and made his preparations. His mission was to go down the river, preceding Brown's boat by an hour or more, to tell Dain Waris finally and formally that the whites were to be allowed to pass out unmolested. Jim would not trust anybody else with that service. Before starting, Tamb' Itam, more as a matter of form (since his position about Jim made him perfectly known), asked for a token. "Because, Tuan," he said, "the message is important, and these are thy very words I carry." His master first put his hand into one pocket, then into another, and finally took off his forefinger Stein's silver ring, which he habitually wore, and gave it to Tamb' Itam. When Tamb' Itam left on his mission, Brown's camp on the knoll was dark but for a single small glow shining through the branches of one of the trees the white men had cut down.

‘Early in the evening Brown had received from Jim a folded piece of paper on which was written, “You get the clear road. Start as soon as your boat floats on the morning tide. Let your men be careful. The bushes on both sides of the creek and the stockade at the mouth are full of well-armed men. You would have no chance, but I don’t believe you want bloodshed.” Brown read it, tore the paper into small pieces, and, turning to Cornelius, who had brought it, said jeeringly, “Good-bye, my excellent friend.” Cornelius had been in the fort, and had been sneaking around Jim’s house during the afternoon. Jim chose him to carry the note because he could speak English, was known to Brown, and was not likely to be shot by some nervous mistake of one of the men as a Malay, approaching in the dusk, perhaps might have been.

‘Cornelius didn’t go away after delivering the paper. Brown was sitting up over a tiny fire; all the others were lying down. “I could tell you something you would like to know,” Cornelius mumbled crossly. Brown paid no attention. “You did not kill him,” went on the other, “and what do you get for it? You might have had money from the Rajah, besides the loot of all the Bugis houses, and now you get nothing.” “You had better clear out from here,” growled Brown, without even looking at him. But Cornelius let himself drop by his side and began to whisper very fast, touching his elbow from time to time. What he had to say made Brown sit up at first, with a curse. He had simply informed him of Dain Waris’s armed party down the river. At first Brown saw himself completely sold and betrayed, but a moment’s reflection convinced him that there could be no treachery intended. He said nothing, and after a while Cornelius remarked, in a tone of complete indifference, that there was another way out of the river which he knew very well. “A good thing to know, too,” said Brown, pricking up his ears; and Cornelius began to talk of what went on in town and repeated all that had been said in council, gossiping in an even undertone at Brown’s ear as you talk amongst sleeping men you do not wish to wake. “He thinks he has made me harmless, does he?” mumbled Brown very low. . . . “Yes. He is a fool. A little child. He came here and robbed me,” droned on Cornelius, “and he made all the people believe him. But if something happened that they did not believe him any more, where would he be? And the Bugis Dain who is waiting for you down the river there, captain, is the very man who chased you up here when you first came.” Brown observed nonchalantly that it would be just as well to avoid him, and with the same detached, musing air Cornelius declared himself acquainted with a backwater broad enough to take Brown’s boat past Waris’s camp. “You will have to be quiet,” he said as an afterthought, “for in one place we pass close behind his camp. Very close. They are camped ashore with their boats hauled up.” “Oh, we know how to be as quiet as mice; never fear,” said Brown. Cornelius stipulated that in case he were to pilot Brown out, his canoe should be towed. “I’ll have to get back quick,” he explained.

‘It was two hours before the dawn when word was passed to the stockade from outlying watchers that the white robbers were coming down to their boat. In a very short time every armed man from one end of Patusan to the other was on the alert, yet the banks of the river remained so silent that but for the fires burning with sudden

blurred flares the town might have been asleep as if in peace-time. A heavy mist lay very low on the water, making a sort of illusive grey light that showed nothing. When Brown's long-boat glided out of the creek into the river, Jim was standing on the low point of land before the Rajah's stockade — on the very spot where for the first time he put his foot on Patusan shore. A shadow loomed up, moving in the greyness, solitary, very bulky, and yet constantly eluding the eye. A murmur of low talking came out of it. Brown at the tiller heard Jim speak calmly: "A clear road. You had better trust to the current while the fog lasts; but this will lift presently." "Yes, presently we shall see clear," replied Brown.

'The thirty or forty men standing with muskets at ready outside the stockade held their breath. The Bugis owner of the prau, whom I saw on Stein's verandah, and who was amongst them, told me that the boat, shaving the low point close, seemed for a moment to grow big and hang over it like a mountain. "If you think it worth your while to wait a day outside," called out Jim, "I'll try to send you down something — a bullock, some yams — what I can." The shadow went on moving. "Yes. Do," said a voice, blank and muffled out of the fog. Not one of the many attentive listeners understood what the words meant; and then Brown and his men in their boat floated away, fading spectrally without the slightest sound.

'Thus Brown, invisible in the mist, goes out of Patusan elbow to elbow with Cornelius in the stern-sheets of the long-boat. "Perhaps you shall get a small bullock," said Cornelius. "Oh yes. Bullock. Yam. You'll get it if he said so. He always speaks the truth. He stole everything I had. I suppose you like a small bullock better than the loot of many houses." "I would advise you to hold your tongue, or somebody here may fling you overboard into this damned fog," said Brown. The boat seemed to be standing still; nothing could be seen, not even the river alongside, only the water-dust flew and trickled, condensed, down their beards and faces. It was weird, Brown told me. Every individual man of them felt as though he were adrift alone in a boat, haunted by an almost imperceptible suspicion of sighing, muttering ghosts. "Throw me out, would you? But I would know where I was," mumbled Cornelius surlily. "I've lived many years here." "Not long enough to see through a fog like this," Brown said, lolling back with his arm swinging to and fro on the useless tiller. "Yes. Long enough for that," snarled Cornelius. "That's very useful," commented Brown. "Am I to believe you could find that backway you spoke of blindfold, like this?" Cornelius grunted. "Are you too tired to row?" he asked after a silence. "No, by God!" shouted Brown suddenly. "Out with your oars there." There was a great knocking in the fog, which after a while settled into a regular grind of invisible sweeps against invisible thole-pins. Otherwise nothing was changed, and but for the slight splash of a dipped blade it was like rowing a balloon car in a cloud, said Brown. Thereafter Cornelius did not open his lips except to ask querulously for somebody to bale out his canoe, which was towing behind the long-boat. Gradually the fog whitened and became luminous ahead. To the left Brown saw a darkness as though he had been looking at the back of the departing night. All at once a big bough covered with leaves appeared above his head, and ends of twigs,

dripping and still, curved slenderly close alongside. Cornelius, without a word, took the tiller from his hand.'

Chapter 44

‘I don’t think they spoke together again. The boat entered a narrow by-channel, where it was pushed by the oar-blades set into crumbling banks, and there was a gloom as if enormous black wings had been outspread above the mist that filled its depth to the summits of the trees. The branches overhead showered big drops through the gloomy fog. At a mutter from Cornelius, Brown ordered his men to load. “I’ll give you a chance to get even with them before we’re done, you dismal cripples, you,” he said to his gang. “Mind you don’t throw it away — you hounds.” Low growls answered that speech. Cornelius showed much fussy concern for the safety of his canoe.

‘Meantime Tamb’ Itam had reached the end of his journey. The fog had delayed him a little, but he had paddled steadily, keeping in touch with the south bank. By-and-by daylight came like a glow in a ground glass globe. The shores made on each side of the river a dark smudge, in which one could detect hints of columnar forms and shadows of twisted branches high up. The mist was still thick on the water, but a good watch was being kept, for as Iamb’ Itam approached the camp the figures of two men emerged out of the white vapour, and voices spoke to him boisterously. He answered, and presently a canoe lay alongside, and he exchanged news with the paddlers. All was well. The trouble was over. Then the men in the canoe let go their grip on the side of his dug-out and incontinently fell out of sight. He pursued his way till he heard voices coming to him quietly over the water, and saw, under the now lifting, swirling mist, the glow of many little fires burning on a sandy stretch, backed by lofty thin timber and bushes. There again a look-out was kept, for he was challenged. He shouted his name as the two last sweeps of his paddle ran his canoe up on the strand. It was a big camp. Men crouched in many little knots under a subdued murmur of early morning talk. Many thin threads of smoke curled slowly on the white mist. Little shelters, elevated above the ground, had been built for the chiefs. Muskets were stacked in small pyramids, and long spears were stuck singly into the sand near the fires.

‘Tamb’ Itam, assuming an air of importance, demanded to be led to Dain Waris. He found the friend of his white lord lying on a raised couch made of bamboo, and sheltered by a sort of shed of sticks covered with mats. Dain Waris was awake, and a bright fire was burning before his sleeping-place, which resembled a rude shrine. The only son of nakhoda Doramin answered his greeting kindly. Tamb’ Itam began by handing him the ring which vouched for the truth of the messenger’s words. Dain Waris, reclining on his elbow, bade him speak and tell all the news. Beginning with the consecrated formula, “The news is good,” Tamb’ Itam delivered Jim’s own words. The white men, deputing with the consent of all the chiefs, were to be allowed to pass down

the river. In answer to a question or two Tamb' Itam then reported the proceedings of the last council. Dain Waris listened attentively to the end, toying with the ring which ultimately he slipped on the forefinger of his right hand. After hearing all he had to say he dismissed Tamb' Itam to have food and rest. Orders for the return in the afternoon were given immediately. Afterwards Dain Waris lay down again, open-eyed, while his personal attendants were preparing his food at the fire, by which Tamb' Itam also sat talking to the men who lounged up to hear the latest intelligence from the town. The sun was eating up the mist. A good watch was kept upon the reach of the main stream where the boat of the whites was expected to appear every moment.

'It was then that Brown took his revenge upon the world which, after twenty years of contemptuous and reckless bullying, refused him the tribute of a common robber's success. It was an act of cold-blooded ferocity, and it consoled him on his deathbed like a memory of an indomitable defiance. Stealthily he landed his men on the other side of the island opposite to the Bugis camp, and led them across. After a short but quite silent scuffle, Cornelius, who had tried to slink away at the moment of landing, resigned himself to show the way where the undergrowth was most sparse. Brown held both his skinny hands together behind his back in the grip of one vast fist, and now and then impelled him forward with a fierce push. Cornelius remained as mute as a fish, abject but faithful to his purpose, whose accomplishment loomed before him dimly. At the edge of the patch of forest Brown's men spread themselves out in cover and waited. The camp was plain from end to end before their eyes, and no one looked their way. Nobody even dreamed that the white men could have any knowledge of the narrow channel at the back of the island. When he judged the moment come, Brown yelled, "Let them have it," and fourteen shots rang out like one.

'Tamb' Itam told me the surprise was so great that, except for those who fell dead or wounded, not a soul of them moved for quite an appreciable time after the first discharge. Then a man screamed, and after that scream a great yell of amazement and fear went up from all the throats. A blind panic drove these men in a surging swaying mob to and fro along the shore like a herd of cattle afraid of the water. Some few jumped into the river then, but most of them did so only after the last discharge. Three times Brown's men fired into the ruck, Brown, the only one in view, cursing and yelling, "Aim low! aim low!"

'Tamb' Itam says that, as for him, he understood at the first volley what had happened. Though untouched he fell down and lay as if dead, but with his eyes open. At the sound of the first shots Dain Waris, reclining on the couch, jumped up and ran out upon the open shore, just in time to receive a bullet in his forehead at the second discharge. Tamb' Itam saw him fling his arms wide open before he fell. Then, he says, a great fear came upon him — not before. The white men retired as they had come — unseen.

'Thus Brown balanced his account with the evil fortune. Notice that even in this awful outbreak there is a superiority as of a man who carries right — the abstract thing — within the envelope of his common desires. It was not a vulgar and treacherous

massacre; it was a lesson, a retribution — a demonstration of some obscure and awful attribute of our nature which, I am afraid, is not so very far under the surface as we like to think.

‘Afterwards the whites depart unseen by Tamb’ Itam, and seem to vanish from before men’s eyes altogether; and the schooner, too, vanishes after the manner of stolen goods. But a story is told of a white long-boat picked up a month later in the Indian Ocean by a cargo steamer. Two parched, yellow, glassy-eyed, whispering skeletons in her recognised the authority of a third, who declared that his name was Brown. His schooner, he reported, bound south with a cargo of Java sugar, had sprung a bad leak and sank under his feet. He and his companions were the survivors of a crew of six. The two died on board the steamer which rescued them. Brown lived to be seen by me, and I can testify that he had played his part to the last.

‘It seems, however, that in going away they had neglected to cast off Cornelius’s canoe. Cornelius himself Brown had let go at the beginning of the shooting, with a kick for a parting benediction. Tamb’ Itam, after arising from amongst the dead, saw the Nazarene running up and down the shore amongst the corpses and the expiring fires. He uttered little cries. Suddenly he rushed to the water, and made frantic efforts to get one of the Bugis boats into the water. “Afterwards, till he had seen me,” related Tamb’ Itam, “he stood looking at the heavy canoe and scratching his head.” “What became of him?” I asked. Tamb’ Itam, staring hard at me, made an expressive gesture with his right arm. “Twice I struck, Tuan,” he said. “When he beheld me approaching he cast himself violently on the ground and made a great outcry, kicking. He screeched like a frightened hen till he felt the point; then he was still, and lay staring at me while his life went out of his eyes.”

‘This done, Tamb’ Itam did not tarry. He understood the importance of being the first with the awful news at the fort. There were, of course, many survivors of Dain Waris’s party; but in the extremity of panic some had swum across the river, others had bolted into the bush. The fact is that they did not know really who struck that blow — whether more white robbers were not coming, whether they had not already got hold of the whole land. They imagined themselves to be the victims of a vast treachery, and utterly doomed to destruction. It is said that some small parties did not come in till three days afterwards. However, a few tried to make their way back to Patusan at once, and one of the canoes that were patrolling the river that morning was in sight of the camp at the very moment of the attack. It is true that at first the men in her leaped overboard and swam to the opposite bank, but afterwards they returned to their boat and started fearfully up-stream. Of these Tamb’ Itam had an hour’s advance.’

Chapter 45

‘When Tamb’ Itam, paddling madly, came into the town-reach, the women, thronging the platforms before the houses, were looking out for the return of Dain Waris’s little fleet of boats. The town had a festive air; here and there men, still with spears or guns in their hands, could be seen moving or standing on the shore in groups. Chinamen’s shops had been opened early; but the market-place was empty, and a sentry, still posted at the corner of the fort, made out Tamb’ Itam, and shouted to those within. The gate was wide open. Tamb’ Itam jumped ashore and ran in headlong. The first person he met was the girl coming down from the house.

‘Tamb’ Itam, disordered, panting, with trembling lips and wild eyes, stood for a time before her as if a sudden spell had been laid on him. Then he broke out very quickly: “They have killed Dain Waris and many more.” She clapped her hands, and her first words were, “Shut the gates.” Most of the fortmen had gone back to their houses, but Tamb’ Itam hurried on the few who remained for their turn of duty within. The girl stood in the middle of the courtyard while the others ran about. “Doramin,” she cried despairingly, as Tamb’ Itam passed her. Next time he went by he answered her thought rapidly, “Yes. But we have all the powder in Patusan.” She caught him by the arm, and, pointing at the house, “Call him out,” she whispered, trembling.

‘Tamb’ Itam ran up the steps. His master was sleeping. “It is I, Tamb’ Itam,” he cried at the door, “with tidings that cannot wait.” He saw Jim turn over on the pillow and open his eyes, and he burst out at once. “This, Tuan, is a day of evil, an accursed day.” His master raised himself on his elbow to listen — just as Dain Waris had done. And then Tamb’ Itam began his tale, trying to relate the story in order, calling Dain Waris Panglima, and saying: “The Panglima then called out to the chief of his own boatmen, ‘Give Tamb’ Itam something to eat’” — when his master put his feet to the ground and looked at him with such a discomposed face that the words remained in his throat.

“Speak out,” said Jim. “Is he dead?” “May you live long,” cried Tamb’ Itam. “It was a most cruel treachery. He ran out at the first shots and fell.” . . . His master walked to the window and with his fist struck at the shutter. The room was made light; and then in a steady voice, but speaking fast, he began to give him orders to assemble a fleet of boats for immediate pursuit, go to this man, to the other — send messengers; and as he talked he sat down on the bed, stooping to lace his boots hurriedly, and suddenly looked up. “Why do you stand here?” he asked very red-faced. “Waste no time.” Tamb’ Itam did not move. “Forgive me, Tuan, but . . . but,” he began to stammer. “What?” cried his master aloud, looking terrible, leaning forward with his hands gripping the

edge of the bed. "It is not safe for thy servant to go out amongst the people," said Tamb' Itam, after hesitating a moment.

'Then Jim understood. He had retreated from one world, for a small matter of an impulsive jump, and now the other, the work of his own hands, had fallen in ruins upon his head. It was not safe for his servant to go out amongst his own people! I believe that in that very moment he had decided to defy the disaster in the only way it occurred to him such a disaster could be defied; but all I know is that, without a word, he came out of his room and sat before the long table, at the head of which he was accustomed to regulate the affairs of his world, proclaiming daily the truth that surely lived in his heart. The dark powers should not rob him twice of his peace. He sat like a stone figure. Tamb' Itam, deferential, hinted at preparations for defence. The girl he loved came in and spoke to him, but he made a sign with his hand, and she was awed by the dumb appeal for silence in it. She went out on the verandah and sat on the threshold, as if to guard him with her body from dangers outside.

'What thoughts passed through his head — what memories? Who can tell? Everything was gone, and he who had been once unfaithful to his trust had lost again all men's confidence. It was then, I believe, he tried to write — to somebody — and gave it up. Loneliness was closing on him. People had trusted him with their lives — only for that; and yet they could never, as he had said, never be made to understand him. Those without did not hear him make a sound. Later, towards the evening, he came to the door and called for Tamb' Itam. "Well?" he asked. "There is much weeping. Much anger too," said Tamb' Itam. Jim looked up at him. "You know," he murmured. "Yes, Tuan," said Tamb' Itam. "Thy servant does know, and the gates are closed. We shall have to fight." "Fight! What for?" he asked. "For our lives." "I have no life," he said. Tamb' Itam heard a cry from the girl at the door. "Who knows?" said Tamb' Itam. "By audacity and cunning we may even escape. There is much fear in men's hearts too." He went out, thinking vaguely of boats and of open sea, leaving Jim and the girl together.

'I haven't the heart to set down here such glimpses as she had given me of the hour or more she passed in there wrestling with him for the possession of her happiness. Whether he had any hope — what he expected, what he imagined — it is impossible to say. He was inflexible, and with the growing loneliness of his obstinacy his spirit seemed to rise above the ruins of his existence. She cried "Fight!" into his ear. She could not understand. There was nothing to fight for. He was going to prove his power in another way and conquer the fatal destiny itself. He came out into the courtyard, and behind him, with streaming hair, wild of face, breathless, she staggered out and leaned on the side of the doorway. "Open the gates," he ordered. Afterwards, turning to those of his men who were inside, he gave them leave to depart to their homes. "For how long, Tuan?" asked one of them timidly. "For all life," he said, in a sombre tone.

'A hush had fallen upon the town after the outburst of wailing and lamentation that had swept over the river, like a gust of wind from the opened abode of sorrow. But rumours flew in whispers, filling the hearts with consternation and horrible doubts. The robbers were coming back, bringing many others with them, in a great ship, and

there would be no refuge in the land for any one. A sense of utter insecurity as during an earthquake pervaded the minds of men, who whispered their suspicions, looking at each other as if in the presence of some awful portent.

'The sun was sinking towards the forests when Dain Waris's body was brought into Doramin's campong. Four men carried it in, covered decently with a white sheet which the old mother had sent out down to the gate to meet her son on his return. They laid him at Doramin's feet, and the old man sat still for a long time, one hand on each knee, looking down. The fronds of palms swayed gently, and the foliage of fruit trees stirred above his head. Every single man of his people was there, fully armed, when the old nakhoda at last raised his eyes. He moved them slowly over the crowd, as if seeking for a missing face. Again his chin sank on his breast. The whispers of many men mingled with the slight rustling of the leaves.

'The Malay who had brought Tamb' Itam and the girl to Samarang was there too. "Not so angry as many," he said to me, but struck with a great awe and wonder at the "suddenness of men's fate, which hangs over their heads like a cloud charged with thunder." He told me that when Dain Waris's body was uncovered at a sign of Doramin's, he whom they often called the white lord's friend was disclosed lying unchanged with his eyelids a little open as if about to wake. Doramin leaned forward a little more, like one looking for something fallen on the ground. His eyes searched the body from its feet to its head, for the wound maybe. It was in the forehead and small; and there was no word spoken while one of the by-standers, stooping, took off the silver ring from the cold stiff hand. In silence he held it up before Doramin. A murmur of dismay and horror ran through the crowd at the sight of that familiar token. The old nakhoda stared at it, and suddenly let out one great fierce cry, deep from the chest, a roar of pain and fury, as mighty as the bellow of a wounded bull, bringing great fear into men's hearts, by the magnitude of his anger and his sorrow that could be plainly discerned without words. There was a great stillness afterwards for a space, while the body was being borne aside by four men. They laid it down under a tree, and on the instant, with one long shriek, all the women of the household began to wail together; they mourned with shrill cries; the sun was setting, and in the intervals of screamed lamentations the high sing-song voices of two old men intoning the Koran chanted alone.

'About this time Jim, leaning on a gun-carriage, looked at the river, and turned his back on the house; and the girl, in the doorway, panting as if she had run herself to a standstill, was looking at him across the yard. Tamb' Itam stood not far from his master, waiting patiently for what might happen. All at once Jim, who seemed to be lost in quiet thought, turned to him and said, "Time to finish this."

"Tuan?" said Tamb' Itam, advancing with alacrity. He did not know what his master meant, but as soon as Jim made a movement the girl started too and walked down into the open space. It seems that no one else of the people of the house was in sight. She tottered slightly, and about half-way down called out to Jim, who had apparently resumed his peaceful contemplation of the river. He turned round, setting his back

against the gun. "Will you fight?" she cried. "There is nothing to fight for," he said; "nothing is lost." Saying this he made a step towards her. "Will you fly?" she cried again. "There is no escape," he said, stopping short, and she stood still also, silent, devouring him with her eyes. "And you shall go?" she said slowly. He bent his head. "Ah!" she exclaimed, peering at him as it were, "you are mad or false. Do you remember the night I prayed you to leave me, and you said that you could not? That it was impossible! Impossible! Do you remember you said you would never leave me? Why? I asked you for no promise. You promised unasked — remember." "Enough, poor girl," he said. "I should not be worth having."

'Tamb' Itam said that while they were talking she would laugh loud and senselessly like one under the visitation of God. His master put his hands to his head. He was fully dressed as for every day, but without a hat. She stopped laughing suddenly. "For the last time," she cried menacingly, "will you defend yourself?" "Nothing can touch me," he said in a last flicker of superb egoism. Tamb' Itam saw her lean forward where she stood, open her arms, and run at him swiftly. She flung herself upon his breast and clasped him round the neck.

"Ah! but I shall hold thee thus," she cried. . . . "Thou art mine!"

'She sobbed on his shoulder. The sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense, streaming like an open vein. An enormous sun nestled crimson amongst the tree-tops, and the forest below had a black and forbidding face.

'Tamb' Itam tells me that on that evening the aspect of the heavens was angry and frightful. I may well believe it, for I know that on that very day a cyclone passed within sixty miles of the coast, though there was hardly more than a languid stir of air in the place.

'Suddenly Tamb' Itam saw Jim catch her arms, trying to unclasp her hands. She hung on them with her head fallen back; her hair touched the ground. "Come here!" his master called, and Tamb' Itam helped to ease her down. It was difficult to separate her fingers. Jim, bending over her, looked earnestly upon her face, and all at once ran to the landing-stage. Tamb' Itam followed him, but turning his head, he saw that she had struggled up to her feet. She ran after them a few steps, then fell down heavily on her knees. "Tuan! Tuan!" called Tamb' Itam, "look back;" but Jim was already in a canoe, standing up paddle in hand. He did not look back. Tamb' Itam had just time to scramble in after him when the canoe floated clear. The girl was then on her knees, with clasped hands, at the water-gate. She remained thus for a time in a supplicating attitude before she sprang up. "You are false!" she screamed out after Jim. "Forgive me," he cried. "Never! Never!" she called back.

'Tamb' Itam took the paddle from Jim's hands, it being unseemly that he should sit while his lord paddled. When they reached the other shore his master forbade him to come any farther; but Tamb' Itam did follow him at a distance, walking up the slope to Doramin's campong.

'It was beginning to grow dark. Torches twinkled here and there. Those they met seemed awestruck, and stood aside hastily to let Jim pass. The wailing of women came

from above. The courtyard was full of armed Bugis with their followers, and of Patusan people.

‘I do not know what this gathering really meant. Were these preparations for war, or for vengeance, or to repulse a threatened invasion? Many days elapsed before the people had ceased to look out, quaking, for the return of the white men with long beards and in rags, whose exact relation to their own white man they could never understand. Even for those simple minds poor Jim remains under a cloud.

‘Doramin, alone! immense and desolate, sat in his arm-chair with the pair of flintlock pistols on his knees, faced by a armed throng. When Jim appeared, at somebody’s exclamation, all the heads turned round together, and then the mass opened right and left, and he walked up a lane of averted glances. Whispers followed him; murmurs: “He has worked all the evil.” “He hath a charm.” . . . He heard them — perhaps!

‘When he came up into the light of torches the wailing of the women ceased suddenly. Doramin did not lift his head, and Jim stood silent before him for a time. Then he looked to the left, and moved in that direction with measured steps. Dain Waris’s mother crouched at the head of the body, and the grey dishevelled hair concealed her face. Jim came up slowly, looked at his dead friend, lifting the sheet, than dropped it without a word. Slowly he walked back.

“‘He came! He came!’” was running from lip to lip, making a murmur to which he moved. “‘He hath taken it upon his own head,’” a voice said aloud. He heard this and turned to the crowd. “‘Yes. Upon my head.’” A few people recoiled. Jim waited awhile before Doramin, and then said gently, “‘I am come in sorrow.’” He waited again. “‘I am come ready and unarmed,’” he repeated.

‘The unwieldy old man, lowering his big forehead like an ox under a yoke, made an effort to rise, clutching at the flintlock pistols on his knees. From his throat came gurgling, choking, inhuman sounds, and his two attendants helped him from behind. People remarked that the ring which he had dropped on his lap fell and rolled against the foot of the white man, and that poor Jim glanced down at the talisman that had opened for him the door of fame, love, and success within the wall of forests fringed with white foam, within the coast that under the western sun looks like the very stronghold of the night. Doramin, struggling to keep his feet, made with his two supporters a swaying, tottering group; his little eyes stared with an expression of mad pain, of rage, with a ferocious glitter, which the bystanders noticed; and then, while Jim stood stiffened and with bared head in the light of torches, looking him straight in the face, he clung heavily with his left arm round the neck of a bowed youth, and lifting deliberately his right, shot his son’s friend through the chest.

‘The crowd, which had fallen apart behind Jim as soon as Doramin had raised his hand, rushed tumultuously forward after the shot. They say that the white man sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead.

‘And that’s the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic. Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions

could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success! For it may very well be that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side.

‘But we can see him, an obscure conqueror of fame, tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism. He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct. Is he satisfied — quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us — and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all? Now he is no more, there are days when the reality of his existence comes to me with an immense, with an overwhelming force; and yet upon my honour there are moments, too when he passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades.

‘Who knows? He is gone, inscrutable at heart, and the poor girl is leading a sort of soundless, inert life in Stein’s house. Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is “preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave . . .” while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies.’

September 1899 — July 1900.

The Inheritors

An Extravagant Story

By

Joseph Conrad & Ford M. Hueffer

“Sardanapalus builded seven cities in a day. Let us eat, drink and sleep, for tomorrow we die.”

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“Ideas,” she said. “Oh, as for ideas — ”

“Well?” I hazarded, “as for ideas — ?”

We went through the old gateway and I cast a glance over my shoulder. The noon sun was shining over the masonry, over the little saints’ effigies, over the little fretted canopies, the grime and the white streaks of bird-dropping.

“There,” I said, pointing toward it, “doesn’t that suggest something to you?”

She made a motion with her head — half negative, half contemptuous.

“But,” I stuttered, “the associations — the ideas — the historical ideas — ”

She said nothing.

“You Americans,” I began, but her smile stopped me. It was as if she were amused at the utterances of an old lady shocked by the habits of the daughters of the day. It was the smile of a person who is confident of superseding one fatally.

In conversations of any length one of the parties assumes the superiority — superiority of rank, intellectual or social. In this conversation she, if she did not attain to tacitly acknowledged temperamental superiority, seemed at least to claim it, to have no doubt as to its ultimate according. I was unused to this. I was a talker, proud of my conversational powers.

I had looked at her before; now I cast a sideways, critical glance at her. I came out of my moodiness to wonder what type this was. She had good hair, good eyes, and some charm. Yes. And something besides — a something — a something that was not an attribute of her beauty. The modelling of her face was so perfect and so delicate as to produce an effect of transparency, yet there was no suggestion of frailness; her glance had an extraordinary strength of life. Her hair was fair and gleaming, her cheeks coloured as if a warm light had fallen on them from somewhere. She was familiar till it occurred to you that she was strange.

“Which way are you going?” she asked.

“I am going to walk to Dover,” I answered.

“And I may come with you?”

I looked at her — intent on divining her in that one glance. It was of course impossible. “There will be time for analysis,” I thought.

“The roads are free to all,” I said. “You are not an American?”

She shook her head. No. She was not an Australian either, she came from none of the British colonies.

“You are not English,” I affirmed. “You speak too well.” I was piqued. She did not answer. She smiled again and I grew angry. In the cathedral she had smiled at the verger’s commendation of particularly abominable restorations, and that smile had drawn me toward her, had emboldened me to offer deferential and condemnatory remarks as to the plaster-of-Paris mouldings. You know how one addresses a young lady who is obviously capable of taking care of herself. That was how I had come across her. She had smiled at the gabble of the cathedral guide as he showed the obsessed troop, of which we had formed units, the place of martyrdom of Blessed Thomas, and her smile had had just that quality of superseder’s contempt. It had pleased me then;

but, now that she smiled thus past me — it was not quite at me — in the crooked highways of the town, I was irritated. After all, I was somebody; I was not a cathedral verger. I had a fancy for myself in those days — a fancy that solitude and brooding had crystallised into a habit of mind. I was a writer with high — with the highest — ideals. I had withdrawn myself from the world, lived isolated, hidden in the countryside, lived as hermits do, on the hope of one day doing something — of putting greatness on paper. She suddenly fathomed my thoughts: “You write,” she affirmed. I asked how she knew, wondered what she had read of mine — there was so little.

“Are you a popular author?” she asked.

“Alas, no!” I answered. “You must know that.”

“You would like to be?”

“We should all of us like,” I answered; “though it is true some of us protest that we aim for higher things.”

“I see,” she said, musingly. As far as I could tell she was coming to some decision. With an instinctive dislike to any such proceeding as regarded myself, I tried to cut across her unknown thoughts.

“But, really — ” I said, “I am quite a commonplace topic. Let us talk about yourself. Where do you come from?”

It occurred to me again that I was intensely unacquainted with her type.

Here was the same smile — as far as I could see, exactly the same smile.

There are fine shades in smiles as in laughs, as in tones of voice. I seemed unable to hold my tongue.

“Where do you come from?” I asked. “You must belong to one of the new nations. You are a foreigner, I’ll swear, because you have such a fine contempt for us. You irritate me so that you might almost be a Prussian. But it is obvious that you are of a new nation that is beginning to find itself.”

“Oh, we are to inherit the earth, if that is what you mean,” she said.

“The phrase is comprehensive,” I said. I was determined not to give myself away. “Where in the world do you come from?” I repeated. The question, I was quite conscious, would have sufficed, but in the hope, I suppose, of establishing my intellectual superiority, I continued:

“You know, fair play’s a jewel. Now I’m quite willing to give you information as to myself. I have already told you the essentials — you ought to tell me something. It would only be fair play.”

“Why should there be any fair play?” she asked.

“What have you to say against that?” I said. “Do you not number it among your national characteristics?”

“You really wish to know where I come from?”

I expressed light-hearted acquiescence.

“Listen,” she said, and uttered some sounds. I felt a kind of unholy emotion. It had come like a sudden, suddenly hushed, intense gust of wind through a breathless day. “What — what!” I cried.

“I said I inhabit the Fourth Dimension.”

I recovered my equanimity with the thought that I had been visited by some stroke of an obscure and unimportant physical kind.

“I think we must have been climbing the hill too fast for me,” I said, “I have not been very well. I missed what you said.” I was certainly out of breath.

“I said I inhabit the Fourth Dimension,” she repeated with admirable gravity.

“Oh, come,” I expostulated, “this is playing it rather low down. You walk a convalescent out of breath and then propound riddles to him.”

I was recovering my breath, and, with it, my inclination to expand. Instead, I looked at her. I was beginning to understand. It was obvious enough that she was a foreigner in a strange land, in a land that brought out her national characteristics. She must be of some race, perhaps Semitic, perhaps Slav — of some incomprehensible race. I had never seen a Circassian, and there used to be a tradition that Circassian women were beautiful, were fair-skinned, and so on. What was repelling in her was accounted for by this difference in national point of view. One is, after all, not so very remote from the horse. What one does not understand one shies at — finds sinister, in fact. And she struck me as sinister.

“You won’t tell me who you are?” I said.

“I have done so,” she answered.

“If you expect me to believe that you inhabit a mathematical monstrosity, you are mistaken. You are, really.”

She turned round and pointed at the city.

“Look!” she said.

We had climbed the western hill. Below our feet, beneath a sky that the wind had swept clean of clouds, was the valley; a broad bowl, shallow, filled with the purple of smoke-wreaths. And above the mass of red roofs there soared the golden stonework of the cathedral tower. It was a vision, the last word of a great art. I looked at her. I was moved, and I knew that the glory of it must have moved her.

She was smiling. “Look!” she repeated. I looked.

There was the purple and the red, and the golden tower, the vision, the last word. She said something — uttered some sound.

What had happened? I don’t know. It all looked contemptible. One seemed to see something beyond, something vaster — vaster than cathedrals, vaster than the conception of the gods to whom cathedrals were raised. The tower reeled out of the perpendicular. One saw beyond it, not roofs, or smoke, or hills, but an unrealised, an unrealisable infinity of space.

It was merely momentary. The tower filled its place again and I looked at her.

“What the devil,” I said, hysterically — “what the devil do you play these tricks upon me for?”

“You see,” she answered, “the rudiments of the sense are there.”

“You must excuse me if I fail to understand,” I said, grasping after fragments of dropped dignity. “I am subject to fits of giddiness.” I felt a need for covering a species of nakedness. “Pardon my swearing,” I added; a proof of recovered equanimity.

We resumed the road in silence. I was physically and mentally shaken; and I tried to deceive myself as to the cause. After some time I said:

“You insist then in preserving your — your incognito.”

“Oh, I make no mystery of myself,” she answered.

“You have told me that you come from the Fourth Dimension,” I remarked, ironically.

“I come from the Fourth Dimension,” she said, patiently. She had the air of one in a position of difficulty; of one aware of it and ready to brave it. She had the listlessness of an enlightened person who has to explain, over and over again, to stupid children some rudimentary point of the multiplication table.

She seemed to divine my thoughts, to be aware of their very wording. She even said “yes” at the opening of her next speech.

“Yes,” she said. “It is as if I were to try to explain the new ideas of any age to a person of the age that has gone before.” She paused, seeking a concrete illustration that would touch me. “As if I were explaining to Dr. Johnson the methods and the ultimate vogue of the cockney school of poetry.”

“I understand,” I said, “that you wish me to consider myself as relatively a Choctaw. But what I do not understand is; what bearing that has upon — upon the Fourth Dimension, I think you said?”

“I will explain,” she replied.

“But you must explain as if you were explaining to a Choctaw,” I said, pleasantly, “you must be concise and convincing.”

She answered: “I will.”

She made a long speech of it; I condense. I can’t remember her exact words — there were so many; but she spoke like a book. There was something exquisitely piquant in her choice of words, in her expressionless voice. I seemed to be listening to a phonograph reciting a technical work. There was a touch of the incongruous, of the mad, that appealed to me — the commonplace rolling-down landscape, the straight, white, undulating road that, from the tops of rises, one saw running for miles and miles, straight, straight, and so white. Filtering down through the great blue of the sky came the thrilling of innumerable skylarks. And I was listening to a parody of a scientific work recited by a phonograph.

I heard the nature of the Fourth Dimension — heard that it was an inhabited plane — invisible to our eyes, but omnipresent; heard that I had seen it when Bell Harry had reeled before my eyes. I heard the Dimensionists described: a race clear-sighted, eminently practical, incredible; with no ideals, prejudices, or remorse; with no feeling for art and no reverence for life; free from any ethical tradition; callous to pain, weakness, suffering and death, as if they had been invulnerable and immortal. She did not say that they were immortal, however. “You would — you will — hate us,” she concluded. And I seemed only then to come to myself. The power of her imagination

was so great that I fancied myself face to face with the truth. I supposed she had been amusing herself; that she should have tried to frighten me was inadmissible. I don't pretend that I was completely at my ease, but I said, amiably: "You certainly have succeeded in making these beings hateful."

"I have made nothing," she said with a faint smile, and went on amusing herself. She would explain origins, now.

"Your" — she used the word as signifying, I suppose, the inhabitants of the country, or the populations of the earth — "your ancestors were mine, but long ago you were crowded out of the Dimension as we are to-day, you overran the earth as we shall do to-morrow. But you contracted diseases, as we shall contract them, — beliefs, traditions; fears; ideas of pity ... of love. You grew luxurious in the worship of your ideals, and sorrowful; you solaced yourselves with creeds, with arts — you have forgotten!"

She spoke with calm conviction; with an overwhelming and dispassionate assurance. She was stating facts; not professing a faith. We approached a little roadside inn. On a bench before the door a dun-clad country fellow was asleep, his head on the table.

"Put your fingers in your ears," my companion commanded.

I humoured her.

I saw her lips move. The countryman started, shuddered, and by a clumsy, convulsive motion of his arms, upset his quart. He rubbed his eyes. Before he had voiced his emotions we had passed on.

"I have seen a horse-coper do as much for a stallion," I commented. "I know there are words that have certain effects. But you shouldn't play pranks like the low-comedy devil in Faustus."

"It isn't good form, I suppose?" she sneered.

"It's a matter of feeling," I said, hotly, "the poor fellow has lost his beer."

"What's that to me?" she commented, with the air of one affording a concrete illustration.

"It's a good deal to him," I answered.

"But what to me?"

I said nothing. She ceased her exposition immediately afterward, growing silent as suddenly as she had become discursive. It was rather as if she had learnt a speech by heart and had come to the end of it. I was quite at a loss as to what she was driving at. There was a newness, a strangeness about her; sometimes she struck me as mad, sometimes as frightfully sane. We had a meal somewhere — a meal that broke the current of her speech — and then, in the late afternoon, took a by-road and wandered in secluded valleys. I had been ill; trouble of the nerves, brooding, the monotony of life in the shadow of unsuccess. I had an errand in this part of the world and had been approaching it deviously, seeking the normal in its quiet hollows, trying to get back to my old self. I did not wish to think of how I should get through the year — of the thousand little things that matter. So I talked and she — she listened very well.

But topics exhaust themselves and, at the last, I myself brought the talk round to the Fourth Dimension. We were sauntering along the forgotten valley that lies between

Hardves and Stelling Minnis; we had been silent for several minutes. For me, at least, the silence was pregnant with the undefinable emotions that, at times, run in currents between man and woman. The sun was getting low and it was shadowy in those shrouded hollows. I laughed at some thought, I forget what, and then began to badger her with questions. I tried to exhaust the possibilities of the Dimensionist idea, made grotesque suggestions. I said: "And when a great many of you have been crowded out of the Dimension and invaded the earth you will do so and so —" something preposterous and ironical. She coldly dissented, and at once the irony appeared as gross as the jocularity of a commercial traveller. Sometimes she signified: "Yes, that is what we shall do;" signified it without speaking — by some gesture perhaps, I hardly know what. There was something impressive — something almost regal — in this manner of hers; it was rather frightening in those lonely places, which were so forgotten, so gray, so closed in. There was something of the past world about the hanging woods, the little veils of unmoving mist — as if time did not exist in those furrows of the great world; and one was so absolutely alone; anything might have happened. I grew weary of the sound of my tongue. But when I wanted to cease, I found she had on me the effect of some incredible stimulant.

We came to the end of the valley where the road begins to climb the southern hill, out into the open air. I managed to maintain an uneasy silence. From her grimly dispassionate reiterations I had attained to a clear idea, even to a visualisation, of her fantastic conception — allegory, madness, or whatever it was. She certainly forced it home. The Dimensionists were to come in swarms, to materialise, to devour like locusts, to be all the more irresistible because indistinguishable. They were to come like snow in the night: in the morning one would look out and find the world white; they were to come as the gray hairs come, to sap the strength of us as the years sap the strength of the muscles. As to methods, we should be treated as we ourselves treat the inferior races. There would be no fighting, no killing; we — our whole social system — would break as a beam snaps, because we were worm-eaten with altruism and ethics. We, at our worst, had a certain limit, a certain stage where we exclaimed: "No, this is playing it too low down," because we had scruples that acted like handicapping weights. She uttered, I think, only two sentences of connected words: "We shall race with you and we shall not be weighted," and, "We shall merely sink you lower by our weight." All the rest went like this:

"But then," I would say ... "we shall not be able to trust anyone. Anyone may be one of you...." She would answer: "Anyone." She prophesied a reign of terror for us. As one passed one's neighbour in the street one would cast sudden, piercing glances at him.

I was silent. The birds were singing the sun down. It was very dark among the branches, and from minute to minute the colours of the world deepened and grew sombre.

"But —" I said. A feeling of unrest was creeping over me. "But why do you tell me all this?" I asked. "Do you think I will enlist with you?"

“You will have to in the end,” she said, “and I do not wish to waste my strength. If you had to work unwittingly you would resist and resist and resist. I should have to waste my power on you. As it is, you will resist only at first, then you will begin to understand. You will see how we will bring a man down — a man, you understand, with a great name, standing for probity and honour. You will see the nets drawing closer and closer, and you will begin to understand. Then you will cease resisting, that is all.”

I was silent. A June nightingale began to sing, a trifle hoarsely. We seemed to be waiting for some signal. The things of the night came and went, rustled through the grass, rustled through the leafage. At last I could not even see the white gleam of her face....

I stretched out my hand and it touched hers. I seized it without an instant of hesitation. “How could I resist you?” I said, and heard my own whisper with a kind of amazement at its emotion. I raised her hand. It was very cold and she seemed to have no thought of resistance; but before it touched my lips something like a panic of prudence had overcome me. I did not know what it would lead to — and I remembered that I did not even know who she was. From the beginning she had struck me as sinister and now, in the obscurity, her silence and her coldness seemed to be a passive threatening of unknown entanglement. I let her hand fall.

“We must be getting on,” I said.

The road was shrouded and overhung by branches. There was a kind of translucent light, enough to see her face, but I kept my eyes on the ground. I was vexed. Now that it was past the episode appeared to be a lost opportunity. We were to part in a moment, and her rare mental gifts and her unfamiliar, but very vivid, beauty made the idea of parting intensely disagreeable. She had filled me with a curiosity that she had done nothing whatever to satisfy, and with a fascination that was very nearly a fear. We mounted the hill and came out on a stretch of soft common sward. Then the sound of our footsteps ceased and the world grew more silent than ever. There were little enclosed fields all round us. The moon threw a wan light, and gleaming mist hung in the ragged hedges. Broad, soft roads ran away into space on every side.

“And now ...” I asked, at last, “shall we ever meet again?” My voice came huskily, as if I had not spoken for years and years.

“Oh, very often,” she answered.

“Very often?” I repeated. I hardly knew whether I was pleased or dismayed. Through the gate-gap in a hedge, I caught a glimmer of a white house front. It seemed to belong to another world; to another order of things.

“Ah ... here is Callan’s,” I said. “This is where I was going....”

“I know,” she answered; “we part here.”

“To meet again?” I asked.

“Oh ... to meet again; why, yes, to meet again.”

Chapter 2

Her figure faded into the darkness, as pale things waver down into deep water, and as soon as she disappeared my sense of humour returned. The episode appeared more clearly, as a flirtation with an enigmatic, but decidedly charming, chance travelling companion. The girl was a riddle, and a riddle once guessed is a very trivial thing. She, too, would be a very trivial thing when I had found a solution. It occurred to me that she wished me to regard her as a symbol, perhaps, of the future — as a type of those who are to inherit the earth, in fact. She had been playing the fool with me, in her insolent modernity. She had wished me to understand that I was old-fashioned; that the frame of mind of which I and my fellows were the inheritors was over and done with. We were to be compulsorily retired; to stand aside superannuated. It was obvious that she was better equipped for the swiftness of life. She had a something — not only quickness of wit, not only ruthless determination, but a something quite different and quite indefinably more impressive. Perhaps it was only the confidence of the superseder, the essential quality that makes for the empire of the Occidental. But I was not a negro — not even relatively a Hindoo. I was somebody, confound it, I was somebody.

As an author, I had been so uniformly unsuccessful, so absolutely unrecognised, that I had got into the way of regarding myself as ahead of my time, as a worker for posterity. It was a habit of mind — the only revenge that I could take upon despiteful Fate. This girl came to confound me with the common herd — she declared herself to be that very posterity for which I worked.

She was probably a member of some clique that called themselves Fourth Dimensionists — just as there had been pre-Raphaelites. It was a matter of cant allegory. I began to wonder how it was that I had never heard of them. And how on earth had they come to hear of me!

“She must have read something of mine,” I found myself musing: “the Jenkins story perhaps. It must have been the Jenkins story; they gave it a good place in their rotten magazine. She must have seen that it was the real thing, and....” When one is an author one looks at things in that way, you know.

By that time I was ready to knock at the door of the great Callan. I seemed to be jerked into the commonplace medium of a great, great — oh, an infinitely great — novelist’s home life. I was led into a well-lit drawing-room, welcomed by the great man’s wife, gently propelled into a bedroom, made myself tidy, descended and was introduced into the sanctum, before my eyes had grown accustomed to the lamp-light. Callan was seated upon his sofa surrounded by an admiring crowd of very local personages. I forget

what they looked like. I think there was a man whose reddish beard did not become him and another whose face might have been improved by the addition of a reddish beard; there was also an extremely moody dark man and I vaguely recollect a person who lisped.

They did not talk much; indeed there was very little conversation. What there was Callan supplied. He — spoke — very — slowly — and — very — authoritatively, like a great actor whose aim is to hold the stage as long as possible. The raising of his heavy eyelids at the opening door conveyed the impression of a dark, mental weariness; and seemed somehow to give additional length to his white nose. His short, brown beard was getting very grey, I thought. With his lofty forehead and with his superior, yet propitiatory smile, I was of course familiar. Indeed one saw them on posters in the street. The notables did not want to talk. They wanted to be spell-bound — and they were. Callan sat there in an appropriate attitude — the one in which he was always photographed. One hand supported his head, the other toyed with his watch-chain. His face was uniformly solemn, but his eyes were disconcertingly furtive. He cross-questioned me as to my walk from Canterbury; remarked that the cathedral was a — magnificent — Gothic — Monument and set me right as to the lie of the roads. He seemed pleased to find that I remembered very little of what I ought to have noticed on the way. It gave him an opportunity for the display of his local erudition.

“A — remarkable woman — used — to — live — in — the — cottage — next — the — mill — at — Stelling,” he said; “she was the original of Kate Wingfield.”

“In your ‘Boldero?’” the chorus chorussed.

Remembrance of the common at Stelling — of the glimmering white faces of the shadowy cottages — was like a cold waft of mist to me. I forgot to say “Indeed!”

“She was — a very — remarkable — woman — She — — ”

I found myself wondering which was real; the common with its misty hedges and the blurred moon; or this room with its ranks of uniformly bound books and its bust of the great man that threw a portentous shadow upward from its pedestal behind the lamp.

Before I had entirely recovered myself, the notables were departing to catch the last train. I was left alone with Callan.

He did not trouble to resume his attitude for me, and when he did speak, spoke faster.

“Interesting man, Mr. Jinks?” he said; “you recognised him?”

“No,” I said; “I don’t think I ever met him.”

Callan looked annoyed.

“I thought I’d got him pretty well. He’s Hector Steele. In my ‘Blanfield,’” he added.

“Indeed!” I said. I had never been able to read “Blanfield.” “Indeed, ah, yes — of course.”

There was an awkward pause.

"The whiskey will be here in a minute," he said, suddenly. "I don't have it in when Whatnot's here. He's the Rector, you know; a great temperance man. When we've had a — a modest quencher — we'll get to business."

"Oh," I said, "your letters really meant — "

"Of course," he answered. "Oh, here's the whiskey. Well now, Fox was down here the other night. You know Fox, of course?"

"Didn't he start the rag called — ?"

"Yes, yes," Callan answered, hastily, "he's been very successful in launching papers. Now he's trying his hand with a new one. He's any amount of backers — big names, you know. He's to run my next as a feuilleton. This — this venture is to be rather more serious in tone than any that he's done hitherto. You understand?"

"Why, yes," I said; "but I don't see where I come in."

Callan took a meditative sip of whiskey, added a little more water, a little more whiskey, and then found the mixture to his liking.

"You see," he said, "Fox got a letter here to say that Wilkinson had died suddenly — some affection of the heart. Wilkinson was to have written a series of personal articles on prominent people. Well, Fox was nonplussed and I put in a word for you."

"I'm sure I'm much — " I began.

"Not at all, not at all," Callan interrupted, blandly. "I've known you and you've known me for a number of years."

A sudden picture danced before my eyes — the portrait of the Callan of the old days — the fawning, shady individual, with the seedy clothes, the furtive eyes and the obliging manners.

"Why, yes," I said; "but I don't see that that gives me any claim."

Callan cleared his throat.

"The lapse of time," he said in his grand manner, "rivets what we may call the bands of association."

He paused to inscribe this sentence on the tablets of his memory. It would be dragged in — to form a purple patch — in his new serial.

"You see," he went on, "I've written a good deal of autobiographical matter and it would verge upon self-advertisement to do more. You know how much I dislike that. So I showed Fox your sketch in the Kensington."

"The Jenkins story?" I said. "How did you come to see it?"

"Then send me the Kensington," he answered. There was a touch of sourness in his tone, and I remembered that the Kensington I had seen had been ballasted with seven goodly pages by Callan himself — seven unreadable packed pages of a serial.

"As I was saying," Callan began again, "you ought to know me very well, and I suppose you are acquainted with my books. As for the rest, I will give you what material you want."

"But, my dear Callan," I said, "I've never tried my hand at that sort of thing."

Callan silenced me with a wave of his hand.

"It struck both Fox and myself that your — your 'Jenkins' was just what was wanted," he said; "of course, that was a study of a kind of broken-down painter. But it was well done."

I bowed my head. Praise from Callan was best acknowledged in silence.

"You see, what we want, or rather what Fox wants," he explained, "is a kind of series of studies of celebrities chez eux. Of course, they are not broken down. But if you can treat them as you treated Jenkins — get them in their studies, surrounded by what in their case stands for the broken lay figures and the faded serge curtains — it will be exactly the thing. It will be a new line, or rather — what is a great deal better, mind you — an old line treated in a slightly, very slightly different way. That's what the public wants."

"Ah, yes," I said, "that's what the public wants. But all the same, it's been done time out of mind before. Why, I've seen photographs of you and your arm-chair and your pen-wiper and so on, half a score of times in the sixpenny magazines."

Callan again indicated bland superiority with a wave of his hand.

"You undervalue yourself," he said.

I murmured — "Thanks."

"This is to be — not a mere pandering to curiosity — but an attempt to get at the inside of things — to get the atmosphere, so to speak; not merely to catalogue furniture."

He was quoting from the prospectus of the new paper, and then cleared his throat for the utterance of a tremendous truth.

"Photography — is not — Art," he remarked.

The fantastic side of our colloquy began to strike me.

"After all," I thought to myself, "why shouldn't that girl have played at being a denizen of another sphere? She did it ever so much better than Callan. She did it too well, I suppose."

"The price is very decent," Callan chimed in. "I don't know how much per thousand, ...but...."

I found myself reckoning, against my will as it were.

"You'll do it, I suppose?" he said.

I thought of my debts ... "Why, yes, I suppose so," I answered. "But who are the others that I am to provide with atmospheres?"

Callan shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all sorts of prominent people — soldiers, statesmen, Mr. Churchill, the Foreign Minister, artists, preachers — all sorts of people."

"All sorts of glory," occurred to me.

"The paper will stand expenses up to a reasonable figure," Callan reassured me.

"It'll be a good joke for a time," I said. "I'm infinitely obliged to you."

He warded off my thanks with both hands.

"I'll just send a wire to Fox to say that you accept," he said, rising. He seated himself at his desk in the appropriate attitude. He had an appropriate attitude for

every vicissitude of his life. These he had struck before so many people that even in the small hours of the morning he was ready for the kodak wielder. Beside him he had every form of labour-saver; every kind of literary knick-knack. There were book-holders that swung into positions suitable to appropriate attitudes; there were piles of little green boxes with red capital letters of the alphabet upon them, and big red boxes with black small letters. There was a writing-lamp that cast an æsthetic glow upon another appropriate attitude — and there was one typewriter with note-paper upon it, and another with MS. paper already in position.

“My God!” I thought — ”to these heights the Muse soars.”

As I looked at the gleaming pillars of the typewriters, the image of my own desk appeared to me; chipped, ink-stained, gloriously dusty. I thought that when again I lit my battered old tin lamp I should see ashes and match-ends; a tobacco-jar, an old gnawed penny penholder, bits of pink blotting-paper, match-boxes, old letters, and dust everywhere. And I knew that my attitude — when I sat at it — would be inappropriate.

Callan was ticking off the telegram upon his machine. “It will go in the morning at eight,” he said.

Chapter 3

To encourage me, I suppose, Callan gave me the proof-sheets of his next to read in bed. The thing was so bad that it nearly sickened me of him and his jobs. I tried to read the stuff; to read it conscientiously, to read myself to sleep with it. I was under obligations to old Cal and I wanted to do him justice, but the thing was impossible. I fathomed a sort of a plot. It dealt in fratricide with a touch of adultery; a Great Moral Purpose loomed in the background. It would have been a dully readable novel but for that; as it was, it was intolerable. It was amazing that Cal himself could put out such stuff; that he should have the impudence. He was not a fool, not by any means a fool. It revolted me more than a little.

I came to it out of a different plane of thought. I may not have been able to write then — or I may; but I did know enough to recognise the flagrantly, the indecently bad, and, upon my soul, the idea that I, too, must cynically offer this sort of stuff if I was ever to sell my tens of thousands very nearly sent me back to my solitude. Callan had begun very much as I was beginning now; he had even, I believe, had ideals in his youth and had starved a little. It was rather trying to think that perhaps I was really no more than another Callan, that, when at last I came to review my life, I should have much such a record to look back upon. It disgusted me a little, and when I put out the light the horrors settled down upon me.

I woke in a shivering frame of mind, ashamed to meet Callan's eye. It was as if he must be aware of my over-night thoughts, as if he must think me a fool who quarrelled with my victuals. He gave no signs of any such knowledge — was dignified, cordial; discussed his breakfast with gusto, opened his letters, and so on. An anæmic amanuensis was taking notes for appropriate replies. How could I tell him that I would not do the work, that I was too proud and all the rest of it? He would have thought me a fool, would have stiffened into hostility, I should have lost my last chance. And, in the broad light of day, I was loath to do that.

He began to talk about indifferent things; we glided out on to a current of mediocre conversation. The psychical moment, if there were any such, disappeared.

Someone bearing my name had written to express an intention of offering personal worship that afternoon. The prospect seemed to please the great Cal. He was used to such things; he found them pay, I suppose. We began desultorily to discuss the possibility of the writer's being a relation of mine; I doubted. I had no relations that I knew of; there was a phenomenal old aunt who had inherited the acres and respectability of the Etchingam Grangers, but she was not the kind of person to worship a novelist. I, the poor last of the family, was without the pale, simply because I, too, was a novelist.

I explained these things to Callan and he commented on them, found it strange how small or how large, I forget which, the world was. Since his own apotheosis shoals of Callans had claimed relationship.

I ate my breakfast. Afterward, we set about the hatching of that article — the thought of it sickens me even now. You will find it in the volume along with the others; you may see how I lugged in Callan's surroundings, his writing-room, his dining-room, the romantic arbour in which he found it easy to write love-scenes, the clipped trees like peacocks and the trees clipped like bears, and all the rest of the background for appropriate attitudes. He was satisfied with any arrangements of words that suggested a gentle awe on the part of the writer.

"Yes, yes," he said once or twice, "that's just the touch, just the touch — very nice. But don't you think..." We lunched after some time.

I was so happy. Quite pathetically happy. It had come so easy to me. I had doubted my ability to do the sort of thing; but it had written itself, as money spends itself, and I was going to earn money like that. The whole of my past seemed a mistake — a childishness. I had kept out of this sort of thing because I had thought it below me; I had kept out of it and had starved my body and warped my mind. Perhaps I had even damaged my work by this isolation. To understand life one must live — and I had only brooded. But, by Jove, I would try to live now.

Callan had retired for his accustomed siesta and I was smoking pipe after pipe over a confoundedly bad French novel that I had found in the book-shelves. I must have been dozing. A voice from behind my back announced:

"Miss Etchingham Granger!" and added — "Mr. Callan will be down directly." I laid down my pipe, wondered whether I ought to have been smoking when Cal expected visitors, and rose to my feet.

"You!" I said, sharply. She answered, "You see." She was smiling. She had been so much in my thoughts that I was hardly surprised — the thing had even an air of pleasant inevitability about it.

"You must be a cousin of mine," I said, "the name — "

"Oh, call it sister," she answered.

I was feeling inclined for farce, if blessed chance would throw it in my way. You see, I was going to live at last, and life for me meant irresponsibility.

"Ah!" I said, ironically, "you are going to be a sister to me, as they say." She might have come the bogy over me last night in the moonlight, but now ... There was a spice of danger about it, too, just a touch lurking somewhere. Besides, she was good-looking and well set up, and I couldn't see what could touch me. Even if it did, even if I got into a mess, I had no relatives, not even a friend, to be worried about me. I stood quite alone, and I half relished the idea of getting into a mess — it would be part of life, too. I was going to have a little money, and she excited my curiosity. I was tingling to know what she was really at.

"And one might ask," I said, "what you are doing in this — in this..." I was at a loss for a word to describe the room — the smugness parading as professional Bohemianism.

“Oh, I am about my own business,” she said, “I told you last night — have you forgotten?”

“Last night you were to inherit the earth,” I reminded her, “and one doesn’t start in a place like this. Now I should have gone — well — I should have gone to some politician’s house — a cabinet minister’s — say to Gurnard’s. He’s the coming man, isn’t he?”

“Why, yes,” she answered, “he’s the coming man.”

You will remember that, in those days, Gurnard was only the dark horse of the ministry. I knew little enough of these things, despised politics generally; they simply didn’t interest me. Gurnard I disliked platonically; perhaps because his face was a little enigmatic — a little repulsive. The country, then, was in the position of having no Opposition and a Cabinet with two distinct strains in it — the Churchill and the Gurnard — and Gurnard was the dark horse.

“Oh, you should join your flats,” I said, pleasantly. “If he’s the coming man, where do you come in?... Unless he, too, is a Dimensionist.”

“Oh, both — both,” she answered. I admired the tranquillity with which she converted my points into her own. And I was very happy — it struck me as a pleasant sort of fooling....

“I suppose you will let me know some day who you are?” I said.

“I have told you several times,” she answered.

“Oh, you won’t frighten me to-day,” I asserted, “not here, you know, and anyhow, why should you want to?”

“I have told you,” she said again.

“You’ve told me you were my sister,” I said; “but my sister died years and years ago. Still, if it suits you, if you want to be somebody’s sister ...”

“It suits me,” she answered — “I want to be placed, you see.”

I knew that my name was good enough to place anyone. We had been the Grangers of Etchingam since — oh, since the flood. And if the girl wanted to be my sister and a Granger, why the devil shouldn’t she, so long as she would let me continue on this footing? I hadn’t talked to a woman — not to a well set-up one — for ages and ages. It was as if I had come back from one of the places to which younger sons exile themselves, and for all I knew it might be the correct thing for girls to elect brothers nowadays in one set or another.

“Oh, tell me some more,” I said, “one likes to know about one’s sister. You and the Right Honourable Charles Gurnard are Dimensionists, and who are the others of your set?”

“There is only one,” she answered. And would you believe it! — it seems he was Fox, the editor of my new paper.

“You select your characters with charming indiscriminateness,” I said.

“Fox is only a sort of toad, you know — he won’t get far.”

“Oh, he’ll go far,” she answered, “but he won’t get there. Fox is fighting against us.”

“Oh, so you don’t dwell in amity?” I said. “You fight for your own hands.”

“We fight for our own hands,” she answered, “I shall throw Gurnard over when he’s pulled the chestnuts out of the fire.”

I was beginning to get a little tired of this. You see, for me, the scene was a veiled flirtation and I wanted to get on. But I had to listen to her fantastic scheme of things. It was really a duel between Fox, the Journal-founder, and Gurnard, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Fox, with Churchill, the Foreign Minister, and his supporters, for pieces, played what he called “the Old Morality business” against Gurnard, who passed for a cynically immoral politician.

I grew more impatient. I wanted to get out of this stage into something more personal. I thought she invented this sort of stuff to keep me from getting at her errand at Callan’s. But I didn’t want to know her errand; I wanted to make love to her. As for Fox and Gurnard and Churchill, the Foreign Minister, who really was a sympathetic character and did stand for political probity, she might be uttering allegorical truths, but I was not interested in them. I wanted to start some topic that would lead away from this Dimensionist farce.

“My dear sister,” I began.... Callan always moved about like a confounded eavesdropper, wore carpet slippers, and stepped round the corners of screens. I expect he got copy like that.

“So, she’s your sister?” he said suddenly, from behind me. “Strange that you shouldn’t recognise the handwriting...”

“Oh, we don’t correspond,” I said light-heartedly, “we are so different.” I wanted to take a rise out of the creeping animal that he was. He confronted her blandly.

“You must be the little girl that I remember,” he said. He had known my parents ages ago. That, indeed, was how I came to know him; I wouldn’t have chosen him for a friend. “I thought Granger said you were dead ... but one gets confused...”

“Oh, we see very little of each other,” she answered. “Arthur might have said I was dead — he’s capable of anything, you know.” She spoke with an assumption of sisterly indifference that was absolutely striking. I began to think she must be an actress of genius, she did it so well. She was the sister who had remained within the pale; I, the rapsallion of a brother whose vagaries were trying to his relations. That was the note she struck, and she maintained it. I didn’t know what the deuce she was driving at, and I didn’t care. These scenes with a touch of madness appealed to me. I was going to live, and here, apparently, was a woman ready to my hand. Besides, she was making a fool of Callan, and that pleased me. His patronising manners had irritated me.

I assisted rather silently. They began to talk of mutual acquaintances — as one talks. They both seemed to know everyone in this world. She gave herself the airs of being quite in the inner ring; alleged familiarity with quite impossible persons, with my portentous aunt, with Cabinet Ministers — that sort of people. They talked about them — she, as if she lived among them; he, as if he tried very hard to live up to them.

She affected reverence for his person, plied him with compliments that he swallowed raw — horribly raw. It made me shudder a little; it was tragic to see the little great man confronted with that woman. It shocked me to think that, really, I must appear

much like him — must have looked like that yesterday. He was a little uneasy, I thought, made little confidences as if in spite of himself; little confidences about the Hour, the new paper for which I was engaged. It seemed to be run by a small gang with quite a number of assorted axes to grind. There was some foreign financier — a person of position whom she knew (a noble man in the best sense, Callan said); there was some politician (she knew him too, and he was equally excellent, so Callan said), Mr. Churchill himself, an artist or so, an actor or so — and Callan. They all wanted a little backing, so it seemed. Callan, of course, put it in another way. The Great — Moral — Purpose turned up, I don't know why. He could not think he was taking me in and she obviously knew more about the people concerned than he did. But there it was, looming large, and quite as farcical as all the rest of it. The foreign financier — they called him the Duc de Mersch — was by way of being a philanthropist on megalomaniac lines. For some international reason he had been allowed to possess himself of the pleasant land of Greenland. There was gold in it and train-oil in it and other things that paid — but the Duc de Mersch was not thinking of that. He was first and foremost a State Founder, or at least he was that after being titular ruler of some little spot of a Teutonic grand-duchy. No one of the great powers would let any other of the great powers possess the country, so it had been handed over to the Duc de Mersch, who had at heart, said Cal, the glorious vision of founding a model state — the model state, in which washed and broadclothed Esquimaux would live, side by side, regenerated lives, enfranchised equals of choicely selected younger sons of whatever occidental race. It was that sort of thing. I was even a little overpowered, in spite of the fact that Callan was its trumpeter; there was something fine about the conception and Churchill's acquiescence seemed to guarantee an honesty in its execution.

The Duc de Mersch wanted money, and he wanted to run a railway across Greenland. His idea was that the British public should supply the money and the British Government back the railway, as they did in the case of a less philanthropic Suez Canal. In return he offered an eligible harbour and a strip of coast at one end of the line; the British public was to be repaid in casks of train-oil and gold and with the consciousness of having aided in letting the light in upon a dark spot of the earth. So the Duc de Mersch started the Hour. The Hour was to extol the Duc de Mersch's moral purpose; to pat the Government's back; influence public opinion; and generally advance the cause of the System for the Regeneration of the Arctic Regions.

I tell the story rather flippantly, because I heard it from Callan, and because it was impossible to take him seriously. Besides, I was not very much interested in the thing itself. But it did interest me to see how deftly she pumped him — squeezed him dry.

I was even a little alarmed for poor old Cal. After all, the man had done me a service; had got me a job. As for her, she struck me as a potentially dangerous person. One couldn't tell, she might be some adventuress, or if not that, a speculator who would damage Cal's little schemes. I put it to her plainly afterward; and quarrelled with her as well as I could. I drove her down to the station. Callan must have been distinctly impressed or he would never have had out his trap for her.

“You know,” I said to her, “I won’t have you play tricks with Callan — not while you’re using my name. It’s very much at your service as far as I’m concerned — but, confound it, if you’re going to injure him I shall have to show you up — to tell him.”

“You couldn’t, you know,” she said, perfectly calmly, “you’ve let yourself in for it. He wouldn’t feel pleased with you for letting it go as far as it has. You’d lose your job, and you’re going to live, you know — you’re going to live...”

I was taken aback by this veiled threat in the midst of the pleasantries. It wasn’t fair play — not at all fair play. I recovered some of my old alarm, remembered that she really was a dangerous person; that ...

“But I sha’n’t hurt Callan,” she said, suddenly, “you may make your mind easy.”

“You really won’t?” I asked.

“Really not,” she answered. It relieved me to believe her. I did not want to quarrel with her. You see, she fascinated me, she seemed to act as a stimulant, to set me tingling somehow — and to baffle me.... And there was truth in what she said. I had let myself in for it, and I didn’t want to lose Callan’s job by telling him I had made a fool of him.

“I don’t care about anything else,” I said. She smiled.

Chapter 4

I went up to town bearing the Callan article, and a letter of warm commendation from Callan to Fox. I had been very docile; had accepted emendations; had lavished praise, had been unctuous and yet had contrived to retain the dignified savour of the editorial “we.” Callan himself asked no more.

I was directed to seek Fox out — to find him immediately. The matter was growing urgent. Fox was not at the office — the brand new office that I afterward saw pass through the succeeding stages of business-like comfort and dusty neglect. I was directed to ask for him at the stage door of the Buckingham.

I waited in the doorkeeper’s glass box at the Buckingham. I was eyed by the suspicious commissioner with the contempt reserved for resting actors. Resting actors are hungry suppliants as a rule. Call-boys sought Mr. Fox. “Anybody seen Mr. Fox? He’s gone to lunch.”

“Mr. Fox is out,” said the commissioner.

I explained that the matter was urgent. More call-boys disappeared through the folding doors. Unenticing personages passed the glass box, casting hostile glances askance at me on my high stool. A message came back.

“If it’s Mr. Etchingham Granger, he’s to follow Mr. Fox to Mrs. Hartly’s at once.”

I followed Mr. Fox to Mrs. Hartly’s — to a little flat in a neighbourhood that I need not specify. The eminent journalist was lunching with the eminent actress. A husband was in attendance — a nonentity with a heavy yellow moustache, who hummed and hawed over his watch.

Mr. Fox was full-faced, with a persuasive, peremptory manner. Mrs. Hartly was — well, she was just Mrs. Hartly. You remember how we all fell in love with her figure and her manner, and her voice, and the way she used her hands. She broke her bread with those very hands; spoke to her husband with that very voice, and rose from table with that same graceful management of her limp skirts. She made eyes at me; at her husband; at little Fox, at the man who handed the asparagus — great round grey eyes. She was just the same. The curtain never fell on that eternal dress rehearsal. I don’t wonder the husband was forever looking at his watch.

Mr. Fox was a friend of the house. He dispensed with ceremony, read my manuscript over his Roquefort, and seemed to find it add to the savour.

“You are going to do me for Mr. Fox,” Mrs. Hartly said, turning her large grey eyes upon me. They were very soft. They seemed to send out waves of intense sympathetism. I thought of those others that had shot out a razor-edged ray.

“Why,” I answered, “there was some talk of my doing somebody for the Hour.”

Fox put my manuscript under his empty tumbler.

“Yes,” he said, sharply. “He will do, I think. H’m, yes. Why, yes.”

“You’re a friend of Mr. Callan’s, aren’t you?” Mrs. Hartly asked, “What a dear, nice man he is! You should see him at rehearsals. You know I’m doing his ‘Boldero’; he’s given me a perfectly lovely part — perfectly lovely. And the trouble he takes. He tries every chair on the stage.”

“H’m; yes,” Fox interjected, “he likes to have his own way.”

“We all like that,” the great actress said. She was quoting from her first great part. I thought — but, perhaps, I was mistaken — that all her utterances were quotations from her first great part. Her husband looked at his watch.

“Are you coming to this confounded flower show?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said, turning her mysterious eyes upon him, “I’ll go and get ready.”

She disappeared through an inner door. I expected to hear the pistol-shot and the heavy fall from the next room. I forgot that it was not the end of the fifth act.

Fox put my manuscript into his breast pocket.

“Come along, Granger,” he said to me, “I want to speak to you. You’ll have plenty of opportunity for seeing Mrs. Hartly, I expect. She’s tenth on your list. Good-day, Hartly.”

Hartly’s hand was wavering between his moustache and his watch pocket.

“Good-day,” he said sulkily.

“You must come and see me again, Mr. Granger,” Mrs. Hartly said from the door. “Come to the Buckingham and see how we’re getting on with your friend’s play. We must have a good long talk if you’re to get my local colour, as Mr. Fox calls it.”

“To gild refined gold; to paint the lily,

To throw a perfume on the violet — ”

I quoted banally.

“That’s it,” she said, with a tender smile. She was fastening a button in her glove. I doubt her recognition of the quotation.

When we were in our hansom, Fox began:

“I’m relieved by what I’ve seen of your copy. One didn’t expect this sort of thing from you. You think it a bit below you, don’t you? Oh, I know, I know. You literary people are usually so impracticable; you know what I mean. Callan said you were the man. Callan has his uses; but one has something else to do with one’s paper. I’ve got interests of my own. But you’ll do; it’s all right. You don’t mind my being candid, do you, now?” I muttered that I rather liked it.

“Well then,” he went on, “now I see my way.”

“I’m glad you do,” I murmured. “I wish I did.”

“Oh, that will be all right,” Fox comforted. “I dare say Callan has rather sickened you of the job; particularly if you ain’t used to it. But you won’t find the others as trying. There’s Churchill now, he’s your next. You’ll have to mind him. You’ll find him a decent chap. Not a bit of side on him.”

“What Churchill?” I asked.

“The Foreign Minister.”

“The devil,” I said.

“Oh, you’ll find him all right,” Fox reassured; “you’re to go down to his place to-morrow. It’s all arranged. Here we are. Hop out.” He suited his own action to his words and ran nimbly up the new terra-cotta steps of the Hour’s home. He left me to pay the cabman.

When I rejoined him he was giving directions to an invisible somebody through folding doors.

“Come along,” he said, breathlessly. “Can’t see him,” he added to a little boy, who held a card in his hands. “Tell him to go to Mr. Evans. One’s life isn’t one’s own here,” he went on, when he had reached his own room.

It was a palatial apartment furnished in white and gold — Louis Quinze, or something of the sort — with very new decorations after Watteau covering the walls. The process of disfiguration, however, had already begun. A roll desk of the least possible Louis Quinze order stood in one of the tall windows; the carpet was marked by muddy footprints, and a matchboard screen had been run across one end of the room.

“Hullo, Evans,” Fox shouted across it, “just see that man from Grant’s, will you? Heard from the Central News yet?”

He was looking through the papers on the desk.

“Not yet, I’ve just rung them up for the fifth time,” the answer came.

“Keep on at it,” Fox exhorted.

“Here’s Churchill’s letter,” he said to me. “Have an arm-chair; those blasted things are too uncomfortable for anything. Make yourself comfortable. I’ll be back in a minute.”

I took an arm-chair and addressed myself to the Foreign Minister’s letter. It expressed bored tolerance of a potential interviewer, but it seemed to please Fox. He ran into the room, snatched up a paper from his desk, and ran out again.

“Read Churchill’s letter?” he asked, in passing. “I’ll tell you all about it in a minute.” I don’t know what he expected me to do with it — kiss the postage stamp, perhaps.

At the same time, it was pleasant to sit there idle in the midst of the hurry, the breathlessness. I seemed to be at last in contact with real life, with the life that matters. I was somebody, too. Fox treated me with a kind of deference — as if I were a great unknown. His “you literary men” was pleasing. It was the homage that the pretender pays to the legitimate prince; the recognition due to the real thing from the machine-made imitation; the homage of the builder to the architect.

“Ah, yes,” it seemed to say, “we jobbing men run up our rows and rows of houses; build whole towns and fill the papers for years. But when we want something special — something monumental — we have to come to you.”

Fox came in again.

“Very sorry, my dear fellow, find I can’t possibly get a moment for a chat with you. Look here, come and dine with me at the Paragraph round the corner — to-night at six sharp. You’ll go to Churchill’s to-morrow.”

The Paragraph Club, where I was to meet Fox, was one of those sporadic establishments that spring up in the neighbourhood of the Strand. It is one of their qualities that they are always just round the corner; another, that their stewards are too familiar; another, that they — in the opinion of the other members — are run too much for the convenience of one in particular.

In this case it was Fox who kept the dinner waiting. I sat in the little smoking-room and, from behind a belated morning paper, listened to the conversation of the three or four journalists who represented the members. I felt as a new boy in a new school feels on his first introduction to his fellows.

There was a fossil dramatic critic sleeping in an arm-chair before the fire. At dinner-time he woke up, remarked:

“You should have seen Fanny Ellsler,” and went to sleep again.

Sprawling on a red velvet couch was a beau jeune homme, with the necktie of a Parisian-American student. On a chair beside him sat a personage whom, perhaps because of his plentiful lack of h’s, I took for a distinguished foreigner.

They were talking about a splendid subject for a music-hall dramatic sketch of some sort — afforded by a bus driver, I fancy.

I heard afterward that my Frenchman had been a costermonger and was now half journalist, half financier, and that my art student was an employee of one of the older magazines.

“Dinner’s on the table, gents,” the steward said from the door. He went toward the sleeper by the fire. “I expect Mr. Cunningham will wear that arm-chair out before he’s done,” he said over his shoulder.

“Poor old chap; he’s got nowhere else to go to,” the magazine employee said.

“Why doesn’t he go to the work’ouse,” the journalist financier retorted. “Make a good sketch that, eh?” he continued, reverting to his bus-driver.

“Jolly!” the magazine employee said, indifferently.

“Now, then, Mr. Cunningham,” the steward said, touching the sleeper on the shoulder, “dinner’s on the table.”

“God bless my soul,” the dramatic critic said, with a start. The steward left the room. The dramatic critic furtively took a set of false teeth out of his waistcoat pocket; wiped them with a bandanna handkerchief, and inserted them in his mouth.

He tottered out of the room.

I got up and began to inspect the pen-and-ink sketches on the walls.

The faded paltry caricatures of faded paltry lesser lights that confronted me from fly-blown frames on the purple walls almost made me shiver.

“There you are, Granger,” said a cheerful voice behind me. “Come and have some dinner.”

I went and had some dinner. It was seasoned by small jokes and little personalities. A Teutonic journalist, a musical critic, I suppose, inquired as to the origin of the meagre pheasant. Fox replied that it had been preserved in the back-yard. The dramatic critic mumbled unheard that some piece or other was off the bills of the Adelphi. I grinned

vacantly. Afterward, under his breath, Fox put me up to a thing or two regarding the inner meaning of the new daily. Put by him, without any glamour of a moral purpose, the case seemed rather mean. The dingy smoking-room depressed me and the whole thing was, what I had, for so many years, striven to keep out of. Fox hung over my ear, whispering. There were shades of intonation in his sibillating. Some of those “in it,” the voice implied, were not above-board; others were, and the tone became deferential, implied that I was to take my tone from itself.

“Of course, a man like the Right Honourable C. does it on the straight, ... quite on the straight, ... has to have some sort of semi-official backer.... In this case, it’s me, ... the Hour. They’re a bit splitty, the Ministry, I mean.... They say Gurnard isn’t playing square ... they say so.” His broad, red face glowed as he bent down to my ear, his little sea-blue eyes twinkled with moisture. He enlightened me cautiously, circumspectly. There was something unpleasant in the business — not exactly in Fox himself, but the kind of thing. I wish he would cease his explanations — I didn’t want to hear them. I have never wanted to know how things are worked; preferring to take the world at its face value. Callan’s revelations had been bearable, because of the farcical pompousness of his manner. But this was different, it had the stamp of truth, perhaps because it was a little dirty. I didn’t want to hear that the Foreign Minister was ever so remotely mixed up in this business. He was only a symbol to me, but he stood for the stability of statesmanship and for the decencies that it is troublesome to have touched.

“Of course,” he was proceeding, “the Churchill gang would like to go on playing the stand-off to us. But it won’t do, they’ve got to come in or see themselves left. Gurnard has pretty well nobbled their old party press, so they’ve got to begin all over again.”

That was it — that was precisely it. Churchill ought to have played the stand-off to people like us — to have gone on playing it at whatever cost. That was what I demanded of the world as I conceived it. It was so much less troublesome in that way. On the other hand, this was life — I was living now and the cost of living is disillusionment; it was the price I had to pay. Obviously, a Foreign Minister had to have a semi-official organ, or I supposed so.... “Mind you,” Fox whispered on, “I think myself, that it’s a pity he is supporting the Greenland business. The thing’s not altogether straight. But it’s going to be made to pay like hell, and there’s the national interest to be considered. If this Government didn’t take it up, some other would — and that would give Gurnard and a lot of others a peg against Churchill and his. We can’t afford to lose any more coaling stations in Greenland or anywhere else. And, mind you, Mr. C. can look after the interests of the niggers a good deal better if he’s a hand in the pie. You see the position, eh?”

I wasn’t actually listening to him, but I nodded at proper intervals. I knew that he wanted me to take that line in confidential conversations with fellows seeking copy. I was quite resigned to that. Incidentally, I was overcome by the conviction — perhaps it was no more than a sensation — that that girl was mixed up in this thing, that her shadow was somewhere among the others flickering upon the sheet. I wanted to ask Fox if he knew her. But, then, in that absurd business, I did not even know her

name, and the whole story would have sounded a little mad. Just now, it suited me that Fox should have a moderate idea of my sanity. Besides, the thing was out of tone, I idealised her then. One wouldn't talk about her in a smoking-room full of men telling stories, and one wouldn't talk about her at all to Fox.

The musical critic had been prowling about the room with Fox's eyes upon him. He edged suddenly nearer, pushed a chair aside, and came toward us.

"Hullo," he said, in an ostentatiously genial, after-dinner voice, "what are you two chaps a-talking about?"

"Private matters," Fox answered, without moving a hair.

"Then I suppose I'm in the way?" the other muttered. Fox did not answer.

"Wants a job," he said, watching the discomfited Teuton's retreat, "but, as I was saying — oh, it pays both ways." He paused and fixed his eyes on me. He had been explaining the financial details of the matter, in which the Duc de Mersch and Callan and Mrs. Hartly and all these people clubbed together and started a paper which they hired Fox to run, which was to bring their money back again, which was to scratch their backs, which.... It was like the house that Jack built; I wondered who Jack was. That was it, who was Jack? It all hinged upon that.

"Why, yes," I said. "It seems rather neat."

"Of course," Fox wandered on, "you are wondering why the deuce I tell you all this. Fact is, you'd hear it all if I didn't, and a good deal more that isn't true besides. But I believe you're the sort of chap to respect a confidence."

I didn't rise to the sentiment. I knew as well as he did that he was bamboozling me, that he was, as he said, only telling me — not the truth, but just what I should hear everywhere. I did not bear him any ill-will; it was part of the game, that. But the question was, who was Jack? It might be Fox himself.... There might, after all, be some meaning in the farrago of nonsense that that fantastic girl had let off upon me. Fox really and in a figure of speech such as she allowed herself, might be running a team consisting of the Duc de Mersch and Mr. Churchill.

He might really be backing a foreign, philanthropic ruler and State-founder, and a British Foreign Minister, against the rather sinister Chancellor of the Exchequer that Mr. Gurnard undoubtedly was. It might suit him; perhaps he had shares in something or other that depended on the success of the Duc de Mersch's Greenland Protectorate. I knew well enough, you must remember, that Fox was a big man — one of those big men that remain permanently behind the curtain, perhaps because they have a certain lack of comeliness of one sort or another and don't look well on the stage itself. And I understood now that if he had abandoned — as he had done — half a dozen enterprises of his own for the sake of the Hour, it must be because it was very well worth his while. It was not merely a question of the editorship of a paper; there was something very much bigger in the background. My Dimensionist young lady, again, might have other shares that depended on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's blocking the way. In that way she might very well talk allegorically of herself as in alliance with Gurnard against

Fox and Churchill. I was at sea in that sort of thing — but I understood vaguely that something of the sort was remotely possible.

I didn't feel called upon to back out of it on that account, yet I very decidedly wished that the thing could have been otherwise. For myself, I came into the matter with clean hands — and I was going to keep my hands clean; otherwise, I was at Fox's disposal.

"I understand," I said, the speech marking my decision, "I shall have dealings with a good many of the proprietors — I am the scratcher, in fact, and you don't want me to make a fool of myself."

"Well," he answered, gauging me with his blue, gimlet eyes, "it's just as well to know."

"It's just as well to know," I echoed. It was just as well to know.

Chapter 5

I had gone out into the blackness of the night with a firmer step, with a new assurance. I had had my interview, the thing was definitely settled; the first thing in my life that had ever been definitely settled; and I felt I must tell Lea before I slept. Lea had helped me a good deal in the old days — he had helped everybody, for that matter. You would probably find traces of Lea's influence in the beginnings of every writer of about my decade; of everybody who ever did anything decent, and of some who never got beyond the stage of burgeoning decently. He had given me the material help that a publisher's reader could give, until his professional reputation was endangered, and he had given me the more valuable help that so few can give. I had grown ashamed of this one-sided friendship. It was, indeed, partly because of that that I had taken to the wilds — to a hut near a wood, and all the rest of what now seemed youthful foolishness. I had desired to live alone, not to be helped any more, until I could make some return. As a natural result I had lost nearly all my friends and found myself standing there as naked as on the day I was born.

All around me stretched an immense town — an immense blackness. People — thousands of people hurried past me, had errands, had aims, had others to talk to, to trifle with. But I had nobody. This immense city, this immense blackness, had no interiors for me. There were house fronts, staring windows, closed doors, but nothing within; no rooms, no hollow places. The houses meant nothing to me, nothing more than the solid earth. Lea remained the only one the thought of whom was not like the reconsideration of an ancient, a musty pair of gloves.

He lived just anywhere. Being a publisher's reader, he had to report upon the probable commercial value of the manuscripts that unknown authors sent to his employer, and I suppose he had a settled plan of life, of the sort that brought him within the radius of a given spot at apparently irregular, but probably ordered, intervals. It seemed to be no more than a piece of good luck that let me find him that night in a little room in one of the by-ways of Bloomsbury. He was sprawling angularly on a cane lounge, surrounded by whole rubbish heaps of manuscript, a grey scrawl in a foam of soiled paper. He peered up at me as I stood in the doorway.

"Hullo!" he said, "what's brought you here? Have a manuscript?" He waved an abstracted hand round him. "You'll find a chair somewhere." A claret bottle stood on the floor beside him. He took it by the neck and passed it to me.

He bent his head again and continued his reading. I displaced three bulky folio sheaves of typewritten matter from a chair and seated myself behind him. He continued to read.

"I hadn't seen these rooms before," I said, for want of something to say.

The room was not so much scantily as arbitrarily furnished. It contained a big mahogany sideboard; a common deal table, an extraordinary kind of folding wash-hand-stand; a deal bookshelf, the cane lounge, and three unrelated chairs. There were three framed Dutch prints on the marble mantel-shelf; striped curtains before the windows. A square, cheap looking-glass, with a razor above it, hung between them. And on the floor, on the chairs, on the sideboard, on the unmade bed, the profusion of manuscripts.

He scribbled something on a blue paper and began to roll a cigarette. He took off his glasses, rubbed them, and closed his eyes tightly.

"Well, and how's Sussex?" he asked.

I felt a sudden attack of what, essentially, was nostalgia. The fact that I was really leaving an old course of life, was actually and finally breaking with it, became vividly apparent. Lea, you see, stood for what was best in the mode of thought that I was casting aside. He stood for the aspiration. The brooding, the moodiness; all the childish qualities, were my own importations. I was a little ashamed to tell him, that — that I was going to live, in fact. Some of the glory of it had gone, as if one of two candles I had been reading by had flickered out. But I told him, after a fashion, that I had got a job at last.

"Oh, I congratulate you," he said.

"You see," I began to combat the objections he had not had time to utter, "even for my work it will be a good thing — I wasn't seeing enough of life to be able to...."

"Oh, of course not," he answered — "it'll be a good thing. You must have been having a pretty bad time."

It struck me as abominably unfair. I hadn't taken up with the Hour because I was tired of having a bad time, but for other reasons: because I had felt my soul being crushed within me.

"You're mistaken," I said. And I explained. He answered, "Yes, yes," but I fancied that he was adding to himself — "They all say that." I grew more angry. Lea's opinion formed, to some extent, the background of my life. For many years I had been writing quite as much to satisfy him as to satisfy myself, and his coldness chilled me. He thought that my heart was not in my work, and I did not want Lea to think that of me. I tried to explain as much to him — but it was difficult, and he gave me no help.

I knew there had been others that he had fostered, only to see them, in the end, drift into the back-wash. And now he thought I was going too....

"Here," he said, suddenly breaking away from the subject, "look at that."

He threw a heavy, ribbon-bound mass of matter into my lap, and recommenced writing his report upon its saleability as a book. He was of opinion that it was too delicately good to attract his employer's class of readers. I began to read it to get rid of my thoughts. The heavy black handwriting of the manuscript sticks in my mind's eye. It must have been good, but probably not so good as I then thought it — I have entirely forgotten all about it; otherwise, I remember that we argued afterward: I for

its publication; he against. I was thinking of the wretched author whose fate hung in the balance. He became a pathetic possibility, hidden in the heart of the white paper that bore pen-markings of a kind too good to be marketable. There was something appalling in Lea's careless — "Oh, it's too good!" He was used to it, but as for me, in arguing that man's case I suddenly became aware that I was pleading my own — pleading the case of my better work. Everything that Lea said of this work, of this man, applied to my work; and to myself. "There's no market for that sort of thing, no public; this book's been all round the trade. I've had it before. The man will never come to the front. He'll take to inn-keeping, and that will finish him off." That's what he said, and he seemed to be speaking of me. Some one was knocking at the door of the room — tentative knocks of rather flabby knuckles. It was one of those sounds that one does not notice immediately. The man might have been knocking for ten minutes. It happened to be Lea's employer, the publisher of my first book. He opened the door at last, and came in rather peremptorily. He had the air of having worked himself into a temper — of being intellectually rather afraid of Lea, but of being, for this occasion, determined to assert himself.

The introduction to myself — I had never met him — which took place after he had hastily brought out half a sentence or so, had the effect of putting him out of his stride, but, after having remotely acknowledged the possibility of my existence, he began again.

The matter was one of some delicacy. I myself should have hesitated to broach it before a third party, even one so negligible as myself. But Mr. Polehampton apparently did not. He had to catch the last post.

Lea, it appeared, had advised him to publish a manuscript by a man called Howden — a moderately known writer....

"But I am disturbed to find, Mr. Lea, that is, my daughter tells me that the manuscript is not ... is not at all the thing.... In fact, it's quite — and — eh ... I suppose it's too late to draw back?"

"Oh, it's altogether too late for that" Lea said, nonchalantly.

"Besides, Howden's theories always sell."

"Oh, yes, of course, of course," Mr. Polehampton interjected, hastily, "but don't you think now ... I mean, taking into consideration the damage it may do our reputation ... that we ought to ask Mr. Howden to accept, say fifty pounds less than...."

"I should think it's an excellent idea," Lea said. Mr. Polehampton glanced at him suspiciously, then turned to me.

"You see," he began to explain, "one has to be so careful about these things."

"Oh, I can quite understand," I answered. There was something so naïve in the man's point of view that I had felt my heart go out to him. And he had taught me at last how it is that the godly grow fat at the expense of the unrighteous. Mr. Polehampton, however, was not fat. He was even rather thin, and his peaked grey hair, though it was actually well brushed, looked as if it ought not to have been. He had even an anxious

expression. People said he speculated in some stock or other, and I should say they were right.

“I ... eh ... believe I published your first book ... I lost money by it, but I can assure you that I bear no grudge — almost a hundred pounds. I bear no grudge....”

The man was an original. He had no idea that I might feel insulted; indeed, he really wanted to be pleasant, and condescending, and forgiving. I didn't feel insulted. He was too big for his clothes, gave that impression at least, and he wore black kid gloves. Moreover, his eyes never left the cornice of the room. I saw him rather often after that night, but never without his gloves and never with his eyes lowered.

“And ... eh ...” he asked, “what are you doing now, Mr. Granger?”

Lea told him Fox had taken me up; that I was going to go. I suddenly remembered it was said of Fox that everyone he took up did “go.” The fact was obviously patent to Mr. Polehampton. He unbent with remarkable suddenness; it reminded me of the abrupt closing of a stiff umbrella. He became distinctly and crudely cordial — hoped that we should work together again; once more reminded me that he had published my first book (the words had a different savour now), and was enchanted to discover that we were neighbours in Sussex. My cottage was within four miles of his villa, and we were members of the same golf club.

“We must have a game — several games,” he said. He struck me as the sort of man to find a difficulty in getting anyone to play with him.

After that he went away. As I had said, I did not dislike him — he was pathetic; but his tone of mind, his sudden change of front, unnerved me. It proved so absolutely that I was “going to go,” and I did not want to go — in that sense. The thing is a little difficult to explain, I wanted to take the job because I wanted to have money — for a little time, for a year or so, but if I once began to go, the temptation would be strong to keep on going, and I was by no means sure that I should be able to resist the temptation. So many others had failed. What if I wrote to Fox, and resigned?... Lea was deep in a manuscript once more.

“Shall I throw it up?” I asked suddenly. I wanted the thing settled.

“Oh, go on with it, by all means go on with it,” Lea answered.

“And ...?” I postulated.

“Take your chance of the rest,” he supplied; “you've had a pretty bad time.”

“I suppose,” I reflected, “if I haven't got the strength of mind to get out of it in time, I'm not up to much.”

“There's that, too,” he commented, “the game may not be worth the candle.” I was silent. “You must take your chance when you get it,” he added.

He had resumed his reading, but he looked up again when I gave way, as I did after a moment's thought.

“Of course,” he said, “it will probably be all right. You do your best.

It's a good thing ... might even do you good.”

In that way the thing went through. As I was leaving the room, the idea occurred to me, “By the way, you don’t know anything of a clique: the Dimensionists — Fourth Dimensionists?”

“Never heard of them,” he negatived. “What’s their specialty?”

“They’re going to inherit the earth,” I answered.

“Oh, I wish them joy,” he closed.

“You don’t happen to be one yourself? I believe it’s a sort of secret society.” He wasn’t listening. I went out quietly.

The night effects of that particular neighbourhood have always affected me dismally. That night they upset me, upset me in much the same way, acting on much the same nerves as the valley in which I had walked with that puzzling girl. I remembered that she had said she stood for the future, that she was a symbol of my own decay — the whole silly farrago, in fact. I reasoned with myself — that I was tired, out of trim, and so on, that I was in a fit state to be at the mercy of any nightmare. I plunged into Southampton Row. There was safety in the contact with the crowd, in jostling, in being jostled.

Chapter 6

It was Saturday and, as was his custom during the session, the Foreign Secretary had gone for privacy and rest till Monday to a small country house he had within easy reach of town. I went down with a letter from Fox in my pocket, and early in the afternoon found myself talking without any kind of inward disturbance to the Minister's aunt, a lean, elderly lady, with a keen eye, and credited with a profound knowledge of European politics. She had a rather abrupt manner and a business-like, brown scheme of coloration. She looked people very straight in the face, bringing to bear all the penetration which, as rumour said, enabled her to take a hidden, but very real part in the shaping of our foreign policy. She seemed to catalogue me, label me, and lay me on the shelf, before I had given my first answer to her first question.

"You ought to know this part of the country well," she said. I think she was considering me as a possible canvasser — an infinitesimal thing, but of a kind possibly worth remembrance at the next General Election.

"No," I said, "I've never been here before."

"Etchingam is only three miles away."

It was new to me to be looked upon as worth consideration for my place-name. I realised that Miss Churchill accorded me toleration on its account, that I was regarded as one of the Grangers of Etchingam, who had taken to literature.

"I met your aunt yesterday," Miss Churchill continued. She had met everybody yesterday.

"Yes," I said, non-committally. I wondered what had happened at that meeting. My aunt and I had never been upon terms. She was a great personage in her part of the world, a great dowager land-owner, as poor as a mouse, and as respectable as a hen. She was, moreover, a keen politician on the side of Miss Churchill. I, who am neither land-owner, nor respectable, nor politician, had never been acknowledged — but I knew that, for the sake of the race, she would have refrained from enlarging on my shortcomings.

"Has she found a companion to suit her yet?" I said, absent-mindedly. I was thinking of an old legend of my mother's. Miss Churchill looked me in between the eyes again. She was preparing to relabel me, I think. I had become a spiteful humourist. Possibly I might be useful for platform malice.

"Why, yes," she said, the faintest of twinkles in her eyes, "she has adopted a niece."

The legend went that, at a hotly contested election in which my aunt had played a prominent part, a rainbow poster had beset the walls. "Who starved her governess?" it had inquired.

My accidental reference to such electioneering details placed me upon an excellent footing with Miss Churchill. I seemed quite unawares to have asserted myself a social equal, a person not to be treated as a casual journalist. I became, in fact, not the representative of the Hour — but an Etchingham Granger that competitive forces had compelled to accept a journalistic plum. I began to see the line I was to take throughout my interviewing campaign. On the one hand, I was “one of us,” who had temporarily strayed beyond the pale; on the other, I was to be a sort of great author’s bottle-holder.

A side door, behind Miss Churchill, opened gently. There was something very characteristic in the tentative manner of its coming ajar. It seemed to say: “Why any noisy vigour?” It seemed to be propelled by a contemplative person with many things on his mind. A tall, grey man in the doorway leaned the greater part of his weight on the arm that was stretched down to the handle. He was looking thoughtfully at a letter that he held in his other hand. A face familiar enough in caricatures suddenly grew real to me — more real than the face of one’s nearest friends, yet older than one had any wish to expect. It was as if I had gazed more intently than usual at the face of a man I saw daily, and had found him older and greyer than he had ever seemed before — as if I had begun to realise that the world had moved on.

He said, languidly — almost protestingly, “What am I to do about the Duc de Mersch?”

Miss Churchill turned swiftly, almost apprehensively, toward him. She uttered my name and he gave the slightest of starts of annoyance — a start that meant, “Why wasn’t I warned before?” This irritated me; I knew well enough what were his relations with de Mersch, and the man took me for a little eavesdropper, I suppose. His attitudes were rather grotesque, of the sort that would pass in a person of his eminence. He stuck his eye-glasses on the end of his nose, looked at me short-sightedly, took them off and looked again. He had the air of looking down from an immense height — of needing a telescope.

“Oh, ah ... Mrs. Granger’s son, I presume.... I wasn’t aware....” The hesitation of his manner made me feel as if we never should get anywhere — not for years and years.

“No,” I said, rather brusquely, “I’m only from the Hour.”

He thought me one of Fox’s messengers then, said that Fox might have written: “Have saved you the trouble, I mean ... or....”

He had the air of wishing to be amiable, of wishing, even, to please me by proving that he was aware of my identity.

“Oh,” I said, a little loftily, “I haven’t any message, I’ve only come to interview you.” An expression of dismay sharpened the lines of his face.

“To....” he began, “but I’ve never allowed — ” He recovered himself sharply, and set the glasses vigorously on his nose; at last he had found the right track. “Oh, I remember now,” he said, “I hadn’t looked at it in that way.”

The whole thing grated on my self-love and I became, in a contained way, furiously angry. I was impressed with the idea that the man was only a puppet in the hands of

Fox and de Mersch, and that lot. And he gave himself these airs of enormous distance. I, at any rate, was clean-handed in the matter; I hadn't any axe to grind.

"Ah, yes," he said, hastily, "you are to draw my portrait — as Fox put it. He sent me your Jenkins sketch. I read it — it struck a very nice note. And so — ." He sat himself down on a preposterously low chair, his knees on a level with his chin. I muttered that I feared he would find the process a bore.

"Not more for me than for you," he answered, seriously — "one has to do these things."

"Why, yes," I echoed, "one has to do these things." It struck me that he regretted it — regretted it intensely; that he attached a bitter meaning to the words.

"And ... what is the procedure?" he asked, after a pause. "I am new to the sort of thing." He had the air, I thought, of talking to some respectable tradesman that one calls in only when one is in extremis — to a distinguished pawnbroker, a man quite at the top of a tree of inferior timber.

"Oh, for the matter of that, so am I," I answered. "I'm supposed to get your atmosphere, as Callan put it."

"Indeed," he answered, absently, and then, after a pause, "You know Callan?" I was afraid I should fall in his estimation.

"One has to do these things," I said; "I've just been getting his atmosphere."

He looked again at the letter in his hand, smoothed his necktie and was silent. I realised that I was in the way, but I was still so disturbed that I forgot how to phrase an excuse for a momentary absence.

"Perhaps, ..." I began.

He looked at me attentively.

"I mean, I think I'm in the way," I blurted out.

"Well," he answered, "it's quite a small matter. But, if you are to get my atmosphere, we may as well begin out of doors." He hesitated, pleased with his witticism; "Unless you're tired," he added.

"I will go and get ready," I said, as if I were a lady with bonnet-strings to tie. I was conducted to my room, where I kicked my heels for a decent interval. When I descended, Mr. Churchill was lounging about the room with his hands in his trouser-pockets and his head hanging limply over his chest. He said, "Ah!" on seeing me, as if he had forgotten my existence. He paused for a long moment, looked meditatively at himself in the glass over the fireplace, and then grew brisk. "Come along," he said.

We took a longish walk through a lush home-country meadow land. We talked about a number of things, he opening the ball with that infernal Jenkins sketch. I was in the stage at which one is sick of the thing, tired of the bare idea of it — and Mr. Churchill's laboriously kind phrases made the matter no better.

"You know who Jenkins stands for?" I asked. I wanted to get away on the side issues.

"Oh, I guessed it was — — " he answered. They said that Mr. Churchill was an enthusiast for the school of painting of which Jenkins was the last exponent. He began to ask questions about him. Did he still paint? Was he even alive?

"I once saw several of his pictures," he reflected. "His work certainly appealed to me ... yes, it appealed to me. I meant at the time ... but one forgets; there are so many things." It seemed to me that the man wished by these detached sentences to convey that he had the weight of a kingdom — of several kingdoms — on his mind; that he could spare no more than a fragment of his thoughts for everyday use.

"You must take me to see him," he said, suddenly. "I ought to have something." I thought of poor white-haired Jenkins, and of his long struggle with adversity. It seemed a little cruel that Churchill should talk in that way without meaning a word of it — as if the words were a polite formality.

"Nothing would delight me more," I answered, and added, "nothing in the world."

He asked me if I had seen such and such a picture, talked of artists, and praised this and that man very fittingly, but with a certain timidity — a timidity that lured me back to my normally overbearing frame of mind. In such matters I was used to hearing my own voice. I could talk a man down, and, with a feeling of the unfitness of things, I talked Churchill down. The position, even then, struck me as gently humorous. It was as if some infinitely small animal were bullying some colossus among the beasts. I was of no account in the world, he had his say among the Olympians. And I talked recklessly, like any little school-master, and he swallowed it.

We reached the broad market-place of a little, red and grey, home county town; a place of but one street dominated by a great inn-signboard a-top of an enormous white post. The effigy of So-and-So of gracious memory swung lazily, creaking, overhead.

"This is Etchingam," Churchill said.

It was a pleasant commentary on the course of time, this entry into the home of my ancestors. I had been without the pale for so long, that I had never seen the haunt of ancient peace. They had done very little, the Grangers of Etchingam — never anything but live at Etchingam and quarrel at Etchingam and die at Etchingam and be the monstrous important Grangers of Etchingam. My father had had the undesirable touch, not of the genius, but of the Bohemian. The Grangers of Etchingam had cut him adrift and he had swum to sink in other seas. Now I was the last of the Grangers and, as things went, was quite the best known of all of them. They had grown poor in their generation; they bade fair to sink, even as, it seemed, I bade fair to rise, and I had come back to the old places on the arm of one of the great ones of the earth. I wondered what the portentous old woman who ruled alone in Etchingam thought of these times — the portentous old woman who ruled, so they said, the place with a rod of iron; who made herself unbearable to her companions and had to fall back upon an unfortunate niece. I wondered idly who the niece could be; certainly not a Granger of Etchingam, for I was the only one of the breed. One of her own nieces, most probably. Churchill had gone into the post-office, leaving me standing at the foot of the sign-post. It was a pleasant summer day, the air very clear, the place very slumbrous. I looked up the street at a pair of great stone gate-posts, august, in their way, standing distinctly aloof from the common houses, a little weather-stained, staidly lichened. At the top

of each column sat a sculptured wolf — as far as I knew, my own crest. It struck me pleasantly that this must be the entrance of the Manor house.

The tall iron gates swung inward, and I saw a girl on a bicycle curve out, at the top of the sunny street. She glided, very clear, small, and defined, against the glowing wall, leaned aslant for the turn, and came shining down toward me. My heart leapt; she brought the whole thing into composition — the whole of that slumbrous, sunny street. The bright sky fell back into place, the red roofs, the blue shadows, the red and blue of the sign-board, the blue of the pigeons walking round my feet, the bright red of a postman's cart. She was gliding toward me, growing and growing into the central figure. She descended and stood close to me.

"You?" I said. "What blessed chance brought you here?"

"Oh, I am your aunt's companion," she answered, "her niece, you know."

"Then you must be a cousin," I said.

"No; sister," she corrected, "I assure you it's sister. Ask anyone — ask your aunt." I was braced into a state of puzzled buoyancy.

"But really, you know," I said. She was smiling, standing up squarely to me, leaning a little back, swaying her machine with the motion of her body.

"It's a little ridiculous, isn't it?" she said.

"Very," I answered, "but even at that, I don't see — . And I'm not phenomenally dense."

"Not phenomenally," she answered.

"Considering that I'm not a — not a Dimensionist," I bantered. "But you have really palmed yourself off on my aunt?"

"Really," she answered, "she doesn't know any better. She believes in me immensely. I am such a real Granger, there never was a more typical one. And we shake our heads together over you." My bewilderment was infinite, but it stopped short of being unpleasant.

"Might I call on my aunt?" I asked. "It wouldn't interfere — "

"Oh, it wouldn't interfere," she said, "but we leave for Paris to-morrow. We are very busy. We — that is, my aunt; I am too young and too, too discreet — have a little salon where we hatch plots against half the régimes in Europe. You have no idea how Legitimate we are."

"I don't understand in the least," I said; "not in the least."

"Oh, you must take me literally if you want to understand," she answered, "and you won't do that. I tell you plainly that I find my account in unsettled states, and that I am unsettling them. Everywhere. You will see."

She spoke with her monstrous dispassionateness, and I felt a shiver pass down my spine, very distinctly. I was thinking what she might do if ever she became in earnest, and if ever I chanced to stand in her way — as her husband, for example.

"I wish you would talk sense — for one blessed minute," I said; "I want to get things a little settled in my mind."

“Oh, I’ll talk sense,” she said, “by the hour, but you won’t listen. Take your friend, Churchill, now. He’s the man that we’re going to bring down. I mentioned it to you, and so...”

“But this is sheer madness,” I answered.

“Oh, no, it’s a bald statement of fact,” she went on.

“I don’t see how,” I said, involuntarily.

“Your article in the Hour will help. Every trifle will help,” she said. “Things that you understand and others that you cannot.... He is identifying himself with the Duc de Mersch. That looks nothing, but it’s fatal. There will be friendships ... and desertions.”

“Ah!” I said. I had had an inkling of this, and it made me respect her insight into home politics. She must have been alluding to Gurnard, whom everybody — perhaps from fear — pretended to trust. She looked at me and smiled again. It was still the same smile; she was not radiant to-day and pensive to-morrow. “Do you know I don’t like to hear that?” I began.

“Oh, there’s irony in it, and pathos, and that sort of thing,” she said, with the remotest chill of mockery in her intonation. “He goes into it clean-handed enough and he only half likes it. But he sees that it’s his last chance. It’s not that he’s worn out — but he feels that his time has come — unless he does something. And so he’s going to do something. You understand?”

“Not in the least,” I said, light-heartedly.

“Oh, it’s the System for the Regeneration of the Arctic Regions — the Greenland affair of my friend de Mersch. Churchill is going to make a grand coup with that — to keep himself from slipping down hill, and, of course, it would add immensely to your national prestige. And he only half sees what de Mersch is or isn’t.”

“This is all Greek to me,” I muttered rebelliously.

“Oh, I know, I know,” she said. “But one has to do these things, and I want you to understand. So Churchill doesn’t like the whole business. But he’s under the shadow. He’s been thinking a good deal lately that his day is over — I’ll prove it to you in a minute — and so — oh, he’s going to make a desperate effort to get in touch with the spirit of the times that he doesn’t like and doesn’t understand. So he lets you get his atmosphere. That’s all.”

“Oh, that’s all,” I said, ironically.

“Of course he’d have liked to go on playing the stand-off to chaps like you and me,” she mimicked the tone and words of Fox himself.

“This is witchcraft,” I said. “How in the world do you know what Fox said to me?”

“Oh, I know,” she said. It seemed to me that she was playing me with all this nonsense — as if she must have known that I had a tenderness for her and were fooling me to the top of her bent. I tried to get my hook in.

“Now look here,” I said, “we must get things settled. You ...”

She carried the speech off from under my nose.

“Oh, you won’t denounce me,” she said, “not any more than you did before; there are so many reasons. There would be a scene, and you’re afraid of scenes — and our

aunt would back me up. She'd have to. My money has been reviving the glories of the Grangers. You can see, they've been regilding the gate."

I looked almost involuntarily at the tall iron gates through which she had passed into my view. It was true enough — some of the scroll work was radiant with new gold.

"Well," I said, "I will give you credit for not wishing to — to prey upon my aunt. But still ..." I was trying to make the thing out. It struck me that she was an American of the kind that subsidizes households like that of Etchingham Manor. Perhaps my aunt had even forced her to take the family name, to save appearances. The old woman was capable of anything, even of providing an obscure nephew with a brilliant sister. And I should not be thanked if I interfered. This skeleton of swift reasoning passed between word and word ... "You are no sister of mine!" I was continuing my sentence quite amiably.

Her face brightened to greet someone approaching behind me.

"Did you hear him?" she said. "Did you hear him, Mr. Churchill. He casts off — he disowns me. Isn't he a stern brother? And the quarrel is about nothing." The impudence — or the presence of mind of it — overwhelmed me.

Churchill smiled pleasantly.

"Oh — one always quarrels about nothing," Churchill answered. He spoke a few words to her; about my aunt; about the way her machine ran — that sort of thing. He behaved toward her as if she were an indulged child, impertinent with licence and welcome enough. He himself looked rather like the short-sighted, but indulgent and very meagre lion that peers at the unicorn across a plum-cake.

"So you are going back to Paris," he said. "Miss Churchill will be sorry. And you are going to continue to — to break up the universe?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, "we are going on with that, my aunt would never give it up. She couldn't, you know."

"You'll get into trouble," Churchill said, as if he were talking to a child intent on stealing apples. "And when is our turn coming? You're going to restore the Stuarts, aren't you?" It was his idea of badinage, amiable without consequence.

"Oh, not quite that," she answered, "not quite that." It was curious to watch her talking to another man — to a man, not a bagman like Callan. She put aside the face she always showed me and became at once what Churchill took her for — a spoiled child. At times she suggested a certain kind of American, and had that indefinable air of glib acquaintance with the names, and none of the spirit of tradition. One half expected her to utter rhapsodies about donjon-keeps.

"Oh, you know," she said, with a fine affectation of aloofness, "we shall have to be rather hard upon you; we shall crumple you up like — " Churchill had been moving his stick absent-mindedly in the dust of the road, he had produced a big "C H U." She had erased it with the point of her foot — "like that," she concluded.

He laid his head back and laughed almost heartily.

“Dear me,” he said, “I had no idea that I was so much in the way of — of yourself and Mrs. Granger.”

“Oh, it’s not only that,” she said, with a little smile and a cast of the eye to me. “But you’ve got to make way for the future.”

Churchill’s face changed suddenly. He looked rather old, and grey, and wintry, even a little frail. I understood what she was proving to me, and I rather disliked her for it. It seemed wantonly cruel to remind a man of what he was trying to forget.

“Ah, yes,” he said, with the gentle sadness of quite an old man, “I dare say there is more in that than you think. Even you will have to learn.”

“But not for a long time,” she interrupted audaciously.

“I hope not,” he answered, “I hope not.” She nodded and glided away.

We resumed the road in silence. Mr. Churchill smiled at his own thoughts once or twice.

“A most amusing ...” he said at last. “She does me a great deal of good, a great deal.”

I think he meant that she distracted his thoughts.

“Does she always talk like that?” I asked. He had hardly spoken to me, and I felt as if I were interrupting a reverie — but I wanted to know.

“I should say she did,” he answered; “I should say so. But Miss Churchill says that she has a real genius for organization. She used to see a good deal of them, before they went to Paris, you know.”

“What are they doing there?” It was as if I were extracting secrets from a sleep-walker.

“Oh, they have a kind of a meeting place, for all kinds of Legitimist pretenders — French and Spanish, and that sort of thing. I believe Mrs. Granger takes it very seriously.” He looked at me suddenly. “But you ought to know more about it than I do,” he said.

“Oh, we see very little of each other,” I answered, “you could hardly call us brother and sister.”

“Oh, I see,” he answered. I don’t know what he saw. For myself, I saw nothing.

Chapter 7

I succeeded in giving Fox what his journal wanted; I got the atmosphere of Churchill and his house, in a way that satisfied the people for whom it was meant. His house was a pleasant enough place, of the sort where they do you well, but not nauseously well. It stood in a tranquil countryside, and stood there modestly. Architecturally speaking, it was gently commonplace; one got used to it and liked it. And Churchill himself, when one had become accustomed to his manner, one liked very well — very well indeed. He had a dainty, dilettante mind, delicately balanced, with strong limitations, a fantastic temperament for a person in his walk of life — but sane, mind you, persistent. After a time, I amused myself with a theory that his heart was not in his work, that circumstance had driven him into the career of politics and ironical fate set him at its head. For myself, I had an intense contempt for the political mind, and it struck me that he had some of the same feeling. He had little personal quaintnesses, too, a deference, a modesty, an open-mindedness.

I was with him for the greater part of his weekend holiday; hung, perforce, about him whenever he had any leisure. I suppose he found me tiresome — but one has to do these things. He talked, and I talked; heavens, how we talked! He was almost always deferential, I almost always dogmatic; perhaps because the conversation kept on my own ground. Politics we never touched. I seemed to feel that if I broached them, I should be checked — politely, but very definitely. Perhaps he actually contrived to convey as much to me; perhaps I evolved the idea that if I were to say:

“What do you think about the ‘Greenland System’?” — he would answer:

“I try not to think about it,” or whatever gently closing phrase his mind conceived. But I never did so; there were so many other topics.

He was then writing his *Life of Cromwell* and his mind was very full of his subject. Once he opened his heart, after delicately sounding me for signs of boredom. It happened, by the merest chance — one of those blind chances that inevitably lead in the future — that I, too, was obsessed at that moment by the Lord Oliver. A great many years before, when I was a yearling of tremendous plans, I had set about one of those glorious novels that one plans — a splendid thing with Old Noll as the hero or the heavy father. I had haunted the bookstalls in search of local colour and had wonderfully well invested my half-crowns. Thus a company of seventeenth century tracts, dog-eared, coverless, but very glorious under their dust, accompany me through life. One parts last with those relics of a golden age, and during my late convalescence I had reread many of them, the arbitrary half-remembered phrases suggesting all sorts of scenes — lamplight in squalid streets, trays full of weather-beaten books. So, even

then, my mind was full of Mercurius Rusticus. Mr. Churchill on Cromwell amused me immensely and even excited me. It was life, this attending at a self-revelation of an impossible temperament. It did me good, as he had said of my pseudo-sister. It was fantastic — as fantastic as herself — and it came out more in his conversation than in the book itself. I had something to do with that, of course. But imagine the treatment accorded to Cromwell by this delicate, negative, obstinately judicial personality. It was the sort of thing one wants to get into a novel. It was a lesson to me — in temperament, in point of view; I went with his mood, tried even to outdo him, in the hope of spurring him to outdo himself. I only mention it because I did it so well that it led to extraordinary consequences.

We were walking up and down his lawn, in the twilight, after his Sunday supper. The pale light shone along the gleaming laurels and dwelt upon the soft clouds of orchard blossoms that shimmered above them. It dwelt, too, upon the silver streaks in his dark hair and made his face seem more pallid, and more old. It affected me like some intense piece of irony. It was like hearing a dying man talk of the year after next. I had the sense of the unreality of things strong upon me. Why should nightingale upon nightingale pour out volley upon volley of song for the delight of a politician whose heart was not in his task of keeping back the waters of the deluge, but who grew animated at the idea of damming one of the titans who had let loose the deluge?

About a week after — or it may have been a fortnight — Churchill wrote to me and asked me to take him to see the Jenkins of my Jenkins story. It was one of those ordeals that one goes through when one has tried to advance one's friends. Jenkins took the matter amiss, thought it was a display of insulting patronage on the part of officialism. He was reluctant to show his best work, the forgotten masterpieces, the things that had never sold, that hung about on the faded walls and rotted in cellars. He would not be his genial self; he would not talk. Churchill behaved very well — I think he understood.

Jenkins thawed before his gentle appreciations. I could see the change operating within him. He began to realise that this incredible visit from a man who ought to be hand and glove with Academicians was something other than a spy's encroachment. He was old, you must remember, and entirely unsuccessful. He had fought a hard fight and had been worsted. He took his revenge in these suspicions.

We younger men adored him. He had the ruddy face and the archaic silver hair of the King of Hearts; and a wonderful elaborate politeness that he had inherited from his youth — from the days of Brummell. And, whilst all his belongings were rotting into dust, he retained an extraordinarily youthful and ingenuous habit of mind. It was that, or a little of it, that gave the charm to my Jenkins story.

It was a disagreeable experience. I wished so much that the perennial hopefulness of the man should at last escape deferring and I was afraid that Churchill would chill before Jenkins had time to thaw. But, as I have said, I think Churchill understood. He smiled his kindly, short-sighted smile over canvas after canvas, praised the right thing

in each, remembered having seen this and that in such and such a year, and Jenkins thawed.

He happened to leave the room — to fetch some studies, to hurry up the tea or for some such reason. Bereft of his presence the place suddenly grew ghostly. It was as if the sun had died in the sky and left us in that nether world where dead, buried pasts live in a grey, shadowless light. Jenkins' palette glowed from above a medley of stained rags on his open colour table. The rush-bottom of his chair resembled a wind-torn thatch.

"One can draw morals from a life like that," I said suddenly. I was thinking rather of Jenkins than of the man I was talking to.

"Why, yes," he said, absently, "I suppose there are men who haven't the knack of getting on."

"It's more than a knack," I said, with unnecessary bitterness. "It's a temperament."

"I think it's a habit, too. It may be acquired, mayn't it?"

"No, no," I fulminated, "it's precisely because it can't be acquired that the best men — the men like ..." I stopped suddenly, impressed by the idea that the thing was out of tone. I had to assert myself more than I liked in talking to Churchill. Otherwise I should have disappeared. A word from him had the weight of three kingdoms and several colonies behind it, and I was forced to get that out of my head by making conversation a mere matter of temperament. In that I was the stronger. If I wanted to say a thing, I said it; but he was hampered by a judicial mind. It seemed, too, that he liked a dictatorial interlocutor, else he would hardly have brought himself into contact with me again. Perhaps it was new to him. My eye fell upon a couple of masks, hanging one on each side of the fireplace. The room was full of a profusion of little casts, thick with dust upon the shoulders, the hair, the eyelids, on every part that projected outward.

"By-the-bye," I said, "that's a death-mask of Cromwell."

"Ah!" he answered, "I knew there was...."

He moved very slowly toward it, rather as if he did not wish to bring it within his field of view. He stopped before reaching it and pivotted slowly to face me.

"About my book," he opened suddenly, "I have so little time." His briskness dropped into a half complaint, like a faintly suggested avowal of impotence. "I have been at it four years now. It struck me — you seemed to coincide so singularly with my ideas."

His speech came wavering to a close, but he recommenced it apologetically — as if he wished me to help him out.

"I went to see Smithson the publisher about it, and he said he had no objection...."

He looked appealingly at me. I kept silence.

"Of course, it's not your sort of work. But you might try.... You see...." He came to a sustained halt.

"I don't understand," I said, rather coldly, when the silence became embarrassing. "You want me to 'ghost' for you?"

"'Ghost,' good gracious no," he said, energetically; "dear me, no!"

“Then I really don’t understand,” I said.

“I thought you might see your ... I wanted you to collaborate with me.

Quite publicly, of course, as far as the epithet applies.”

“To collaborate,” I said slowly. “You...”

I was looking at a miniature of the Farnese Hercules — I wondered what it meant, what club had struck the wheel of my fortune and whirled it into this astounding attitude.

“Of course you must think about it,” he said.

“I don’t know,” I muttered; “the idea is so new. It’s so little in my line. I don’t know what I should make of it.”

I talked at random. There were so many thoughts jostling in my head. It seemed to carry me so much farther from the kind of work I wanted to do. I did not really doubt my ability — one does not. I rather regarded it as work upon a lower plane. And it was a tremendous — an incredibly tremendous — opportunity.

“You know pretty well how much I’ve done,” he continued. “I’ve got a good deal of material together and a good deal of the actual writing is done. But there is ever so much still to do. It’s getting beyond me, as I said just now.”

I looked at him again, rather incredulously. He stood before me, a thin parallelogram of black with a mosaic of white about the throat. The slight grotesqueness of the man made him almost impossibly real in his abstracted earnestness. He so much meant what he said that he ignored what his hands were doing, or his body or his head. He had taken a very small, very dusty book out of a little shelf beside him, and was absently turning over the rusty leaves, while he talked with his head bent over it. What was I to him, or he to me?

“I could give my Saturday afternoons to it,” he was saying, “whenever you could come down.”

“It’s immensely kind of you,” I began.

“Not at all, not at all,” he waived. “I’ve set my heart on doing it and, unless you help me, I don’t suppose I ever shall get it done.”

“But there are hundreds of others,” I said.

“There may be,” he said, “there may be. But I have not come across them.”

I was beset by a sudden emotion of blind candour.

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense,” I said. “Don’t you see that you are offering me the chance of a lifetime?”

Churchill laughed.

“After all, one cannot refuse to take what offers,” he said. “Besides, your right man to do the work might not suit me as a collaborator.”

“It’s very tempting,” I said.

“Why, then, succumb,” he smiled.

I could not find arguments against him, and I succumbed as Jenkins re-entered the room.

Chapter 8

After that I began to live, as one lives; and for forty-nine weeks. I know it was forty-nine, because I got fifty-two atmospheres in all; Callan's and Churchill's, and those forty-nine and the last one that finished the job and the year of it. It was amusing work in its way; people mostly preferred to have their atmospheres taken at their country houses — it showed that they had them, I suppose. Thus I spent a couple of days out of every week in agreeable resorts, and people were very nice to me — it was part of the game.

So I had a pretty good time for a year and enjoyed it, probably because I had had a pretty bad one for several years. I filled in the rest of my weeks by helping Fox and collaborating with Mr. Churchill and adoring Mrs. Hartly at odd moments. I used to hang about the office of the Hour on the chance of snapping up a blank three lines fit for a subtle puff of her. Sometimes they were too hurried to be subtle, and then Mrs. Hartly was really pleased.

I never understood her in the least, and I very much doubt whether she ever understood a word I said. I imagine that I must have talked to her about her art or her mission — things obviously as strange to her as to the excellent Hartly himself. I suppose she hadn't any art; I am certain she hadn't any mission, except to be adored. She walked about the stage and one adored her, just as she sat about her flat and was adored, and there the matter ended.

As for Fox, I seemed to suit him — I don't in the least know why. No doubt he knew me better than I knew myself. He used to get hold of me whilst I was hanging about the office on the chance of engaging space for Mrs. Hartly, and he used to utilise me for the ignoblest things. I saw men for him, scribbled notes for him, abused people through the telephone, and wrote articles. Of course, there were the pickings.

I never understood Fox — not in the least, not more than I understood Mrs. Hartly. He had the mannerisms of the most incredible vulgarian and had, apparently, the point of view of a pig. But there was something else that obscured all that, that forced one to call him a wonderful man. Everyone called him that. He used to say that he knew what he wanted and that he got it, and that was true, too. I didn't in the least want to do his odd jobs, even for the ensuing pickings, and I didn't want to be hail-fellow with him. But I did them and I was, without even realising that it was distasteful to me. It was probably the same with everybody else.

I used to have an idea that I was going to reform him; that one day I should make him convert the Hour into an asylum for writers of merit. He used to let me have my own way sometimes — just often enough to keep my conscience from inconveniencing

me. He let me present Lea with an occasional column and a half; and once he promised me that one day he would allow me to get the atmosphere of Arthur Edwards, the novelist.

Then there was Churchill and the *Life of Cromwell* that progressed slowly. The experiment succeeded well enough, as I grew less domineering and he less embarrassed. Toward the end I seemed to have become a familiar inmate of his house. I used to go down with him on Saturday afternoons and we talked things over in the train. It was, to an idler like myself, wonderful the way that essential idler's days were cut out and fitted in like the squares of a child's puzzle; little passages of work of one kind fitting into quite unrelated passages of something else. He did it well, too, without the remotest semblance of hurry.

I suppose that actually the motive power was his aunt. People used to say so, but it did not appear on the surface to anyone in close contact with the man; or it appeared only in very small things. We used to work in a tall, dark, pleasant room, book-lined, and giving on to a lawn that was always an asylum for furtive thrushes. Miss Churchill, as a rule, sat half forgotten near the window, with the light falling over her shoulder. She was always very absorbed in papers; seemed to be spending laborious days in answering letters, in evolving reports. Occasionally she addressed a question to her nephew, occasionally received guests that came informally but could not be refused admittance. Once it was a semi-royal personage, once the Duc de Mersch, my reputed employer.

The latter, I remember, was announced when Churchill and I were finally finishing our account of the tremendous passing of the Protector. In that silent room I had a vivid sense of the vast noise of the storm in that twilight of the crowning mercy. I seemed to see the candles a-flicker in the eddies of air forced into the gloomy room; the great bed and the portentous uncouth form that struggled in the shadows of the hangings. Miss Churchill looked up from the card that had been placed in her hands.

"Edward," she said, "the Duc de Mersch."

Churchill rose irritably from his low seat. "Confound him," he said, "I won't see him."

"You can't help it, I think," his aunt said, reflectively; "you will have to settle it sooner or later."

I know pretty well what it was they had to settle — the Greenland affair that had hung in the air so long. I knew it from hearsay, from Fox, vaguely enough. Mr. Gurnard was said to recommend it for financial reasons, the Duc to be eager, Churchill to hang back unaccountably. I never had much head for details of this sort, but people used to explain them to me — to explain the reasons for de Mersch's eagerness. They were rather shabby, rather incredible reasons, that sounded too reasonable to be true. He wanted the money for his railways — wanted it very badly. He was vastly in want of money, he was this, that, and the other in certain international-philanthropic concerns, and had a finger in this, that, and the other pie. There was an "All Round the World Cable Company" that united hearts and hands, and a "Pan-European Railway,

Exploration, and Civilisation Company” that let in light in dark places, and an “International Housing of the Poor Company,” as well as a number of others. Somewhere at the bottom of these seemingly bottomless concerns, the Duc de Mersch was said to be moving, and the Hour certainly contained periodically complimentary allusions to their higher philanthropy and dividend-earning prospects. But that was as much as I knew. The same people — people one met in smoking-rooms — said that the Trans-Greenland Railway was the last card of de Mersch. British investors wouldn’t trust the Duc without some sort of guarantee from the British Government, and no other investor would trust him on any terms. England was to guarantee something or other — the interest for a number of years, I suppose. I didn’t believe them, of course — one makes it a practice to believe nothing of the sort. But I recognised that the evening was momentous to somebody — that Mr. Gurnard and the Duc de Mersch and Churchill were to discuss something and that I was remotely interested because the Hour employed me.

Churchill continued to pace up and down.

“Gurnard dines here to-night,” his aunt said.

“Oh, I see.” His hands played with some coins in his trouser-pockets. “I see,” he said again, “they’ve ...”

The occasion impressed me. I remember very well the manner of both nephew and aunt. They seemed to be suddenly called to come to a decision that was no easy one, that they had wished to relegate to an indefinite future.

She left Churchill pacing nervously up and down.

“I could go on with something else, if you like,” I said.

“But I don’t like,” he said, energetically; “I’d much rather not see the man. You know the sort of person he is.”

“Why, no,” I answered, “I never studied the Almanac de Gotha.”

“Oh, I forgot,” he said. He seemed vexed with himself.

Churchill’s dinners were frequently rather trying to me. Personages of enormous importance used to drop in — and reveal themselves as rather asinine. At the best of times they sat dimly opposite to me, discomposed me, and disappeared. Sometimes they stared me down. That night there were two of them.

Gurnard I had heard of. One can’t help hearing of a Chancellor of the Exchequer. The books of reference said that he was the son of one William Gurnard, Esq., of Grimsby; but I remember that once in my club a man who professed to know everything, assured me that W. Gurnard, Esq. (whom he had described as a fish salesman), was only an adoptive father. His rapid rise seemed to me inexplicable till the same man accounted for it with a shrug: “When a man of such ability believes in nothing, and sticks at nothing, there’s no saying how far he may go. He has kicked away every ladder. He doesn’t mean to come down.”

This, no doubt, explained much; but not everything in his fabulous career. His adherents called him an inspired statesman; his enemies set him down a mere politician. He was a man of forty-five, thin, slightly bald, and with an icy assurance of manner.

He was indifferent to attacks upon his character, but crushed mercilessly every one who menaced his position. He stood alone, and a little mysterious; his own party was afraid of him.

Gurnard was quite hidden from me by table ornaments; the Duc de Mersch glowed with light and talked voluminously, as if he had for years and years been starved of human society. He glowed all over, it seemed to me. He had a glorious beard, that let one see very little of his florid face and took the edge away from an almost non-existent forehead and depressingly wrinkled eyelids. He spoke excellent English, rather slowly, as if he were forever replying to toasts to his health. It struck me that he seemed to treat Churchill in nuances as an inferior, whilst for the invisible Gurnard, he reserved an attitude of nervous self-assertion. He had apparently come to dilate on the *Système Groënlandais*, and he dilated. Some mistaken persons had insinuated that the *Système* was neither more nor less than a corporate exploitation of unhappy Esquimaux. De Mersch emphatically declared that those mistaken people were mistaken, declared it with official finality. The Esquimaux were not unhappy. I paid attention to my dinner, and let the discourse on the affairs of the Hyperborean Protectorate lapse into an unheeded murmur. I tried to be the simple amanuensis at the feast.

Suddenly, however, it struck me that de Mersch was talking at me; that he had by the merest shade raised his intonation. He was dilating upon the immense international value of the proposed Trans-Greenland Railway. Its importance to British trade was indisputable; even the opposition had no serious arguments to offer. It was the obvious duty of the British Government to give the financial guarantee. He would not insist upon the moral aspect of the work — it was unnecessary. Progress, improvement, civilisation, a little less evil in the world — more light! It was our duty not to count the cost of humanising a lower race. Besides, the thing would pay like another Suez Canal. Its terminus and the British coaling station would be on the west coast of the island... I knew the man was talking at me — I wondered why.

Suddenly he turned his glowing countenance full upon me.

"I think I must have met a member of your family," he said. The solution occurred to me. I was a journalist, he a person interested in a railway that he wished the Government to back in some way or another. His attempts to capture my suffrage no longer astonished me. I murmured:

"Indeed!"

"In Paris — Mrs. Etchingham Granger," he said.

I said, "Oh, yes."

Miss Churchill came to the rescue.

"The Duc de Mersch means our friend, your aunt," she explained. I had an unpleasant sensation. Through fronds of asparagus fern I caught the eyes of Gurnard fixed upon me as though something had drawn his attention. I returned his glance, tried to make his face out. It had nothing distinctive in its half-hidden pallid oval; nothing that one could seize upon. But it gave the impression of never having seen the light of day, of never having had the sun upon it. But the conviction that I had aroused his attention

disturbed me. What could the man know about me? I seemed to feel his glance bore through the irises of my eyes into the back of my skull. The feeling was almost physical; it was as if some incredibly concentrant reflector had been turned upon me. Then the eyelids dropped over the metallic rings beneath them. Miss Churchill continued to explain.

“She has started a sort of Salon des Causes Perdues in the Faubourg Saint Germain.” She was recording the vagaries of my aunt. The Duc laughed.

“Ah, yes,” he said, “what a menagerie — Carlists, and Orleanists, and Papal Blacks. I wonder she has not held a bazaar in favour of your White Rose League.”

“Ah, yes,” I echoed, “I have heard that she was mad about the divine right of kings.”

Miss Churchill rose, as ladies rise at the end of a dinner. I followed her out of the room, in obedience to some minute signal.

We were on the best of terms — we two. She mothered me, as she mothered everybody not beneath contempt or above a certain age. I liked her immensely — the masterful, absorbed, brown lady. As she walked up the stairs, she said, in half apology for withdrawing me.

“They’ve got things to talk about.”

“Why, yes,” I answered; “I suppose the railway matter has to be settled.” She looked at me fixedly.

“You — you mustn’t talk,” she warned.

“Oh,” I answered, “I’m not indiscreet — not essentially.”

The other three were somewhat tardy in making their drawing-room appearance. I had a sense of them, leaning their heads together over the edges of the table. In the interim a rather fierce political dowager convoyed two well-controlled, blond daughters into the room. There was a continual coming and going of such people in the house; they did with Miss Churchill social business of some kind, arranged electoral rarées-shows, and what not; troubled me very little. On this occasion the blond daughters were types of the sixties’ survivals — the type that unemotionally inspected albums. I was convoying them through a volume of views of Switzerland, the dowager was saying to Miss Churchill:

“You think, then, it will be enough if we have...” When the door opened behind my back. I looked round negligently and hastily returned to the consideration of a shining photograph of the Dent du Midi. A very gracious figure of a girl was embracing the grim Miss Churchill, as a gracious girl should virginally salute a grim veteran.

“Ah, my dear Miss Churchill!” a fluting voice filled the large room, “we were very nearly going back to Paris without once coming to see you. We are only over for two days — for the Tenants’ Ball, and so my aunt ... but surely that is Arthur...”

I turned eagerly. It was the Dimensionist girl. She continued talking to Miss Churchill. “We meet so seldom, and we are never upon terms,” she said lightly. “I assure you we are like cat and dog.” She came toward me and the blond maidens disappeared, everybody, everything disappeared. I had not seen her for nearly a year.

I had vaguely gathered from Miss Churchill that she was regarded as a sister of mine, that she had, with wealth inherited from a semi-fabulous Australian uncle, revived the glories of my aunt's house. I had never denied it, because I did not want to interfere with my aunt's attempts to regain some of the family's prosperity. It even had my sympathy to a small extent, for, after all, the family was my family too.

As a memory my pseudo-sister had been something bright and clear-cut and rather small; seen now, she was something that one could not look at for glow. She moved toward me, smiling and radiant, as a ship moves beneath towers of shining canvas. I was simply overwhelmed. I don't know what she said, what I said, what she did or I. I have an idea that we conversed for some minutes. I remember that she said, at some point,

"Go away now; I want to talk to Mr. Gurnard."

As a matter of fact, Gurnard was making toward her — a deliberate, slow progress. She greeted him with nonchalance, as, beneath eyes, a woman greets a man she knows intimately. I found myself hating him, thinking that he was not the sort of man she ought to know.

"It's settled?" she asked him, as he came within range. He looked at me inquiringly — insolently. She said, "My brother," and he answered:

"Oh, yes," as I moved away. I hated the man and I could not keep my eyes off him and her. I went and stood against the mantel-piece. The Duc de Mersch bore down upon them, and I welcomed his interruption until I saw that he, too, was intimate with her, intimate with a pomposity of flourishes as irritating as Gurnard's nonchalance.

I stood there and glowered at them. I noted her excessive beauty; her almost perilous self-possession while she stood talking to those two men. Of me there was nothing left but the eyes. I had no mind, no thoughts. I saw the three figures go through the attitudes of conversation — she very animated, de Mersch grotesquely empressé, Gurnard undisguisedly saturnine. He repelled me exactly as grossly vulgar men had the power of doing, but he, himself, was not that — there was something ... something. I could not quite make out his face, I never could. I never did, any more than I could ever quite visualise hers. I wondered vaguely how Churchill could work in harness with such a man, how he could bring himself to be closeted, as he had just been, with him and with a fool like de Mersch — I should have been afraid.

As for de Mersch, standing between those two, he seemed like a country lout between confederate sharpers. It struck me that she let me see, made me see, that she and Gurnard had an understanding, made manifest to me by glances that passed when the Duc had his unobservant eyes turned elsewhere.

I saw Churchill, in turn, move desultorily toward them, drawn in, like a straw toward a little whirlpool. I turned my back in a fury of jealousy.

Chapter 9

I had a pretty bad night after that, and was not much in the mood for Fox on the morrow. The sight of her had dwarfed everything; the thought of her disgusted me with everything, made me out of conceit with the world — with that part of the world that had become my world. I wanted to get up into hers — and I could not see any way. The room in which Fox sat seemed to be hopelessly off the road — to be hopelessly off any road to any place; to be the end of a blind alley. One day I might hope to occupy such a room — in my shirt-sleeves, like Fox. But that was not the end of my career — not the end that I desired. She had upset me.

“You’ve just missed Polehampton,” Fox said; “wanted to get hold of your ‘Atmospheres.’”

“Oh, damn Polehampton,” I said, “and particularly damn the ‘Atmospheres.’”

“Willingly,” Fox said, “but I told Mr. P. that you were willing if...”

“I don’t want to know,” I repeated. “I tell you I’m sick of the things.”

“What a change,” he asserted, sympathetically, “I thought you would.”

It struck me as disgusting that a person like Fox should think about me at all. “Oh, I’ll see it through,” I said. “Who’s the next?”

“We’ve got to have the Duc de Mersch now,” he answered, “De Mersch as State Founder — written as large as you can — all across the page. The moment’s come and we’ve got to rope it in, that’s all. I’ve been middling good to you.... You understand....”

He began to explain in his dark sentences. The time had come for an energetically engineered boom in de Mersch — a boom all along the line. And I was to commence the campaign. Fox had been good to me and I was to repay him. I listened in a sort of apathetic indifference.

“Oh, very well,” I said. I was subconsciously aware that, as far as I was concerned, the determining factor of the situation was the announcement that de Mersch was to be in Paris. If he had been in his own particular grand duchy I wouldn’t have gone after him. For a moment I thought of the interview as taking place in London. But Fox — ostensibly, at least — wasn’t even aware of de Mersch’s visit; spoke of him as being in Paris — in a flat in which he was accustomed to interview the continental financiers who took up so much of his time.

I realised that I wanted to go to Paris because she was there. She had said that she was going to Paris on the morrow of yesterday. The name was pleasant to me, and it turned the scale.

Fox’s eyes remained upon my face.

“Do you good, eh?” he dimly interpreted my thoughts. “A run over. I thought you’d like it and, look here, Polehampton’s taken over the Bi-Monthly; wants to get new blood into it, see? He’d take something. I’ve been talking to him — a short series... ‘Aspects.’ That sort of thing.” I tried to work myself into some sort of enthusiasm of gratitude. I knew that Fox had spoken well of me to Polehampton — as a sort of set off.

“You go and see Mr. P.,” he confirmed; “it’s really all arranged. And then get off to Paris as fast as you can and have a good time.”

“Have I been unusually cranky lately?” I asked.

“Oh, you’ve been a little off the hooks, I thought, for the last week or so.”

He took up a large bottle of white mucilage, and I accepted it as a sign of dismissal. I was touched by his solicitude for my health. It always did touch me, and I found myself unusually broad-minded in thought as I went down the terra-cotta front steps into the streets. For all his frank vulgarity, for all his shirt-sleeves — I somehow regarded that habit of his as the final mark of the Beast — and the Louis Quinze accessories, I felt a warm good-feeling for the little man.

I made haste to see Polehampton, to beard him in a sort of den that contained a number of shelves of books selected for their glittering back decoration. They gave the impression that Mr. Polehampton wished to suggest to his visitors the fitness and propriety of clothing their walls with the same gilt cloth. They gave that idea, but I think that, actually, Mr. Polehampton took an aesthetic delight in the gilding. He was not a publisher by nature. He had drifted into the trade and success, but beneath a polish of acquaintance retained a fine awe for a book as such. In early life he had had such shining things on a shiny table in a parlour. He had a similar awe for his daughter, who had been born after his entry into the trade, and who had the literary flavour — a flavour so pronounced that he dragged her by the heels into any conversation with us who hewed his raw material, expecting, I suppose, to cow us. For the greater good of this young lady he had bought the Bi-Monthly — one of the portentous political organs. He had, they said, ideas of forcing a seat out of the party as a recompense.

It didn’t matter much what was the nature of my series of articles. I was to get the atmosphere of cities as I had got those of the various individuals. I seemed to pay on those lines, and Miss Polehampton commended me.

“My daughter likes ... eh ... your touch, you know, and....” His terms were decent — for the man, and were offered with a flourish that indicated special benevolence and a reference to the hundred pounds. I was at a loss to account for his manner until he began to stammer out an indication. Its lines were that I knew Fox, and I knew Churchill and the Duc de Mersch, and the Hour. “And those financial articles ... in the Hour ... were they now?... Were they ... was the Trans -Greenland railway actually ... did I think it would be worth one’s while ... in fact....” and so on.

I never was any good in a situation of that sort, never any good at all. I ought to have assumed blank ignorance, but the man’s eyes pleaded; it seemed a tremendous matter to him. I tried to be non-committal, and said: “Of course I haven’t any right.”

But I had a vague, stupid sense that loyalty to Churchill demanded that I should back up a man he was backing. As a matter of fact, nothing so direct was a-gate, it couldn't have been. It was something about shares in one of de Mersch's other enterprises. Polehampton was going to pick them up for nothing, and they were going to rise when the boom in de Mersch's began — something of the sort. And the boom would begin as soon as the news of the agreement about the railway got abroad.

I let him get it out of me in a way that makes the thought of that bare place with its gilt book-backs and its three uncomfortable office-chairs and the ground-glass windows through which one read the inversion of the legend "Polehampton," all its gloom and its rigid lines and its pallid light, a memory of confusion. And Polehampton was properly grateful, and invited me to dine with him and his phantasmal daughter — who wanted to make my acquaintance. It was like a command to a state banquet given by a palace official, and Lea would be invited to meet me. Miss Polehampton did not like Lea, but he had to be asked once a year — to encourage good feeling, I suppose. The interview dribbled out on those lines. I asked if it was one of Lea's days at the office. It was not. I tried to put in a good word for Lea, but it was not very effective. Polehampton was too subject to his assistant's thorns to be responsive to praise of him.

So I hurried out of the place. I wanted to be out of this medium in which my ineffectiveness threatened to proclaim itself to me. It was not a very difficult matter. I had, in those days, rooms in one of the political journalists' clubs — a vast mausoleum of white tiles. But a man used to pack my portmanteau very efficiently and at short notice. At the station one of those coincidences that are not coincidences made me run against the great Callan. He was rather unhappy — found it impossible to make an already distracted porter listen to the end of one of his sentences with two-second waits between each word. For that reason he brightened to see me — was delighted to find a through-journey companion who would take him on terms of greatness. In the railway carriage, divested of troublesome bags that imparted anxiety to his small face and a stagger to his walk, he swelled to his normal dimensions.

"So you're — going to — Paris," he meditated, "for the Hour."

"I'm going to Paris for the Hour," I agreed.

"Ah!" he went on, "you're going to interview the Elective Grand Duke..."

"We call him the Duc de Mersch," I interrupted, flippantly. It was a matter of nuances. The Elective Grand Duke was a philanthropist and a State Founder, the Duc de Mersch was the hero as financier.

"Of Holstein-Launewitz," Callan ignored. The titles slipped over his tongue like the last drops of some inestimable oily vintage.

"I might have saved you the trouble. I'm going to see him myself."

"You," I italicised. It struck me as phenomenal and rather absurd that everybody that I came across should, in some way or other, be mixed up with this portentous philanthropist. It was as if a fisherman were drawing in a ground line baited with hundreds of hooks. He had a little offended air.

“He, or, I should say, a number of people interested in a philanthropic society, have asked me to go to Greenland.”

“Do they want to get rid of you?” I asked, flippantly. I was made to know my place.

“My dear fellow,” Callan said, in his most deliberate, most Olympian tone. “I believe you’re entirely mistaken, I believe ... I’ve been informed that the *Système Groënlandais* is one of the healthiest places in the Polar regions. There are interested persons who....”

“So I’ve heard,” I interrupted, “but I can assure you I’ve heard nothing but good of the *Système* and the ... and its philanthropists. I meant nothing against them. I was only astonished that you should go to such a place.”

“I have been asked to go upon a mission,” he explained, seriously, “to ascertain what the truth about the *Système* really is. It is a new country with, I am assured, a great future in store. A great deal of English money has been invested in its securities, and naturally great interest is taken in its affairs.”

“So it seems,” I said, “I seem to run upon it at every hour of the day and night.”

“Ah, yes,” Callan rhapsodised, “it has a great future in store, a great future. The Duke is a true philanthropist. He has taken infinite pains — infinite pains. He wished to build up a model state, the model protectorate of the world, a place where perfect equality shall obtain for all races, all creeds, and all colours. You would scarcely believe how he has worked to ensure the happiness of the native races. He founded the great society to protect the Esquimaux, the Society for the Regeneration of the Arctic Regions — the S.R.A.R. — as you called it, and now he is only waiting to accomplish his greatest project — the Trans-Greenland railway. When that is done, he will hand over the *Système* to his own people. That is the act of a great man.”

“Ah, yes,” I said.

“Well,” Callan began again, but suddenly paused. “By-the-bye, this must go no farther,” he said, anxiously, “I will let you have full particulars when the time is ripe.”

“My dear Callan,” I said, touchily, “I can hold my tongue.”

He went off at tangent.

“I don’t want you to take my word — I haven’t seen it yet. But I feel assured about it myself. The most distinguished people have spoken to me in its favour. The celebrated traveller, Aston, spoke of it with tears in his eyes. He was the first governor-general, you know. Of course I should not take any interest in it, if I were not satisfied as to that. It is precisely because I feel that the thing is one of the finest monuments of a grand century that I am going to lend it the weight of my pen.”

“I quite understand,” I assured him; then, solicitously, “I hope they don’t expect you to do it for nothing.”

“Oh, dear, no,” Callan answered.

“Ah, well, I wish you luck,” I said. “They couldn’t have got a better man to win over the National conscience. I suppose it comes to that.”

Callan nodded.

“I fancy I have the ear of the public,” he said. He seemed to get satisfaction from the thought.

The train entered Folkestone Harbour. The smell of the sea and the easy send of the boat put a little heart into me, but my spirits were on the down grade. Callan was a trying companion. The sight of him stirred uneasy emotions, the sound of his voice jarred.

“Are you coming to the Grand?” he said, as we passed St. Denis.

“My God, no,” I answered, hotly, “I’m going across the river.”

“Ah,” he murmured, “the Quartier Latin. I wish I could come with you. But I’ve my reputation to think of. You’d be surprised how people get to hear of my movements. Besides, I’m a family man.”

I was agitatedly silent. The train steamed into the glare of the electric lights, and, getting into a fiacre, I breathed again. I seemed to be at the entrance of a new life, a better sort of paradise, during that drive across the night city. In London one is always a passenger, in Paris one has reached a goal. The crowds on the pavements, under the plane-trees, in the black shadows, in the white glare of the open spaces, are at leisure — they go nowhere, seek nothing beyond.

We crossed the river, the unwinking towers of Notre Dame towering pallidly against the dark sky behind us; rattled into the new light of the resuming boulevard; turned up a dark street, and came to a halt before a half-familiar shut door. You know how one wakes the sleepy concierge, how one takes one’s candle, climbs up hundreds and hundreds of smooth stairs, following the slipshod footfalls of a half-awakened guide upward through Rembrandt’s own shadows, and how one’s final sleep is sweetened by the little inconveniences of a strange bare room and of a strange hard bed.

Chapter 10

Before noon of the next day I was ascending the stairs of the new house in which the Duc had his hermitage. There was an air of secrecy in the broad publicity of the carpeted stairs that led to his flat; a hush in the atmosphere; in the street itself, a glorified cul de sac that ran into the bustling life of the Italiens. It had the sudden sluggishness of a back-water. One seemed to have grown suddenly deaf in the midst of the rattle.

There was an incredible suggestion of silence — the silence of a private detective — in the mien of the servant who ushered me into a room. He was the English servant of the theatre — the English servant that foreigners affect. The room had a splendour of its own, not a cheaply vulgar splendour, but the vulgarity of the most lavish plush and purple kind. The air was heavy, killed by the scent of exotic flowers, darkened by curtains that suggested the voluminous velvet backgrounds of certain old portraits. The Duc de Mersch had carried with him into this place of retirement the taste of the New Palace, that show-place of his that was the stupefaction of swarms of honest tourists.

I remembered soon enough that the man was a philanthropist, that he might be an excellent man of heart and indifferent of taste. He must be. But I was prone to be influenced by things of this sort, and felt depressed at the thought that so much of royal excellence should weigh so heavily in the wrong scale of the balance of the applied arts. I turned my back on the room and gazed at the blazing white decorations of the opposite house-fronts.

A door behind me must have opened, for I heard the sounds of a concluding tirade in a high-pitched voice.

“Et quant à un duc de farce, je ne m’en fiche pas mal, moi,” it said in an accent curiously compounded of the foreign and the coulisse. A muttered male remonstrance ensued, and then, with disconcerting clearness:

“Gr-r-rangeur — Eschingan — eh bien — il entend. Et moi, j’entends, moi aussi. Tu veux me jouer contre elle. La Grangeur — pah! Consoles-toi avec elle, mon vieux. Je ne veux plus de toi. Tu m’as donné de tes sales rentes Groenlandoises, et je n’ai pas pu les vendre. Ah, vieux farceur, tu vas voir ce que j’en vais faire.”

A glorious creature — a really glorious creature — came out of an adjoining room. She was as frail, as swaying as a garden lily. Her great blue eyes turned irefully upon me, her bowed lips parted, her nostrils quivered.

“Et quant à vous, M. Grangeur Eschingan,” she began, “je vais vous donner mon idée à moi ...”

I did not understand the situation in the least, but I appreciated the awkwardness of it. The world seemed to be standing on its head. I was overcome; but I felt for the person in the next room. I did not know what to do. Suddenly I found myself saying:

“I am extremely sorry, madam, but I don’t understand French.” An expression of more intense vexation passed into her face — her beautiful face. I fancy she wished — wished intensely — to give me the benefit of her “*idée à elle*.” She made a quick, violent gesture of disgusted contempt, and turned toward the half-open door from which she had come. She began again to dilate upon the little weaknesses of the person behind, when silently and swiftly it closed. We heard the lock click. With extraordinary quickness she had her mouth at the keyhole: “Peeg, peeg,” she enunciated. Then she stood to her full height, her face became calm, her manner stately. She glided half way across the room, paused, looked at me, and pointed toward the unmoving door.

“Peeg, peeg,” she explained, mysteriously. I think she was warning me against the wiles of the person behind the door. I gazed into her great eyes. “I understand,” I said, gravely. She glided from the room. For me the incident supplied a welcome touch of comedy. I had leisure for thought. The door remained closed. It made the Duc a more real person for me. I had regarded him as a rather tiresome person in whom a pompous philanthropism took the place of human feelings. It amused me to be called *Le Grangeur*. It amused me, and I stood in need of amusement. Without it I might never have written the article on the Duc. I had started out that morning in a state of nervous irritation. I had wanted more than ever to have done with the thing, with the Hour, with journalism, with everything. But this little new experience buoyed me up, set my mind working in less morbid lines. I began to wonder whether *de Mersch* would funk, or whether he would take my non-comprehension of the woman’s tirades as a thing assured.

The door at which I had entered, by which she had left, opened.

He must have impressed me in some way or other that evening at the Churchills. He seemed a very stereotyped image in my memory. He spoke just as he had spoken, moved his hands just as I expected him to move them. He called for no modification of my views of his person. As a rule one classes a man so-and-so at first meeting, modifies the classification at each subsequent one, and so on. He seemed to be all affability, of an adipose turn. He had the air of the man of the world among men of the world; but none of the unconscious reserve of manner that one expects to find in the temporarily great. He had in its place a kind of sub-sulkiness, as if he regretted the pedestal from which he had descended.

In his slow commercial English he apologised for having kept me waiting; he had been taking the air of this fine morning, he said. He mumbled the words with his eyes on my waistcoat, with an air that accorded rather ill with the semblance of portentous probity that his beard conferred on him. But he set an eye-glass in his left eye immediately afterward, and looked straight at me as if in challenge. With a smiling “Don’t mention,” I tried to demonstrate that I met him half way.

“You want to interview me,” he said, blandly. “I am only too pleased. I suppose it is about my Arctic schemes that you wish to know. I will do what I can to inform you. You perhaps remember what I said when I had the pleasure of meeting you at the house of the Right Honourable Mr. Churchill. It has been the dream of my life to leave behind me a happy and contented State — as much as laws and organisation can make one. This is what I should most like the English to know of me.” He was a dull talker. I supposed that philanthropists and state founders kept their best faculties for their higher pursuits. I imagined the low, receding forehead and the pink-nailed, fleshy hands to belong to a new Solon, a latter-day Æneas. I tried to work myself into the properly enthusiastic frame of mind. After all, it was a great work that he had undertaken. I was too much given to dwell upon intellectual gifts. These the Duc seemed to lack. I credited him with having let them be merged in his one noble idea.

He furnished me with statistics. They had laid down so many miles of railways, used so many engines of British construction. They had taught the natives to use and to value sewing-machines and European costumes. So many hundred of English younger sons had gone to make their fortunes and, incidentally, to enlighten the Esquimaux — so many hundreds of French, of Germans, Greeks, Russians. All these lived and moved in harmony, employed, happy, free labourers, protected by the most rigid laws. Man-eating, fetich-worship, slavery had been abolished, stamped out. The great international society for the preservation of Polar freedom watched over all, suggested new laws, modified the old. The country was unhealthy, but not to men of clean lives — *hominibus bonæ voluntatis*. It asked for no others.

“I have had to endure much misrepresentation. I have been called names,” the Duc said.

The figure of the lady danced before my eyes, lithe, supple — a statue endued with the motion of a serpent. I seemed to see her sculptured white hand pointing to the closed door.

“Ah, yes,” I said, “but one knows the people that call you names.”

“Well, then,” he answered, “it is your task to make them know the truth.

Your nation has so much power. If it will only realise.”

“I will do my best,” I said.

I saw the apotheosis of the Press — a Press that makes a State Founder suppliant to a man like myself. For he had the tone of a deprecating petitioner. I stood between himself and a people, the arbiter of the peoples, of the kings of the future. I was nothing, nobody; yet here I stood in communion with one of those who change the face of continents. He had need of me, of the power that was behind me. It was strange to be alone in that room with that man — to be there just as I might be in my own little room alone with any other man.

I was not unduly elated, you must understand. It was nothing to me. I was just a person elected by some suffrage of accidents. Even in my own eyes I was merely a symbol — the sign visible of incomprehensible power.

“I will do my best,” I said.

“Ah, yes, do,” he said, “Mr. Churchill told me how nicely you can do such things.”

I said that it was very kind of Mr. Churchill. The tension of the conversation was relaxed. The Duc asked if I had yet seen my aunt.

“I had forgotten her,” I said.

“Oh, you must see her,” he said; “she is a most remarkable lady. She is one of my relaxations. All Paris talks about her, I can assure you.”

“I had no idea,” I said.

“Oh, cultivate her,” he said; “you will be amused.”

“I will,” I said, as I took my leave.

I went straight home to my little room above the roofs. I began at once to write my article, working at high pressure, almost hysterically. I remember that place and that time so well. In moments of emotion one gazes fixedly at things, hardly conscious of them. Afterward one remembers.

I can still see the narrow room, the bare, brown, discoloured walls, the incongruous marble clock on the mantel-piece, the single rickety chair that swayed beneath me. I could almost draw the tortuous pattern of the faded cloth that hid the round table at which I sat. The ink was thick, pale, and sticky; the pen spluttered. I wrote furiously, anxious to be done with it. Once I went and leaned over the balcony, trying to hit on a word that would not come. Miles down below, little people crawled over the cobbled street, little carts rattled, little workmen let down casks into a cellar. It was all very grey, small, and clear.

Through the open window of an opposite garret I could see a sculptor working at a colossal clay model. In his white blouse he seemed big, out of all proportion to the rest of the world. Level with my eyes there were flat lead roofs and chimneys. On one of these was scrawled, in big, irregular, blue-painted letters: “A bas Coignet.”

Great clouds began to loom into view over the house-tops, rounded, toppling masses of grey, lit up with sullen orange against the pale limpid blue of the sky. I stood and looked at all these objects. I had come out here to think — thoughts had deserted me. I could only look.

The clouds moved imperceptibly, fatefully onward, a streak of lightning tore them apart. They whirled like tortured smoke and grew suddenly black. Large spots of rain with jagged edges began to fall on the lead floor of my balcony.

I turned into the twilight of my room and began to write. I can still feel the tearing of my pen-point on the coarse paper. It was a hindrance to thought, but my flow of words ignored it, gained impetus from it, as a stream does at the breaking of a dam.

I was writing a pæan to a great coloniser. That sort of thing was in the air then. I was drawn into it, carried away by my subject. Perhaps I let it do so because it was so little familiar to my lines of thought. It was fresh ground and I revelled in it. I committed myself to that kind of emotional, lyrical outburst that one dislikes so much on re-reading. I was half conscious of the fact, but I ignored it.

The thunderstorm was over, and there was a moist sparkling freshness in the air when I hurried with my copy to the Hour office in the Avenue de l'Opéra. I wished to be rid of it, to render impossible all chance of revision on the morrow.

I wanted, too, to feel elated; I expected it. It was a right. At the office I found the foreign correspondent, a little cosmopolitan Jew whose eyebrows began their growth on the bridge of his nose. He was effusive and familiar, as the rest of his kind.

"Hullo, Granger," was his greeting. I was used to regarding myself as fallen from a high estate, but I was not yet so humble in spirit as to relish being called Granger by a stranger of his stamp. I tried to freeze him politely.

"Read your stuff in the Hour," was his rejoinder; "jolly good I call it. Been doing old Red-Beard? Let's have a look. Yes, yes. That's the way — that's the real thing — I call it. Must have bored you to death ... old de Mersch I mean. I ought to have had the job, you know. My business, interviewing people in Paris. But I don't mind. Much rather you did it than I. You do it a heap better."

I murmured thanks. There was a pathos about the sleek little man — a pathos that is always present in the type. He seemed to be trying to assume a deprecating equality.

"Where are you going to-night?" he asked, with sudden effusiveness. I was taken aback. One is not used to being asked these questions after five minutes' acquaintance. I said that I had no plans.

"Look here," he said, brightening up, "come and have dinner with me at Breguet's, and look in at the Opera afterward. We'll have a real nice chat."

I was too tired to frame an adequate excuse. Besides, the little man was as eager as a child for a new toy. We went to Breguet's and had a really excellent dinner.

"Always come here," he said; "one meets a lot of swells. It runs away with a deal of money — but I don't care to do things on the cheap, not for the Hour, you know. You can always be certain when I say that I have a thing from a senator that he is a senator, and not an old woman in a paper kiosque. Most of them do that sort of thing, you know."

"I always wondered," I said, mildly.

"That's de Sourdam I nodded to as we came in, and that old chap there is Pluyvis — the Affaire man, you know. I must have a word with him in a minute, if you'll excuse me."

He began to ask affectionately after the health of the excellent Fox, asked if I saw him often, and so on and so on. I divined with amusement that was pleasurable that the little man had his own little axe to grind, and thought I might take a turn at the grindstone if he managed me well. So he nodded to de Sourdam of the Austrian embassy and had his word with Pluyvis, and rejoiced to have impressed me — I could see him bubble with happiness and purr. He proposed that we should stroll as far as the paper kiosque that he patronised habitually — it was kept by a fellow-Israelite — a snuffy little old woman.

I understood that in the joy of his heart he was for expanding, for wasting a few minutes on a stroll.

“Haven’t stretched my legs for months,” he explained.

We strolled there through the summer twilight. It was so pleasant to saunter through the young summer night. There were so many little things to catch the eyes, so many of the little things down near the earth; expressions on faces of the passers, the set of a collar, the quaint foreign tightness of waist of a good bourgeoisie who walked arm in arm with her perspiring spouse. The gilding on the statue of Joan of Arc had a pleasant littleness of Philistinism, the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli broke up the grey light pleasantly too. I remembered a little shop — a little Greek affair with a windowful of pinch-beck — where I had been given a false five-franc piece years and years ago. The same villainous old Levantine stood in the doorway, perhaps the fez that he wore was the same fez. The little old woman that we strolled to was bent nearly double. Her nose touched her wares as often as not, her mittened hands sought quiveringly the papers that the correspondent asked for. I liked him the better for his solicitude for this forlorn piece of flotsam of his own race.

“Always come here,” he exclaimed; “one gets into habits. Very honest woman, too, you can be certain of getting your change. If you’re a stranger you can’t be sure that they won’t give you Italian silver, you know.”

“Oh, I know,” I answered. I knew, too, that he wished me to purchase something. I followed the course of her groping hands, caught sight of the *Revue Rouge*, and remembered that it contained something about Greenland. I helped myself to it, paid for it, and received my just change. I felt that I had satisfied the little man, and felt satisfied with myself.

“I want to see Radet’s article on Greenland,” I said.

“Oh, yes,” he explained, once more exhibiting himself in the capacity of the man who knows, “Radet gives it to them. Rather a lark, I call it, though you mustn’t let old de Mersch know you read him. Radet got sick of Cochin, and tried Greenland. He’s getting touched by the Whites you know. They say that the priests don’t like the way the *Système’s* playing into the hands of the Protestants and the English Government. So they set Radet on to write it down. He’s going in for mysticism and all that sort of thing — just like all these French jokers are doing. Got deuced thick with that lot in the F. St. Germain — some relation of yours, ain’t they? Rather a lark that lot, quite the thing just now, everyone goes there; old de Mersch too. Have frightful rows sometimes, such a mixed lot, you see.” The good little man rattled amiably along beside me.

“Seems quite funny to be buying books,” he said. “I haven’t read a thing I’ve bought, not for years.”

We reached the Opera in time for the end of the first act — it was *Aïda*, I think. My little friend had a free pass all over the house. I had not been in it for years. In the old days I had always seen the stage from a great height, craning over people’s heads in a sultry twilight; now I saw it on a level, seated at my ease. I had only the power of the Press to thank for the change.

“Come here as often as I can,” my companion said; “can’t do without music when it’s to be had.” Indeed he had the love of his race for it. It seemed to soften him, to change his nature, as he sat silent by my side.

But the closing notes of each scene found him out in the cool of the corridors, talking, and being talked to by anyone that would vouchsafe him a word.

“Pick up a lot here,” he explained.

After the finale we leaned over one of the side balconies to watch the crowd streaming down the marble staircases. It is a scene that I never tire of. There is something so fantastically tawdry in the coloured marble of the architecture. It is for all the world like a triumph of ornamental soap work; one expects to smell the odours. And the torrent of humanity pouring liquidly aslant through the mirror-like light, and the spaciousness.... Yes, it is fantastic, somehow; ironical, too.

I was watching the devious passage of a rather drunken, gigantic, florid Englishman, wondering, I think, how he would reach his bed.

“That must be a relation of yours,” the correspondent said, pointing. My glance followed the line indicated by his pale finger. I made out the glorious beard of the Duc de Mersch, on his arm was an old lady to whom he seemed to pay deferential attention. His head was bent on one side; he was smiling frankly. A little behind them, on the stairway, there was a space. Perhaps I was mistaken; perhaps there was no space — I don’t know. I was only conscious of a figure, an indescribably clear-cut woman’s figure, gliding down the way. It had a coldness, a self-possession, a motion of its own. In that clear, transparent, shimmering light, every little fold of the dress, every little shadow of the white arms, the white shoulders, came up to me. The face turned up to meet mine. I remember so well the light shining down on the face, not a shadow anywhere, not a shadow beneath the eyebrows, the nostrils, the waves of hair. It was a vision of light, threatening, sinister.

She smiled, her lips parted.

“You come to me to-morrow,” she said. Did I hear the words, did her lips merely form them? She was far, far down below me; the air was alive with the rustling of feet, of garments, of laughter, full of sounds that made themselves heard, full of sounds that would not be caught.

“You come to me ... to-morrow.”

The old lady on the Duc de Mersch’s arm was obviously my aunt. I did not see why I should not go to them to-morrow. It struck me suddenly and rather pleasantly that this was, after all, my family. This old lady actually was a connection more close than anyone else in the world. As for the girl, to all intents and, in everyone else’s eyes, she was my sister. I cannot say I disliked having her for my sister, either. I stood looking down upon them and felt less alone than I had done for many years.

A minute scuffle of the shortest duration was taking place beside me. There were a couple of men at my elbow. I don’t in the least know what they were — perhaps marquises, perhaps railway employees — one never can tell over there. One of them was tall and blond, with a heavy, bow-shaped red moustache — Irish in type; the

other of no particular height, excellently groomed, dark, and exemplary. I knew he was exemplary from some detail of costume that I can't remember — his gloves or a strip of silk down the sides of his trousers — something of the sort. The blond was saying something that I did not catch. I heard the words “de Mersch” and “Anglaise,” and saw the dark man turn his attention to the little group below. Then I caught my own name mispronounced and somewhat of a stumbling-block to a high-pitched contemptuous intonation. The little correspondent, who was on my other arm, started visibly and moved swiftly behind my back.

“Messieurs,” he said in an urgent whisper, and drew them to a little distance. I saw him say something, saw them pivot to look at me, shrug their shoulders and walk away. I didn't in the least grasp the significance of the scene — not then.

“What's the matter?” I asked my returning friend; “were they talking about me?” He answered nervously.

“Oh, it was about your aunt's Salon, you know. They might have been going to say something awkward ... one never knows.”

“They really do talk about it then?” I said. “I've a good mind to attend one of their exhibitions.”

“Why, of course,” he said, “you ought. I really think you ought.”

“I'll go to-morrow,” I answered.

Chapter 11

I couldn't get to sleep that night, but lay and tossed, lit my candle and read, and so on, for ever and ever — for an eternity. I was confoundedly excited; there were a hundred things to be thought about; clamouring to be thought about; out-clamouring the re-curent chimes of some near clock. I began to read the article by Radet in the *Revue Rouge* — the one I had bought of the old woman in the kiosk. It upset me a good deal — that article. It gave away the whole Greenland show so completely that the ecstatic bosh I had just despatched to the *Hour* seemed impossible. I suppose the good Radet had his axe to grind — just as I had had to grind the State Founder's, but Radet's axe didn't show. I was reading about an inland valley, a broad, shadowy, grey thing; immensely broad, immensely shadowy, winding away between immense, half-invisible mountains into the silence of an unknown country. A little band of men, microscopic figures in that immensity, in those mists, crept slowly up it. A man among them was speaking; I seemed to hear his voice, low, monotonous, overpowered by the wan light and the silence and the vastness.

And how well it was done — how the man could write; how skilfully he made his points. There was no slosh about it, no sentiment. The touch was light, in places even gay. He saw so well the romance of that dun band that had cast remorse behind; that had no return, no future, that spread desolation desolately. This was merely a review article — a thing that in England would have been unreadable; the narrative of a nomad of some genius. I could never have written like that — I should have spoilt it somehow. It set me tingling with desire, with the desire that transcends the sexual; the desire for the fine phrase, for the right word — for all the other intangibles. And I had been wasting all this time; had been writing my inanities. I must go away; must get back, right back to the old road, must work. There was so little time. It was unpleasant, too, to have been mixed up in this affair, to have been trepanned into doing my best to help it on its foul way. God knows I had little of the humanitarian in me. If people must murder in the by-ways of an immense world they must do murder and pay the price. But that I should have been mixed up in such was not what I had wanted. I must have dine with it all; with all this sort of thing, must get back to my old self, must get back. I seemed to hear the slow words of the Duc de Mersch.

“We have increased exports by so much; the imports by so much. We have protected the natives, have kept their higher interests ever present in our minds. And through it all we have never forgotten the mission entrusted to us by Europe — to remove the evil of darkness from the earth — to root out barbarism with its nameless horrors,

whose existence has been a blot on our consciences. Men of good-will and self-sacrifice are doing it now — are laying down their priceless lives to root out ... to root out....”

Of course they were rooting them out.

It didn't matter to me. One supposes that that sort of native exists for that sort of thing — to be rooted out by men of good-will, with careers to make. The point was that that was what they were really doing out there — rooting out the barbarians as well as the barbarism, and proving themselves worthy of their hire. And I had been writing them up and was no better than the farcical governor of a department who would write on the morrow to protest that that was what they did not do. You see I had a sort of personal pride in those days; and preferred to think of myself as a decent person. I knew that people would say the same sort of thing about me that they said about all the rest of them. I couldn't very well protest. I had been scratching the backs of all sorts of creatures; out of friendship, out of love — for all sorts of reasons. This was only a sort of last straw — or perhaps it was the sight of her that had been the last straw. It seemed naïvely futile to have been wasting my time over Mrs. Hartly and those she stood for, when there was something so different in the world — something so like a current of east wind.

That vein of thought kept me awake, and a worse came to keep it company. The men from the next room came home — students, I suppose. They talked gaily enough, their remarks interspersed by the thuds of falling boots and the other incomprehensible noises of the night. Through the flimsy partition I caught half sentences in that sort of French intonation that is so impossible to attain. It reminded me of the voices of the two men at the Opera. I began to wonder what they had been saying — what they could have been saying that concerned me and affected the little correspondent to interfere. Suddenly the thing dawned upon me with the startling clearness of a figure in a complicated pattern — a clearness from which one cannot take one's eyes.

It threw everything — the whole world — into more unpleasant relations with me than even the Greenland affair. They had not been talking about my aunt and her Salon, but about my ... my sister. She was De Mersch's "Anglaise." I did not believe it, but probably all Paris — the whole world — said she was. And to the whole world I was her brother! Those two men who had looked at me over their shoulders had shrugged and said, "Oh, he's ...". And the whole world wherever I went would whisper in asides, "Don't you know Granger? He's the brother. De Mersch employs him."

I began to understand everything; the woman in de Mersch's room with her "Eschingan-Grangeur-r-r"; the deference of the little Jew — the man who knew. He knew that I — that I, who patronised him, was a person to stand well with because of my — my sister's hold over de Mersch. I wasn't, of course, but you can't understand how the whole thing maddened me all the same. I hated the world — this world of people who whispered and were whispered to, of men who knew and men who wanted to know — the shadowy world of people who didn't matter, but whose eyes and voices were all round one and did somehow matter. I knew well enough how it had come about. It was de Mersch — the State Founder, with his shamed face and his pallid

hands. She had been attracted by his air of greatness, by his elective grand-dukedom, by his protestations. Women are like that. She had been attracted and didn't know what she was doing, didn't know what the world was over here — how people talked. She had been excited by the whirl and flutter of it, and perhaps she didn't care. The thing must come to an end, however. She had said that I should go to her on the morrow. Well, I would go, and I would put a stop to this. I had suddenly discovered how very much I was a Granger of Etchingam, after all I had family traditions and graves behind me. And for the sake of all these people whose one achievement had been the making of a good name I had to intervene now. After all — "Bon sang ne" — does not get itself talked about in that way.

The early afternoon of the morrow found me in a great room — a faded, sombre salon of the house my aunt had taken in the Faubourg Saint Germain. Numbers of strong-featured people were talking in groups among the tables and chairs of a time before the Revolution. I rather forget how I had got there, and what had gone before. I must have arisen late and passed the intervening hours in a state of trepidation. I was going to see her, and I was like a cub in love, with a man's place to fill. It was a preposterous state of things that set the solid world in a whirl. Once there, my eyes suddenly took in things.

I had a sense of her standing by my side. She had just introduced me to my aunt — a heavy-featured, tired-eyed village tyrant. She was so obviously worn out, so obviously "not what she had been," that her face would have been pitiful but for its immovable expression of class pride. The Grangers of Etchingam, you see, were so absolutely at the top of their own particular kind of tree that it was impossible for them to meet anyone who was not an inferior. A man might be a cabinet minister, might even be a prince, but he couldn't be a Granger of Etchingam, couldn't have such an assortment of graves, each containing a Granger, behind his back. The expression didn't even lift for me who had. It couldn't, it was fixed there. One wondered what she was doing in this galère. It seemed impossible that she should interest herself in the restoration of the Bourbons — they were all very well, but they weren't even English, let alone a county family. I figured it out that she must have set her own village so much in order that there remained nothing but the setting in order of the rest of the world. Her bored eyes wandered sleepily over the assemblage. They seemed to have no preferences for any of them. They rested on the vacuously Bonaparte prince, on the moribund German Jesuit to whom he was listening, on the darkly supple young Spanish priest, on the rosy-gilled English Passionist, on Radet, the writer of that article in the *Revue Rouge*, who was talking to a compatriot in one of the tall windows. She seemed to accept the saturnine-looking men, the political women, who all spoke a language not their own, with an accent and a fluency, and a dangerous far-away smile and a display of questionable teeth all their own. She seemed to class the political with the pious, the obvious adventurer with the seeming fanatic. It was amazing to me to see her there, standing with her county family self-possession in the midst of so much that was questionable. She offered me no explanation; I had to find one for myself.

We stood and talked in the centre of the room. It did not seem a place in which one could sit.

“Why have you never been to see me?” she asked languidly. “I might never have known of your existence if it had not been for your sister.” My sister was standing at my side, you must remember. I don’t suppose that I started, but I made my aunt no answer.

“Indeed,” she went on, “I should never have known that you had a sister. Your father was so very peculiar. From the day he married, my husband never heard a word from him.”

“They were so very different,” I said, listlessly.

“Ah, yes,” she answered, “brothers so often are.” She sighed, apropos of nothing. She continued to utter disjointed sentences from which I gathered a skeleton history of my soi distant sister’s introduction of herself and of her pretensions. She had, it seemed, casually introduced herself at some garden-party or function of the sort, had represented herself as a sister of my own to whom a maternal uncle had left a fabulous fortune. She herself had suggested her being sheltered under my aunt’s roof as a singularly welcome “paying guest.” She herself, too, had suggested the visit to Paris and had hired the house from a degenerate Duc de Luynes who preferred the delights of an appartement in the less lugubrious Avenue Marceau.

“We have tastes so much in common,” my aunt explained, as she moved away to welcome a new arrival. I was left alone with the woman who called herself my sister.

We stood a little apart. Each little group of talkers in the vast room seemed to stand just without earshot of the next. I had my back to the door, my face to her.

“And so you have come,” she said, maliciously it seemed to me.

It was impossible to speak in such a position; in such a place; impossible to hold a discussion on family affairs when a diminutive Irishwoman with too mobile eyebrows, and a couple of gigantic, raw-boned, lugubrious Spaniards, were in a position to hear anything that one uttered above a whisper. One might want to raise one’s voice. Besides, she was so — so terrible; there was no knowing what she might not say. She so obviously did not care what the Irish or the Spaniards or the Jesuits heard or thought, that I was forced to the mortifying conclusion that I did.

“Oh, I’ve come,” I answered. I felt as outrageously out of it as one does at a suburban hop where one does not know one animal of the menagerie. I did not know what to do or what to say, or what to do with my hands. I was pervaded by the unpleasant idea that all those furtive eyes were upon me; gauging me because I was the brother of a personality. I was concerned about the fit of my coat and my boots, and all the while I was in a furious temper; my errand was important.

She stood looking at me, a sinuous, brilliant thing, with a light in the eyes half challenging, half openly victorious.

“You have come,” she said, “and ...”

I became singularly afraid of her; and wanted to stop her mouth. She might be going to say anything. She overpowered me so that I actually dwindled — into the

gawkiness of extreme youth. I became a goggle-eyed, splay-footed boy again and made a boy's desperate effort after a recovery at one stroke of an ideal standard of dignity.

"I must have a word with you," I said, remembering. She made a little gesture with her hands, signifying "I am here." "But in private," I added.

"Oh, everything's in private here," she said. I was silent.

"I must," I added after a time.

"I can't retire with you," she said; "'it would look odd,' you'd say, wouldn't you?" I shrugged my shoulders in intense irritation. I didn't want to be burlesqued. A flood of fresh people came into the room. I heard a throaty "ahem" behind me. The Duc de Mersch was introducing himself to notice. It was as I had thought — the man was an habitue, with his well-cut clothes, his air of protestation, and his tremendous golden poll. He was the only sunlight that the gloomy place rejoiced in. He bowed low over my oppressor's hand, smiled upon me, and began to utter platitudes in English.

"Oh, you may speak French," she said carelessly.

"But your brother..." he answered.

"I understand French very well," I said. I was in no mood to spare him embarrassments; wanted to show him that I had a hold over him, and knew he wasn't the proper person to talk to a young lady. He glared at me haughtily.

"But yesterday ..." he began in a tone that burlesqued august displeasure. I was wondering what he had looked like on the other side of the door — whilst that lady had been explaining his nature to me.

"Yesterday I wished to avoid embarrassments," I said; "I was to represent your views about Greenland. I might have misunderstood you in some important matter."

"I see, I see," he said conciliatorily. "Yesterday we spoke English for the benefit of the British public. When we speak French we are not in public, I hope." He had a semi-supplicating manner.

"Everything's rather too much in public here," I answered. My part as I imagined it was that of a British brother defending his sister from questionable attentions — the person who "tries to show the man he isn't wanted." But de Mersch didn't see the matter in that light at all. He could not, of course. He was as much used to being purred to as my aunt to looking down on non-county persons. He seemed to think I was making an incomprehensible insular joke, and laughed non-committally. It wouldn't have been possible to let him know he wasn't wanted.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of my brother," she said suddenly. "He is quite harmless. He is even going to give up writing for the papers except when we want him."

The Duc turned from me to her, smiled and bowed. His smile was inane, but he bowed very well; he had been groomed into that sort of thing or had it in the blood.

"We work together still?" he asked.

"Why not?" she answered.

A hubbub of angry voices raised itself behind my back. It was one of the contretemps that made the Salon Grangeur famous throughout the city.

“You forced yourself upon me. Did I say anywhere that you were responsible? If it resembles your particular hell upon earth, what is that to me? You do worse things; you, yourself, monsieur. Haven’t I seen ... haven’t I seen it?”

The Duc de Mersch looked swiftly over his shoulder toward the window.

“They seem to be angry there,” he said nervously. “Had not something better be done, Miss Granger?”

Miss Granger followed the direction of his eyes.

“Why,” she said, “we’re used to these differences of opinion. Besides, it’s only Monsieur Radet; he’s forever at war with someone or other.”

“He ought to be shown the door,” the Duc grumbled.

“Oh, as for that,” she answered, “we couldn’t. My aunt would be desolated by such a necessity. He is very influential in certain quarters. My aunt wants to catch him for the — He’s going to write an article.”

“He writes too many articles,” the Duc said, with heavy displeasure.

“Oh, he has written one too many,” she answered, “but that can be traversed...”

“But no one believes,” the Duc objected ... Radet’s voice intermittently broke in upon his sotto-voce, coming to our ears in gusts.

“Haven’t I seen you ... and then ... and you offer me the cross ... to bribe me to silence ... me...”

In the general turning of faces toward the window in which stood Radet and the other, mine turned too. Radet was a cadaverous, weatherworn, passion-worn individual, badger-grey, and worked up into a grotesquely attitudinised fury of injured self-esteem. The other was a denationalised, shifty-eyed, sallow, grey-bearded governor of one of the provinces of the *Système Groënlandais*; had a closely barbered head, a bull neck, and a great belly. He cast furtive glances round him, uncertain whether to escape or to wait for his say. He looked at the ring that encircled the window at a little distance, and his face, which had betrayed a half-apparent shame, hardened at sight of the cynical masks of the cosmopolitan conspirators. They were amused by the scene. The Holsteiner gained confidence, shrugged his shoulders.

“You have had the fever very badly since you came back,” he said, showing a level row of white teeth. “You did not talk like that out there.”

“No — *pas si bête* — you would have hanged me, perhaps, as you did that poor devil of a Swiss. What was his name? Now you offer me the cross. Because I had the fever, *hein?*”

I had been watching the Duc’s face; a first red flush had come creeping from under the roots of his beard, and had spread over the low forehead and the sides of the neck. The eye-glass fell from the eye, a signal for the colour to retreat. The full lips grew pallid, and began to mutter unspoken words. His eyes wandered appealingly from the woman beside him to me. I didn’t want to look him in the face. The man was a trafficker in human blood, an evil liver, and I hated him. He had to pay his price; would have to pay — but I didn’t want to see him pay it. There was a limit.

I began to excuse myself, and slid out between the groups of excellent plotters. As I was going, she said to me:

“You may come to me to-morrow in the morning.”

Chapter 12

I was at the Hôtel de Luynes — or Granger — early on the following morning. The mists were still hanging about the dismal upper windows of the inscrutable Faubourg; the toilet of the city was being completed; the little hoses on wheels were clattering about the quiet larger streets. I had not much courage thus early in the day. I had started impulsively; stepping with the impulse of immediate action from the doorstep of the dairy where I had breakfasted. But I made detours; it was too early, and my pace slackened into a saunter as I passed the row of porters' lodges in that dead, inscrutable street. I wanted to fly; had that impulse very strongly; but I burnt my boats with my inquiry of the incredibly ancient, one-eyed portress. I made my way across the damp court-yard, under the enormous portico, and into the chilly stone hall that no amount of human coming and going sufficed to bring back to a semblance of life. Mademoiselle was expecting me. One went up a great flight of stone steps into one of the immensely high, narrow, impossibly rectangular ante-rooms that one sees in the frontispieces of old plays. The furniture looked no more than knee-high until one discovered that one's self had no appreciable stature. The sad light slanted in ruled lines from the great height of the windows; an army of motes moved slowly in and out of the shadows. I went after awhile and looked disconsolately out into the court-yard. The portress was making her way across the gravelled space, her arms, her hands, the pockets of her black apron full of letters of all sizes. I remembered that the facteur had followed me down the street. A noise of voices came confusedly to my ears from between half-opened folding-doors; the thing reminded me of my waiting in de Mersch's rooms. It did not last so long. The voices gathered tone, as they do at the end of a colloquy, succeeded each other at longer intervals, and at last came to a sustained halt. The tall doors moved ajar and she entered, followed by a man whom I recognized as the governor of a province of the day before. In that hostile light he looked old and weazened and worried; seemed to have lost much of his rotundity. As for her, she shone with a light of her own.

He greeted me dejectedly, and did not brighten when she let him know that we had a mutual friend in Callan. The Governor, it seemed, in his capacity of Supervisor of the Système, was to conduct that distinguished person through the wilds of Greenland; was to smooth his way and to point out to him excellences of administration.

I wished him a good journey; he sighed and began to fumble with his hat.

"Alors, c'est entendu," she said; giving him leave to depart. He looked at her in an odd sort of way, took her hand and applied it to his lips.

“C’est entendu,” he said with a heavy sigh, drops of moisture spattering from beneath his white moustache, “mais ...”

He ogled again with infinitesimal eyes and went out of the room. He had the air of wishing to wipe the perspiration from his brows and to exclaim, “Quelle femme!” But if he had any such wish he mastered it until the door hid him from sight.

“Why the ...” I began before it had well closed, “do you allow that thing to make love to you?” I wanted to take up my position before she could have a chance to make me ridiculous. I wanted to make a long speech — about duty to the name of Granger. But the next word hung, and, before it came, she had answered:

“He? — Oh, I’m making use of him.”

“To inherit the earth?” I asked ironically, and she answered gravely:

“To inherit the earth.”

She was leaning against the window, playing with the strings of the blinds, and silhouetted against the leaden light. She seemed to be, physically, a little tired; and the lines of her figure to interlace almost tenderly — to “compose” well, after the ideas of a certain school. I knew so little of her — only just enough to be in love with her — that this struck me as the herald of a new phase, not so much in her attitude to me as in mine to her; she had even then a sort of gravity, the gravity of a person on whom things were beginning to weigh.

“But,” I said, irresolutely. I could not speak to her; to this new conception of her, in the way I had planned; in the way one would talk to a brilliant, limpid — oh, to a woman of sorts. But I had to take something of my old line. “How would flirting with that man help you?”

“It’s quite simple,” she answered, “he’s to show Callan all Greenland, and Callan is to write ... Callan has immense influence over a great class, and he will have some of the prestige of — of a Commissioner.”

“Oh, I know about Callan,” I said.

“And,” she went on, “this man had orders to hide things from Callan; you know what it is they have to hide. But he won’t now; that is what I was arranging. It’s partly by bribery and partly because he has a belief in his beaux yeux — so Callan will be upset and will write an ... exposure; the sort of thing Callan would write if he were well upset. And he will be, by what this man will let him see. You know what a little man like Callan will feel ... he will be made ill. He would faint at the sight of a drop of blood, you know, and he will see — oh, the very worst, worse than what Radet saw. And he will write a frightful article, and it will be a thunderclap for de Mersch.... And de Mersch will be getting very shaky by then. And your friend Churchill will try to carry de Mersch’s railway bill through in the face of the scandal. Churchill’s motives will be excellent, but everyone will say ... You know what people say ... That is what I and Gurnard want. We want people to talk; we want them to believe...”

I don’t know whether there really was a hesitation in her voice, or whether I read that into it. She stood there, playing with the knots of the window-cords and speaking in a low monotone. The whole thing, the sad twilight of the place, her tone of voice,

seemed tinged with unavailing regret. I had almost forgotten the Dimensionist story, and I had never believed in it. But now, for the first time I began to have my doubts. I was certain that she had been plotting something with one of the Duc de Mersch's lieutenants. The man's manner vouched for that; he had not been able to look me in the face. But, more than anything, his voice and manner made me feel that we had passed out of a realm of farcical allegory. I knew enough to see that she might be speaking the truth. And, if she were, her calm avowal of such treachery proved that she was what she had said the Dimensionists were; cold, with no scruples, clear-sighted and admirably courageous, and indubitably enemies of society.

"I don't understand," I said. "But de Mersch then?"

She made a little gesture; one of those movements that I best remember of her; the smallest, the least noticeable. It reduced de Mersch to nothing; he no longer even counted.

"Oh, as for him," she said, "he is only a detail." I had still the idea that she spoke with a pitying intonation — as if she were speaking to a dog in pain. "He doesn't really count; not really. He will crumble up and disappear, very soon. You won't even remember him."

"But," I said, "you go about with him, as if you.... You are getting yourself talked about.... Everyone thinks — " ... The accusation that I had come to make seemed impossible, now I was facing her. "I believe," I added, with the suddenness of inspiration. "I'm certain even, that he thinks that you ..."

"Well, they think that sort of thing. But it is only part of the game.

Oh, I assure you it is no more than that."

I was silent. I felt that, for one reason or another, she wished me to believe.

"Yes," she said, "I want you to believe. It will save you a good deal of pain."

"If you wanted to save me pain," I maintained, "you would have done with de Mersch ... for good." I had an idea that the solution was beyond me. It was as if the controlling powers were flitting, invisible, just above my head, just beyond my grasp. There was obviously something vibrating; some cord, somewhere, stretched very taut and quivering. But I could think of no better solution than: "You must have done with him." It seemed obvious, too, that that was impossible, was outside the range of things that could be done — but I had to do my best. "It's a — it's vile," I added, "vile."

"Oh, I know, I know," she said, "for you.... And I'm even sorry. But it has to be gone on with. De Mersch has to go under in just this way. It can't be any other."

"Why not?" I asked, because she had paused. I hadn't any desire for enlightenment.

"It isn't even only Churchill," she said, "not even only that de Mersch will bring down Churchill with him. It is that he must bring down everything that Churchill stands for. You know what that is — the sort of probity, all the old order of things. And the more vile the means used to destroy de Mersch the more vile the whole affair will seem. People — the sort of people — have an idea that a decent man cannot be touched by tortuous intrigues. And the whole thing will be — oh, malodorous. You understand."

"I don't," I answered, "I don't understand at all."

"Ah, yes, you do," she said, "you understand...." She paused for a long while, and I was silent. I understood vaguely what she meant; that if Churchill fell amid the clouds of dust of such a collapse, there would be an end of belief in probity ... or nearly an end. But I could not see what it all led up to; where it left us.

"You see," she began again, "I want to make it as little painful to you as I can; as little painful as explanations can make it. I can't feel as you feel, but I can see, rather dimly, what it is that hurts you. And so ... I want to; I really want to."

"But you won't do the one thing," I returned hopelessly to the charge.

"I cannot," she answered, "it must be like that; there isn't any way. You are so tied down to these little things. Don't you see that de Mersch, and — and all these people — don't really count? They aren't anything at all in the scheme of things. I think that, even for you, they aren't worth bothering about. They're only accidents; the accidents that — "

"That what?" I asked, although I began to see dimly what she meant.

"That lead in the inevitable," she answered. "Don't you see? Don't you understand? We are the inevitable ... and you can't keep us back. We have to come and you, you will only hurt yourself, by resisting." A sense that this was the truth, the only truth, beset me. It was for the moment impossible to think of anything else — of anything else in the world. "You must accept us and all that we mean, you must stand back; sooner or later. Look even all round you, and you will understand better. You are in the house of a type — a type that became impossible. Oh, centuries ago. And that type too, tried very hard to keep back the inevitable; not only because itself went under, but because everything that it stood for went under. And it had to suffer — heartache ... that sort of suffering. Isn't it so?"

I did not answer; the illustration was too abominably just. It was just that. There were even now all these people — these Legitimists — sneering ineffectually; shutting themselves away from the light in their mournful houses and suffering horribly because everything that they stood for had gone under.

"But even if I believe you," I said, "the thing is too horrible, and your tools are too mean; that man who has just gone out and — and Callan — are they the weapons of the inevitable? After all, the Revolution ..." I was striving to get back to tangible ideas — ideas that one could name and date and label ... "the Revolution was noble in essence and made for good. But all this of yours is too vile and too petty. You are bribing, or something worse, that man to betray his master. And that you call helping on the inevitable...."

"They used to say just that of the Revolution. That wasn't nice of its tools. Don't you see? They were the people that went under.... They couldn't see the good...."

"And I — I am to take it on trust," I said, bitterly.

"You couldn't see the good," she answered, "it isn't possible, and there is no way of explaining. Our languages are different, and there's no bridge — no bridge at all. We can't meet...."

It was that revolted me. If there was no bridge and we could not meet, we must even fight; that is, if I believed her version of herself. If I did not, I was being played the fool with. I preferred to think that. If she were only fooling me she remained attainable. If it was as she said, there was no hope at all — not any.

“I don’t believe you,” I said, suddenly. I didn’t want to believe her. The thing was too abominable — too abominable for words, and incredible. I struggled against it as one struggles against inevitable madness, against the thought of it. It hung over me, stupefying, deadening. One could only fight it with violence, crudely, in jerks, as one struggles against the numbness of frost. It was like a pall, like descending clouds of smoke, seemed to be actually present in the absurdly lofty room — this belief in what she stood for, in what she said she stood for.

“I don’t believe you,” I proclaimed, “I won’t.... You are playing the fool with me ... trying to get round me ... to make me let you go on with these — with these — It is abominable. Think of what it means for me, what people are saying of me, and I am a decent man — You shall not. Do you understand, you shall not. It is unbearable ... and you ... you try to fool me ... in order to keep me quiet ...”

“Oh, no,” she said. “Oh, no.”

She had an accent that touched grief, as nearly as she could touch it. I remember it now, as one remembers these things. But then I passed it over. I was too much moved myself to notice it more than subconsciously, as one notices things past which one is whirled. And I was whirled past these things, in an ungovernable fury at the remembrance of what I had suffered, of what I had still to suffer. I was speaking with intense rage, jerking out words, ideas, as floodwater jerks through a sluice the débris of once ordered fields.

“You are,” I said, “you are — you — you — dragging an ancient name through the dust — you ...”

I forget what I said. But I remember, “dragging an ancient name.” It struck me, at the time, by its forlornness, as part of an appeal to her. It was so pathetically tiny a motive, so out of tone, that it stuck in my mind. I only remember the upshot of my speech; that, unless she swore — oh, yes, swore — to have done with de Mersch, I would denounce her to my aunt at that very moment and in that very house.

And she said that it was impossible.

Chapter 13

I had a sense of walking very fast — almost of taking flight — down a long dim corridor, and of a door that opened into an immense room. All that I remember of it, as I saw it then, was a number of pastel portraits of weak, vacuous individuals, in dulled, gilt, oval frames. The heads stood out from the panelling and stared at me from between ringlets, from under powdered hair, simpering, or contemptuous with the expression that must have prevailed in the monde of the time before the Revolution. At a great distance, bent over account — books and pink cheques on the flap of an escritoire, sat my aunt, very small, very grey, very intent on her work.

The people who built these rooms must have had some property of the presence to make them bulk large — if they ever really did so — in the eyes of dependents, of lackeys. Perhaps it was their sense of ownership that gave them the necessary prestige. My aunt, who was only a temporary occupant, certainly had none of it. Bent intently over her accounts, peering through her spectacles at columns of figures, she was nothing but a little old woman alone in an immense room. It seemed impossible that she could really have any family pride, any pride of any sort. She looked round at me over her spectacles, across her shoulder.

“Ah ... Etchingam,” she said. She seemed to be trying to carry herself back to England, to the England of her land-agent and her select visiting list. Here she was no more superior than if we had been on a desert island. I wanted to enlighten her as to the woman she was sheltering — wanted to very badly; but a necessity for introducing the matter seemed to arise as she gradually stiffened into assertiveness.

“My dear aunt,” I said, “the woman...” The alien nature of the theme grew suddenly formidable. She looked at me arousedly.

“You got my note then,” she said. “But I don’t think a woman can have brought it. I have given such strict orders. They have such strange ideas here, though. And Madame — the portière — is an old retainer of M. de Luynes, I haven’t much influence over her. It is absurd, but...” It seems that the old lady in the lodge made a point of carrying letters that went by hand. She had an eye for gratuities — and the police, I should say, were concerned. They make a good deal of use of that sort of person in that neighbourhood of infinitesimal and unceasing plotting.

“I didn’t mean that,” I said, “but the woman who calls herself my sister...”

“My dear nephew,” she interrupted, with tranquil force, as if she were taking an arranged line, “I cannot — I absolutely cannot be worried with your quarrels with your sister. As I said to you in my note of this morning, when you are in this town you must consider this house your home. It is almost insulting of you to go to an inn.

I am told it is even ... quite an unfit place that you are stopping at — for a member of our family.”

I maintained for a few seconds a silence of astonishment.

“But,” I returned to the charge, “the matter is one of importance. You must understand that she....”

My aunt stiffened and froze. It was as if I had committed some flagrant sin against etiquette.

“If I am satisfied as to her behaviour,” she said, “I think that you might be.” She paused as if she were satisfied that she had set me hopelessly in the wrong.

“I don’t withdraw my invitation,” she said. “You must understand I wish you to come here. But your quarrels you and she must settle. On those terms....”

She had the air of conferring an immense favour, as if she believed that I had, all my life through, been waiting for her invitation to come within the pale. As for me, I felt a certain relief at having the carrying out of my duty made impossible for me. I did not want to tell my aunt and thus to break things off definitely and for good. Something would have happened; the air might have cleared as it clears after a storm; I should have learnt where I stood. But I was afraid of the knowledge. Light in these dark places might reveal an abyss at my feet. I wanted to let things slide.

My aunt had returned to her accounts, the accounts which were the cog-wheels that kept running the smooth course of the Etchingam estates. She seemed to wish to indicate that I counted for not very much in the scheme of things as she saw it.

“I should like to make your better acquaintance,” she said, with her head still averted, “there are reasons....” It came suddenly into my head that she had an idea of testamentary dispositions, that she felt she was breaking up, that I had my rights. I didn’t much care for the thing, but the idea of being the heir of Etchingam was — well, was an idea. It would make me more possible to my pseudo-sister. It would be, as it were, a starting-point, would make me potentially a somebody of her sort of ideal. Moreover, I should be under the same roof, near her, with her sometimes. One asks so little more than that, that it seemed almost half the battle. I began to consider phrases of thanks and acceptance and then uttered them.

I never quite understood the bearings of that scene; never quite whether my aunt really knew that my sister was not my sister. She was a wonderfully clever woman of the unscrupulous order, with a sang-froid and self-possession well calculated to let her cut short any inconvenient revelations. It was as if she had had long practice in the art, though I cannot say what occasion she can have had for its practice — perhaps for the confounding of wavering avowers of Dissent at home.

I used to think that she knew, if not all, at least a portion; that the weight that undoubtedly was upon her mind was nothing else but that. She broke up, was breaking up from day to day, and I can think of no other reason. She had the air of being disintegrated, like a mineral under an immense weight — quartz in a crushing mill; of being dulled and numbed as if she were under the influence of narcotics.

There is little enough wonder, if she actually carried that imponderable secret about with her. I used to look at her sometimes, and wonder if she, too, saw the oncoming of the inevitable. She was limited enough in her ideas, but not too stupid to take that in if it presented itself. Indeed they have that sort of idea rather grimly before them all the time — that class.

It must have been that that was daily, and little by little, pressing down her eyelids and deepening the quivering lines of her impenetrable face. She had a certain solitary grandeur, the pathos attaching to the last of a race, of a type; the air of waiting for the deluge, of listening for an inevitable sound — the sound of oncoming waters.

It was weird, the time that I spent in that house — more than weird — deadening. It had an extraordinary effect on me — an effect that my “sister,” perhaps, had carefully calculated. She made pretensions of that sort later on; said that she had been breaking me in to perform my allotted task in the bringing on of the inevitable.

I have nowhere come across such an intense solitude as there was there, a solitude that threw one so absolutely upon one’s self and into one’s self. I used to sit working in one of those tall, panelled rooms, very high up in the air. I was writing at the series of articles for the Bi-Monthly, for Polehampton. I was to get the atmosphere of Paris, you remember. It was rather extraordinary, that process. Up there I seemed to be as much isolated from Paris as if I had been in — well, in Hampton Court. It was almost impossible to write; I had things to think about: preoccupations, jealousies. It was true I had a living to make, but that seemed to have lost its engrossingness as a pursuit, or at least to have suspended it.

The panels of the room seemed to act as a sounding-board, the belly of an immense ‘cello. There were never any noises in the house, only whispers coming from an immense distance — as when one drops stones down an unfathomable well and hears ages afterward the faint sound of disturbed waters. When I look back at that time I figure myself as forever sitting with uplifted pen, waiting for a word that would not come, and that I did not much care about getting. The panels of the room would creak sympathetically to the opening of the entrance-door of the house, the faintest of creaks; people would cross the immense hall to the room in which they plotted; would cross leisurely, with laughter and rustling of garments that after a long time reached my ears in whispers. Then I should have an access of mad jealousy. I wanted to be part of her life, but I could not stand that Salon of suspicious conspirators. What could I do there? Stand and look at them, conscious that they all dropped their voices instinctively when I came near them?

That was the general tone of that space of time, but, of course, it was not always that. I used to emerge now and then to breakfast sympathetically with my aunt, sometimes to sit through a meal with the two of them. I danced attendance on them singly; paid depressing calls with my aunt; calls on the people in the Faubourg; people without any individuality other than a kind of desiccation, the shrivelled appearance and point of view of a dried pippin. In revenge, they had names that startled one, names that recalled the generals and flaneurs of an impossibly distant time; names that could

hardly have had any existence outside the memoirs of Madame de Sévigné, the names of people that could hardly have been fitted to do anything more vigorous than be reflected in the mirrors of the Salle des Glaces. I was so absolutely depressed, so absolutely in a state of suspended animation, that I seemed to conform exactly to my aunt's ideas of what was desirable in me as an attendant on her at these functions. I used to stand behind chairs and talk, like a good young man, to the assorted Pères and Abbés who were generally present.

And then I used to go home and get the atmospheres of these people. I must have done it abominably badly, for the notes that brought Polehampton's cheques were accompanied by the bravos of that gentleman and the assurances that Miss Polehampton liked my work — liked it very much.

I suppose I exhibited myself in the capacity of the man who knew — who could let you into a thing or two. After all, anyone could write about students' balls and the lakes in the Bois, but it took someone to write "with knowledge" of the interiors of the barred houses in the Rue de l'Université.

Then, too, I attended the more showy entertainments with my sister. I had by now become so used to hearing her styled "your sister" that the epithet had the quality of a name. She was "mademoiselle votre soeur," as she might have been Mlle. Patience or Hope, without having anything of the named quality. What she did at the entertainments, the charitable bazaars, the dismal dances, the impossibly bad concerts, I have no idea. She must have had some purpose, for she did nothing without. I myself descended into fulfilling the functions of a rudimentarily developed chaperon — functions similar in importance to those performed by the eyes of a mole. I had the maddest of accesses of jealousy if she talked to a man — and such men — or danced with one. And then I was forever screwing my courage up and feeling it die away. We used to drive about in a coupe, a thing that shut us inexorably together, but which quite as inexorably destroyed all opportunities for what one calls making love. In smooth streets its motion was too glib, on the pavé it rattled too abominably. I wanted to make love to her — oh, immensely, but I was never in the mood, or the opportunity was never forthcoming. I used to have the wildest fits of irritation; not of madness or of depression, but of simple wildness at the continual recurrence of small obstacles. I couldn't read, couldn't bring myself to it. I used to sit and look dazedly at the English newspapers — at any newspaper but the Hour. De Mersch had, for the moment, disappeared. There were troubles in his elective grand duchy — he had, indeed, contrived to make himself unpopular with the electors, excessively unpopular. I used to read piquant articles about his embroglio in an American paper that devoted itself to matters of the sort. All sorts of international difficulties were to arise if de Mersch were ejected. There was some other obscure prince of a rival house, Prussian or Russian, who had desires for the degree of royalty that sat so heavily on de Mersch. Indeed, I think there were two rival princes, each waiting with portmanteaux packed and manifestos in their breast pockets, ready to pass de Mersch's frontiers.

The grievances of his subjects — so the Paris-American Gazette said — were intimately connected with matters of finance, and de Mersch's personal finances and his grand ducal were inextricably mixed up with the wild-cat schemes with which he was seeking to make a fortune large enough to enable him to laugh at half a dozen elective grand duchies. Indeed, de Mersch's own portmanteau was reported to be packed against the day when British support of his Greenland schemes would let him afford to laugh at his cantankerous Diet.

The thing interested me so little that I never quite mastered the details of it. I wished the man no good, but so long as he kept out of my way I was not going to hate him actively. Finally the affairs of Holstein-Launewitz ceased to occupy the papers — the thing was arranged and the Russian and Prussian princes unpacked their portmanteaux, and, I suppose, consigned their manifestos to the flames, or adapted them to the needs of other principalities. De Mersch's affairs ceded their space in the public prints to the topic of the dearness of money. Somebody, somewhere, was said to be up to something. I used to try to read the articles, to master the details, because I disliked finding a whole field of thought of which I knew absolutely nothing. I used to read about the great discount houses and other things that conveyed absolutely nothing to my mind. I only gathered that the said great houses were having a very bad time, and that everybody else was having a very much worse.

One day, indeed, the matter was brought home to me by the receipt from Polehampton of bills instead of my usual cheques. I had a good deal of trouble in cashing the things; indeed, people seemed to look askance at them. I consulted my aunt on the subject, at breakfast. It was the sort of thing that interested the woman of business in her, and we were always short of topics of conversation.

We breakfasted in rather a small room, as rooms went there; my aunt sitting at the head of the table, with an early morning air of being *en famille* that she wore at no other time of day. It was not a matter of garments, for she was not the woman to wear a peignoir; but lay, I supposed, in her manner, which did not begin to assume frigidity until several watches of the day had passed.

I handed her Polehampton's bills and explained that I was at a loss to turn them to account; that I even had only the very haziest of ideas as to their meaning. Holding the forlorn papers in her hand, she began to lecture me on the duty of acquiring the rudiments of what she called "business habits."

"Of course you do not require to master details to any considerable extent," she said, "but I always have held that it is one of the duties of a...."

She interrupted herself as my sister came into the room; looked at her, and then held out the papers in her hand. The things quivered a little; the hand must have quivered too.

"You are going to Halderschrodt's?" she said, interrogatively. "You could get him to negotiate these for Etchingham?"

Miss Granger looked at the papers negligently.

"I am going this afternoon," she answered. "Etchingham can come...." She suddenly turned to me: "So your friend is getting shaky," she said.

"It means that?" I asked. "But I've heard that he has done the same sort of thing before."

"He must have been shaky before," she said, "but I daresay Halderschrodt...."

"Oh, it's hardly worth while bothering that personage about such a sum," I interrupted. Halderschrodt, in those days, was a name that suggested no dealings in any sum less than a million.

"My dear Etchingham," my aunt interrupted in a shocked tone, "it is quite worth his while to oblige us...."

"I didn't know," I said.

That afternoon we drove to Halderschrodt's private office, a sumptuous — that is the mot juste — suite of rooms on the first floor of the house next to the Duc de Mersch's Sans Souci. I sat on a plush-bottomed gilded chair, whilst my pseudo-sister transacted her business in an adjoining room — a room exactly corresponding with that within which de Mersch had lurked whilst the lady was warning me against him. A clerk came after awhile, carried me off into an enclosure, where my bill was discounted by another, and then reconducted me to my plush chair. I did not occupy it, as it happened. A meagre, very tall Alsatian was holding the door open for the exit of my sister. He said nothing at all, but stood slightly inclined as she passed him. I caught a glimpse of a red, long face, very tired eyes, and hair of almost startling whiteness — the white hair of a comparatively young man, without any lustre of any sort — a dead white, like that of snow. I remember that white hair with a feeling of horror, whilst I have almost forgotten the features of the great Baron de Halderschrodt.

I had still some of the feeling of having been in contact with a personality of the most colossal significance as we went down the red carpet of the broad white marble stairs. With one foot on the lowest step, the figure of a perfectly clothed, perfectly groomed man was standing looking upward at our descent. I had thought so little of him that the sight of the Duc de Mersch's face hardly suggested any train of emotions. It lit up with an expression of pleasure.

"You," he said.

She stood looking down upon him from the altitude of two steps, looking with intolerable passivity.

"So you use the common stairs," she said, "one had the idea that you communicated with these people through a private door." He laughed uneasily, looking askance at me.

"Oh, I ..." he said.

She moved a little to one side to pass him in her descent.

"So things have arranged themselves — là bas," she said, referring, I supposed, to the elective grand duchy.

"Oh, it was like a miracle," he answered, "and I owed a great deal — a great deal — to your hints...."

“You must tell me all about it to-night,” she said.

De Mersch’s face had an extraordinary quality that I seemed to notice in all the faces around me — a quality of the flesh that seemed to lose all luminosity, of the eyes that seemed forever to have a tendency to seek the ground, to avoid the sight of the world. When he brightened to answer her it was as if with effort. It seemed as if a weight were on the mind of the whole world — a preoccupation that I shared without understanding. She herself, a certain absent-mindedness apart, seemed the only one that was entirely unaffected.

As we sat side by side in the little carriage, she said suddenly:

“They are coming to the end of their tether, you see.” I shrank away from her a little — but I did not see and did not want to see. I said so. It even seemed to me that de Mersch having got over the troubles là bas, was taking a new lease of life.

“I did think,” I said, “a little time ago that ...”

The wheels of the coupe suddenly began to rattle abominably over the cobbles of a narrow street. It was impossible to talk, and I was thrown back upon myself. I found that I was in a temper — in an abominable temper. The sudden sight of that man, her method of greeting him, the intimacy that the scene revealed ... the whole thing had upset me. Of late, for want of any alarms, in spite of groundlessness I had had the impression that I was the integral part of her life. It was not a logical idea, but strictly a habit of mind that had grown up in the desolation of my solitude.

We passed into one of the larger boulevards, and the thing ran silently.

“That de Mersch was crumbling up,” she suddenly completed my unfinished sentence; “oh, that was only a grumble — premonitory. But it won’t take long now. I have been putting on the screw. Halderschrodt will ... I suppose he will commit suicide, in a day or two. And then the — the fun will begin.”

I didn’t answer. The thing made no impression — no mental impression at all.

Chapter 14

That afternoon we had a scene, and late that night another. The memory of the former is a little blotted out. Things began to move so quickly that, try as I will to arrange their sequence in my mind, I cannot. I cannot even very distinctly remember what she told me at that first explanation. I must have attacked her fiercely — on the score of de Mersch, in the old vein; must have told her that I would not in the interest of the name allow her to see the man again. She told me things, too, rather abominable things, about the way in which she had got Halderschrodt into her power and was pressing him down. Halderschrodt was de Mersch's banker-in-chief; his fall would mean de Mersch's, and so on. The "so on" in this case meant a great deal more. Halderschrodt, apparently, was the "somebody who was up to something" of the American paper — that is to say the allied firms that Halderschrodt represented. I can't remember the details. They were too huge and too unfamiliar, and I was too agitated by my own share in the humanity of it. But, in sum, it seemed that the fall of Halderschrodt would mean a sort of incredibly vast Black Monday — a frightful thing in the existing state of public confidence, but one which did not mean much to me. I forget how she said she had been able to put the screw on him. Halderschrodt, as you must remember, was the third of his colossal name, a man without much genius and conscious of the lack, obsessed with the idea of operating some enormous coup, like the founder of his dynasty, something in which foresight in international occurrence played a chief part. That idea was his weakness, the defect of his mind, and she had played on that weakness. I forget, I say, the details, if I ever heard them; they concerned themselves with a dynastic revolution somewhere, a revolution that was to cause a slump all over the world, and that had been engineered in our Salon. And she had burked the revolution — betrayed it, I suppose — and the consequences did not ensue, and Halderschrodt and all the rest of them were left high and dry.

The whole thing was a matter of under-currents that never came to the surface, a matter of shifting sands from which only those with the clearest heads could come forth.

"And we ... we have clear heads," she said. It was impossible to listen to her without shuddering. For me, if he stood for anything, Halderschrodt stood for stability; there was the tremendous name, and there was the person I had just seen, the person on whom a habit of mind approaching almost to the royal had conferred a presence that had some of the divinity that hedges a king. It seemed frightful merely to imagine his ignominious collapse; as frightful as if she had pointed out a splendid-limbed man and said: "That man will be dead in five minutes." That, indeed, was what she said of

Halderschrodt.... The man had saluted her, going to his death; the austere inclination that I had seen had been the salutation of such a man.

I was so moved by one thing and another that I hardly noticed that Gurnard had come into the room. I had not seen him since the night when he had dined with the Duc de Mersch at Churchill's, but he seemed so part of the emotion, of the frame of mind, that he slid noiselessly into the scene and hardly surprised me. I was called out of the room — someone desired to see me, and I passed, without any transition of feeling, into the presence of an entire stranger — a man who remains a voice to me. He began to talk to me about the state of my aunt's health. He said she was breaking up; that he begged respectfully to urge that I would use my influence to take her back to London to consult Sir James — I, perhaps, living in the house and not having known my aunt for very long, might not see; but he ... He was my aunt's solicitor. He was quite right; my aunt was breaking up, she had declined visibly in the few hours that I had been away from her. She had been doing business with this man, had altered her will, had seen Mr. Gurnard; and, in some way had received a shock that seemed to have deprived her of all volition. She sat with her head leaning back, her eyes closed, the lines of her face all seeming to run downward.

"It is obvious to me that arrangements ought to be made for your return to England," the lawyer said, "whatever engagements Miss Granger or Mr. Etchingham Granger or even Mr. Gurnard may have made."

I wondered vaguely what the devil Mr. Gurnard could have to say in the matter, and then Miss Granger herself came into the room.

"They want me," my aunt said in a low voice, "they have been persuading me ... to go back ... to Etchingham, I think you said, Meredith."

I became conscious that I wanted to return to England, wanted it very much, wanted to be out of this; to get somewhere where there was stability and things that one could understand. Everything here seemed to be in a mist, with the ground trembling underfoot.

"Why ..." Miss Granger's verdict came, "we can go when you like.

To-morrow."

Things immediately began to shape themselves on these unexpected lines, a sort of bustle of departure to be in the air. I was employed to conduct the lawyer as far as the porter's lodge, a longish traverse. He beguiled the way by excusing himself for hurrying back to London.

"I might have been of use; in these hurried departures there are generally things. But, you will understand, Mr. — Mr. Etchingham; at a time like this I could hardly spare the hours that it cost me to come over. You would be astonished what a deal of extra work it gives and how far-spreading the evil is. People seem to have gone mad. Even I have been astonished."

"I had no idea," I said.

“Of course not, of course not — no one had. But, unless I am much mistaken — much — there will have to be an enquiry, and people will be very lucky who have had nothing to do with it ...”

I gathered that things were in a bad way, over there as over here; that there were scandals and a tremendous outcry for purification in the highest places. I saw the man get into his fiacre and took my way back across the court-yard rather slowly, pondering over the part I was to fill in the emigration, wondering how far events had conferred on me a partnership in the family affairs.

I found that my tacitly acknowledged function was that of supervising nurse-tender, the sort of thing that made for personal tenderness in the aridity of profuse hired help. I was expected to arrange a rug just a little more comfortably than the lady's maid who would travel in the compartment — to give the finishing touches.

It was astonishing how well the thing was engineered; the removal, I mean. It gave me an even better idea of the woman my aunt had been than even the panic of her solicitor. The thing went as smoothly as the disappearance of a caravan of gypsies, camped for the night on a heath beside gorse bushes. We went to the ball that night as if from a household that had its roots deep in the solid rock, and in the morning we had disappeared.

The ball itself was a finishing touch — the finishing touch of my sister's affairs and the end of my patience. I spent an interminable night, one of those nights that never end and that remain quivering and raw in the memory. I seemed to be in a blaze of light, watching, through a shifting screen of shimmering dresses — her and the Duc de Mersch. I don't know whether the thing was really noticeable, but it seemed that everyone was — that everyone must be — remarking it. I thought I caught women making smile-punctuated remarks behind fans, men answering inaudibly with eyes discreetly on the ground. It was a mixed assembly, somebody's liquidation of social obligations, and there was a sprinkling of the kind of people who do make remarks. It was not the noticeability for its own sake that I hated, but the fact that their relations by their noticeability made me impossible, whilst the notice itself confirmed my own fears. I hung, glowering in corners, noticeable enough myself, I suppose.

The thing reached a crisis late in the evening. There was a kind of winter-garden that one strolled in, a place of giant palms stretching up into a darkness of intense shadow. I was prowling about in the shadows of great metallic leaves, cursing under my breath, in a fury of nervous irritation; quivering like a horse martyred by a stupidly merciless driver. I happened to stand back for a moment in the narrowest of paths, with the touch of spiky leaves on my hand and on my face. In front of me was the glaring perspective of one of the longer alleys, and, stepping into it, a great band of blue ribbon cutting across his chest, came de Mersch with her upon his arm. De Mersch himself hardly counted. He had a way of glowing, but he paled ineffectual fires beside her mænadic glow. There was something overpowering in the sight of her, in the fire of her eyes, in the glow of her coils of hair, in the poise of her head. She wore some kind of early nineteenth-century dress, sweeping low from the waist with a tenderness of fold

that affected one with delicate pathos, that had a virgin quality of almost poignant intensity. And beneath it she stepped with the buoyancy — the long steps — of a triumphant Diana.

It was more than terrible for me to stand there longing with a black, baffled longing, with some of the base quality of an eavesdropper and all the baseness of the unsuccessful.

Then Gurnard loomed in the distance, moving insensibly down the long, glaring corridor, a sinister figure, suggesting in the silence of his oncoming the motionless flight of a vulture. Well within my field of sight he overtook them and, with a lack of preliminary greeting that suggested supreme intimacy, walked beside them. I stood for some moments — for some minutes, and then hastened after them. I was going to do something. After a time I found de Mersch and Gurnard standing facing each other in one of the doorways of the place — Gurnard, a small, dark, impassive column; de Mersch, bulky, overwhelming, florid, standing with his legs well apart and speaking vociferously with a good deal of gesture. I approached them from the side, standing rather insistently at his elbow.

“I want,” I said, “I would be extremely glad if you would give me a minute, monsieur.” I was conscious that I spoke with a tremour of the voice, a sort of throaty eagerness. I was unaware of what course I was to pursue, but I was confident of calmness, of self-control — I was equal to that. They had a pause of surprised silence. Gurnard wheeled and fixed me critically with his eye-glass. I took de Mersch a little apart, into a solitude of palm branches, and began to speak before he had asked me my errand.

“You must understand that I would not interfere without a good deal of provocation,” I was saying, when he cut me short, speaking in a thick, jovial voice.

“Oh, we will understand that, my good Granger, and then ...”

“It is about my sister,” I said — “you — you go too far. I must ask you, as a gentleman, to cease persecuting her.”

He answered “The devil!” and then: “If I do not — — ?”

It was evident in his voice, in his manner, that the man was a little — well, gris. “If you do not,” I said, “I shall forbid her to see you and I shall ...”

“Oh, oh!” he interjected with the intonation of a reveller at a farce. “We are at that — we are the excellent brother.” He paused, and then added: “Well, go to the devil, you and your forbidding.” He spoke with the greatest good humour.

“I am in earnest,” I said; “very much in earnest. The thing has gone too far, and even for your own sake, you had better ...”

He said “Ah, ah!” in the tone of his “Oh, oh!”

“She is no friend to you,” I struggled on, “she is playing with you for her own purposes; you will ...”

He swayed a little on his feet and said: “Bravo ... bravissimo. If we can’t forbid him, we will frighten him. Go on, my good fellow ...” and then, “Come, go on ...”

I looked at his great bulk of a body. It came into my head dimly that I wanted him to strike me, to give me an excuse — anything to end the scene violently, with a crash and exclamations of fury.

“You absolutely refuse to pay any attention?” I said.

“Oh, absolutely,” he answered.

“You know that I can do something, that I can expose you.” I had a vague idea that I could, that the number of small things that I knew to his discredit and the mass of my hatred could be welded into a damning whole. He laughed a high-pitched, hysterical laugh. The dawn was beginning to spread pallidly above us, gleaming mournfully through the glass of the palm-house. People began to pass, muffled up, on their way out of the place.

“You may go ...” he was beginning. But the expression of his face altered. Miss Granger, muffled up like all the rest of the world, was coming out of the inner door. “We have been having a charming ...” he began to her. She touched me gently on the arm.

“Come, Arthur,” she said, and then to him, “You have heard the news?”

He looked at her rather muzzily.

“Baron Halderschrodt has committed suicide,” she said. “Come, Arthur.”

We passed on slowly, but de Mersch followed.

“You — you aren’t in earnest?” he said, catching at her arm so that we swung round and faced him. There was a sort of mad entreaty in his eyes, as if he hoped that by unsaying she could remedy an irremediable disaster, and there was nothing left of him but those panic-stricken, beseeching eyes.

“Monsieur de Sabran told me,” she answered; “he had just come from making the constatation. Besides, you can hear ...”

Half-sentences came to our ears from groups that passed us. A very old man with a nose that almost touched his thick lips, was saying to another of the same type:

“Shot himself ... through the left temple ... Mon Dieu!”

De Mersch walked slowly down the long corridor away from us. There was an extraordinary stiffness in his gait, as if he were trying to emulate the goose step of his days in the Prussian Guard. My companion looked after him as though she wished to gauge the extent of his despair.

“You would say ‘Habet,’ wouldn’t you?” she asked me.

I thought we had seen the last of him, but as in the twilight of the dawn we waited for the lodge gates to open, a furious clatter of hoofs came down the long street, and a carriage drew level with ours. A moment after, de Mersch was knocking at our window.

“You will ... you will ...” he stuttered, “speak ... to Mr. Gurnard. That is our only chance ... now.” His voice came in mingled with the cold air of the morning. I shivered. “You have so much power ... with him and...”

“Oh, I ...” she answered.

“The thing must go through,” he said again, “or else ...” He paused. The great gates in front of us swung noiselessly open, one saw into the court-yard. The light was growing stronger. She did not answer.

“I tell you,” he asseverated insistently, “if the British Government abandons my railway all our plans ...”

“Oh, the Government won’t abandon it,” she said, with a little emphasis on the verb. He stepped back out of range of the wheels, and we turned in and left him standing there.

* * * * *

In the great room which was usually given up to the political plotters stood a table covered with eatables and lit by a pair of candles in tall silver sticks. I was conscious of a raging hunger and of a fierce excitement that made the thought of sleep part of a past of phantoms. I began to eat unconsciously, pacing up and down the while. She was standing beside the table in the glow of the transparent light. Pallid blue lines showed in the long windows. It was very cold and hideously late; away in those endless small hours when the pulse drags, when the clock-beat drags, when time is effaced.

“You see?” she said suddenly.

“Oh, I see,” I answered — ”and ... and now?”

“Now we are almost done with each other,” she answered.

I felt a sudden mental falling away. I had never looked at things in that way, had never really looked things in the face. I had grown so used to the idea that she was to parcel out the remainder of my life, had grown so used to the feeling that I was the integral portion of her life ... “But I — ” I said, “What is to become of me?”

She stood looking down at the ground ... for a long time. At last she said in a low monotone:

“Oh, you must try to forget.”

A new idea struck me — luminously, overwhelming. I grew reckless. “You — you are growing considerate,” I taunted. “You are not so sure, not so cold. I notice a change in you. Upon my soul ...”

Her eyes dilated suddenly, and as suddenly closed again. She said nothing. I grew conscious of unbearable pain, the pain of returning life. She was going away. I should be alone. The future began to exist again, looming up like a vessel through thick mist, silent, phantasmal, overwhelming — a hideous future of irremediable remorse, of solitude, of craving.

“You are going back to work with Churchill,” she said suddenly.

“How did you know?” I asked breathlessly. My despair of a sort found vent in violent interjecting of an immaterial query.

“You leave your letters about,” she said, “and.... It will be best for you.”

“It will not,” I said bitterly. “It could never be the same. I don’t want to see Churchill. I want....”

“You want?” she asked, in a low monotone.

“You,” I answered.

She spoke at last, very slowly:

“Oh, as for me, I am going to marry Gurnard.”

I don't know just what I said then, but I remember that I found myself repeating over and over again, the phrases running metrically up and down my mind: “You couldn't marry Gurnard; you don't know what he is. You couldn't marry Gurnard; you don't know what he is.” I don't suppose that I knew anything to the discredit of Gurnard — but he struck me in that way at that moment; struck me convincingly — more than any array of facts could have done.

“Oh — as for what he is — ” she said, and paused. “I know...” and then suddenly she began to speak very fast.

“Don't you see? — can't you see? — that I don't marry Gurnard for what he is in that sense, but for what he is in the other. It isn't a marriage in your sense at all. And ... and it doesn't affect you ... don't you see? We have to have done with one another, because ... because...”

I had an inspiration.

“I believe,” I said, very slowly, “I believe ... you do care...”

She said nothing.

“You care,” I repeated.

She spoke then with an energy that had something of a threat in it. “Do you think I would? Do you think I could?... or dare? Don't you understand?” She faltered — “but then...” she added, and was silent for a long minute. I felt the throb of a thousand pulses in my head, on my temples. “Oh, yes, I care,” she said slowly, “but that — that makes it all the worse. Why, yes, I care — yes, yes. It hurts me to see you. I might.... It would draw me away. I have my allotted course. And you — Don't you see, you would influence me; you would be — you are — a disease — for me.”

“But,” I said, “I could — I would — do anything.”

I had only the faintest of ideas of what I would do — for her sake.

“Ah, no,” she said, “you must not say that. You don't understand.... Even that would mean misery for you — and I — I could not bear. Don't you see? Even now, before you have done your allotted part, I am wanting — oh, wanting — to let you go.... But I must not; I must not. You must go on ... and bear it for a little while more — and then...”

There was a tension somewhere, a string somewhere that was stretched tight and vibrating. I was tremulous with an excitement that overmastered my powers of speech, that surpassed my understanding.

“Don't you see ...” she asked again, “you are the past — the passing. We could never meet. You are ... for me ... only the portrait of a man — of a man who has been dead — oh, a long time; and I, for you, only a possibility ... a conception.... You work to bring me on — to make me possible.”

“But — ” I said. The idea was so difficult to grasp. “I will — there must be a way — ”

“No,” she answered, “there is no way — you must go back; must try. There will be Churchill and what he stands for — He won’t die, he won’t even care much for losing this game ... not much.... And you will have to forget me. There is no other way — no bridge. We can’t meet, you and I...”

The words goaded me to fury. I began to pace furiously up and down. I wanted to tell her that I would throw away everything for her, would crush myself out, would be a lifeless tool, would do anything. But I could tear no words out of the stone that seemed to surround me.

“You may even tell him, if you like, what I and Gurnard are going to do. It will make no difference; he will fall. But you would like him to — to make a good fight for it, wouldn’t you? That is all I can do ... for your sake.”

I began to speak — as if I had not spoken for years. The house seemed to be coming to life; there were noises of opening doors, of voices outside.

“I believe you care enough,” I said “to give it all up for me. I believe you do, and I want you.” I continued to pace up and down. The noises of returning day grew loud; frightfully loud. It was as if I must hasten, must get said what I had to say, as if I must raise my voice to make it heard amid the clamour of a world awakening to life.

“I believe you do ... I believe you do...” I said again and again, “and I want you.” My voice rose higher and higher. She stood motionless, an inscrutable white figure, like some silent Greek statue, a harmony of falling folds of heavy drapery perfectly motionless.

“I want you,” I said — “I want you, I want you, I want you.” It was unbearable to myself.

“Oh, be quiet,” she said at last. “Be quiet! If you had wanted me I have been here. It is too late. All these days; all these — ”

“But ...” I said.

From without someone opened the great shutters of the windows, and the light from the outside world burst in upon us.

Chapter 15

We parted in London next day, I hardly know where. She seemed so part of my being, was for me so little more than an intellectual force, so little of a physical personality, that I cannot remember where my eyes lost sight of her.

I had desolately made the crossing from country to country, had convoyed my aunt to her big house in one of the gloomy squares in a certain district, and then we had parted. Even afterward it was as if she were still beside me, as if I had only to look round to find her eyes upon me. She remained the propelling force, I a boat thrust out upon a mill-pond, moving more and more slowly. I had been for so long in the shadow of that great house, shut in among the gloom, that all this light, this blazing world — it was a June day in London — seemed impossible, and hateful. Over there, there had been nothing but very slow, fading minutes; now there was a past, a future. It was as if I stood between them in a cleft of unscalable rocks.

I went about mechanically, made arrangements for my housing, moved in and out of rooms in the enormous mausoleum of a club that was all the home I had, in a sort of stupor. Suddenly I remembered that I had been thinking of something; that she had been talking of Churchill. I had had a letter from him on the morning of the day before. When I read it, Churchill and his “Cromwell” had risen in my mind like preposterous phantoms; the one as unreal as the other — as alien. I seemed to have passed an infinity of æons beyond them. The one and the other belonged as absolutely to the past as a past year belongs. The thought of them did not bring with it the tremulously unpleasant sensations that, as a rule, come with the thoughts of a too recent *temps jadis*, but rather as a vein of rose across a gray evening. I had passed his letter over; had dropped it half-read among the litter of the others. Then there had seemed to be a haven into whose mouth I was drifting.

Now I should have to pick the letters up again, all of them; set to work desolately to pick up the threads of the past; and work it back into life as one does half-drowned things. I set about it listlessly. There remained of that time an errand for my aunt, an errand that would take me to Etchingham; something connected with her land steward. I think the old lady had ideas of inducting me into a position that it had grown tacitly acknowledged I was to fill. I was to go down there; to see about some alterations that were in progress; and to make arrangements for my aunt’s return. I was so tired, so dog tired, and the day still had so many weary hours to run, that I recognised instinctively that if I were to come through it sane I must tire myself more, must keep on going — until I sank. I drifted down to Etchingham that evening, I sent a messenger over to

Churchill's cottage, waited for an answer that told me that Churchill was there, and then slept, and slept.

I woke back in the world again, in a world that contained the land steward and the manor house. I had a sense of recovered power from the sight of them, of the sunlight on the stretches of turf, of the mellow, golden stonework of the long range of buildings, from the sound of a chime of bells that came wonderfully sweetly over the soft swelling of the close turf. The feeling came not from any sense of prospective ownership, but from the acute consciousness of what these things stood for. I did not recognise it then, but later I understood; for the present it was enough to have again the power to set my foot on the ground, heel first. In the streets of the little town there was a sensation of holiday, not pronounced enough to call for flags, but enough to convey the idea of waiting for an event.

The land steward, at the end of a tour amongst cottages, explained there was to be a celebration in the neighbourhood — a “cock-and-hen show with a political annex”; the latter under the auspices of Miss Churchill. Churchill himself was to speak; there was a possibility of a pronouncement. I found London reporters at my inn, men I half knew. They expressed mitigated delight at the view of me, and over a lunch-table let me know what “one said” — what one said of the outside of events I knew too well internally. They most of them had the air of my aunt's solicitor when he had said, “Even I did not realise....” their positions saving them the necessity of concealing surprise. “One can't know everything.” They fumbled amusingly about the causes, differed with one another, but were surprisingly unanimous as to effects, as to the panic and the call for purification. It was rather extraordinary, too, how large de Mersch loomed on the horizon over here. It was as if the whole world centred in him, as if he represented the modern spirit that must be purified away by burning before things could return to their normal state. I knew what he represented ... but there it was.

It was part of my programme, the attendance at the poultry show; I was to go back to the cottage with Churchill, after he had made his speech. It was rather extraordinary, the sensations of that function. I went in rather late, with the reporter of the Hour, who was anxious to do me the favour of introducing me without payment — it was his way of making himself pleasant, and I had the reputation of knowing celebrities. It was rather extraordinary to be back again in the midst of this sort of thing, to be walking over a crowded, green paddock, hedged in with tall trees and dotted here and there with the gaily striped species of tent that is called marquee. And the type of face, and the style of the costume! They would have seemed impossible the day before yesterday.

There were all Miss Churchill's gang of great dames, muslin, rustling, marriageable daughters, a continual twitter of voices, and a sprinkling of the peasantry, dun-coloured and struck speechless.

One of the great ladies surveyed me as I stood in the centre of an open space, surveyed me through tortoise-shell glasses on the end of a long handle, and beckoned me to her side.

“You are unattached?” she asked. She had pretensions to voice the county, just as my aunt undoubtedly set the tone of its doings, decided who was visitable, and just as Miss Churchill gave the political tone. “You may wait upon me, then,” she said; “my daughter is with her young man. That is the correct phrase, is it not?”

She was a great lady, who stood nearly six foot high, and whom one would have styled buxom, had one dared. “I have a grievance,” she went on; “I must talk to someone. Come this way. There!” She pointed with the handle of her glasses to a pen of glossy blackbirds. “You see!... Not even commended! — and I assure you the trouble I have taken over them, with the idea of setting an example to the tenantry, is incredible. They give a prize to one of our own tenants ... which is as much as telling the man that he is an example to me. Then they wonder that the country is going to the dogs. I assure you that after breakfast I have had the scraps collected from the plates — that was the course recommended by the poultry manuals — and have taken them out with my own hands.”

The sort of thing passed for humour in the county, and, being delivered with an air and a half Irish ruefulness, passed well enough.

“And that reminds me,” she went on, “ — I mean the fact that the country is going to the dogs, as my husband [You haven’t seen him anywhere, have you? He is one of the judges, and I want to have a word with him about my Orpingtons] says every morning after he has looked at his paper — that ... oh, that you have been in Paris, haven’t you? with your aunt. Then, of course, you have seen this famous Duc de Mersch?”

She looked at me humourously through her glasses. “I’m going to pump you, you know,” she said, “it is the duty that is expected of me. I have to talk for a countyful of women without a tongue in their heads. So tell me about him. Is it true that he is at the bottom of all this mischief? Is it through him that this man committed suicide? They say so. He was mixed up in that Royalist plot, wasn’t he? — and the people that have been failing all over the place are mixed up with him, aren’t they?”

“I ... I really don’t know,” I said; “if you say so....”

“Oh, I assure you I’m sound enough,” she answered, “the Churchills — I know you’re a friend of his — haven’t a stauncher ally than I am, and I should only be too glad to be able to contradict. But it’s so difficult. I assure you I go out of my way; talk to the most outrageous people, deny the very possibility of Mr. Churchill’s being in any way implicated. One knows that it’s impossible, but what can one do? I have said again and again — to people like grocers’ wives; even to the grocers, for that matter — that Mr. Churchill is a statesman, and that if he insists that this odious man’s railway must go through, it is in the interests of the country that it should. I tell them....”

She paused for a minute to take breath and then went on: “I was speaking to a man of that class only this morning, rather an intelligent man and quite nice — I was saying, ‘Don’t you see, my dear Mr. Tull, that it is a question of international politics. If the grand duke does not get the money for his railway, the grand duke will be turned out of his — what is it — principality? And that would be most dangerous

— in the present condition of affairs over there, and besides....’ The man listened very respectfully, but I could see that he was not convinced. I buckled to again....”

“‘And besides,’ I said, ‘there is the question of Greenland itself. We English must have Greenland ... sooner or later. It touches you, even. You have a son who’s above — who doesn’t care for life in a country town, and you want to send him abroad — with a little capital. Well, Greenland is just the place for him.’ The man looked at me, and almost shook his head in my face.”

“‘If you’ll excuse me, my lady,’ he said, ‘it won’t do. Mr. Churchill is a man above hocus-pocus. Well I know it that have had dealings with him. But ... well, the long and the short of it is, my lady, that you can’t touch pitch and not be defiled; or, leastwise, people’ll think you’ve been defiled — those that don’t know you. The foreign nations are all very well, and the grand duchy — and the getting hold of Greenland, but what touches me is this — My neighbour Slingsby had a little money, and he gets a prospectus. It looked very well — very well — and he brings it in to me. I did not have anything to do with it, but Slingsby did. Well, now there’s Slingsby on the rates and his wife a lady born, almost. I might have been taken in the same way but for — for the grace of God, I’m minded to say. Well, Slingsby’s a good man, and used to be a hard-working man — all his life, and now it turns out that that prospectus came about by the man de Mersch’s manoeuvres — ”wild-cat schemes,” they call them in the paper that I read. And there’s any number of them started by de Mersch or his agents. Just for what? That de Mersch may be the richest man in the world and a philanthropist. Well, then, where’s Slingsby, if that’s philanthropy? So Mr. Churchill comes along and says, in a manner of speaking, “That’s all very well, but this same Mr. Mersch is the grand duke of somewhere or other, and we must bolster him up in his kingdom, or else there will be trouble with the powers.” Powers — what’s powers to me? — or Greenland? when there’s Slingsby, a man I’ve smoked a pipe with every market evening of my life, in the workhouse? And there’s hundreds of Slingsbys all over the country.”

“The man was working himself — Slingsby was a good sort of man. It shocked even me. One knows what goes on in one’s own village, of course. And it’s only too true that there’s hundreds of Slingsbys — I’m not boring you, am I?”

I did not answer for a moment. “I — I had no idea,” I said; “I have been so long out of it and over there one did not realise the ... the feeling.”

“You’ve been well out of it,” she answered; “one has had to suffer, I assure you.” I believed that she had had to suffer; it must have taken a good deal to make that lady complain. Her large, ruddy features followed the droop of her eyes down to the fringe of the parasol that she was touching the turf with. We were sitting on garden seats in the dappled shade of enormous elms.

There was in the air a touch of the sounds discoursed by a yeomanry band at the other end of the grounds. One could see the red of their uniforms through moving rifts in the crowd of white dresses.

“That wasn’t even the worst,” she said suddenly, lifting her eyes and looking away between the trunks of the trees. “The man has been reading the papers and he gave me the benefit of his reflections. ‘Someone’s got to be punished for this;’ he said, ‘we’ve got to show them that you can’t be hand-and-glove with that sort of blackguard, without paying for it. I don’t say, mind you, that Mr. Churchill is or ever has been. I know him, and I trust him. But there’s more than me in the world, and they can’t all know him. Well, here’s the papers saying — or they don’t say it, but they hint, which is worse in a way — that he must be, or he wouldn’t stick up for the man. They say the man’s a blackguard out and out — in Greenland too; has the blacks murdered. Churchill says the blacks are to be safe-guarded, that’s the word. Well, they may be — but so ought Slingsby to have been, yet it didn’t help him. No, my lady, we’ve got to put our own house in order and that first, before thinking of the powers or places like Greenland. What’s the good of the saner policy that Mr. Churchill talks about, if you can’t trust anyone with your money, and have to live on the capital? If you can’t sleep at night for thinking that you may be in the workhouse to-morrow — like Slingsby? The first duty of men in Mr. Churchill’s position — as I see it — is to see that we’re able to be confident of honest dealing. That’s what we want, not Greenlands. That’s how we all feel, and you know it, too, or else you, a great lady, wouldn’t stop to talk to a man like me. And, mind you, I’m true blue, always have been and always shall be, and, if it was a matter of votes, I’d give mine to Mr. Churchill to-morrow. But there’s a many that wouldn’t, and there’s a many that believe the hintings.”

My lady stopped and sighed from a broad bosom. “What could I say?” she went on again. “I know Mr. Churchill and I like him — and everyone that knows him likes him. I’m one of the stalwarts, mind you; I’m not for giving in to popular clamour; I’m for the ‘saner policy,’ like Churchill. But, as the man said: ‘There’s a many that believe the hintings.’ And I almost wish Churchill... However, you understand what I meant when I said that one had had to suffer.”

“Oh, I understand,” I said. I was beginning to. “And Churchill?” I asked later, “he gives no sign of relenting?”

“Would you have him?” she asked sharply; “would you make him if you could?” She had an air of challenging. “I’m for the ‘saner policy!’ cost what it may. He owes it to himself to sacrifice himself, if it comes to that.”

“I’m with you too,” I answered, “over boot and spur.” Her enthusiasm was contagious, and unnecessary.

“Oh, he’ll stick,” she began again after consultation with the parasol fringe. “You’ll hear him after a minute. It’s a field day to-day. You’ll miss the other heavy guns if you stop with me. I do it ostentatiously — wait until they’ve done. They’re all trembling; all of them. My husband will be on the platform — trembling too. He is a type of them. All day long and at odd moments at night I talk to him — out-talk him and silence him. What’s the state of popular feeling to him? He’s for the country, not the town — this sort of thing has nothing to do with him. It’s a matter to be settled by Jews in the City. Well, he sees it at night, and then in the morning the papers undo all my work.

He begins to talk about his seat — which I got for him. I've been the 'voice of the county' for years now. Well, it'll soon be a voice without a county.... What is it? 'The old order changeth.' So, I've arranged it that I shall wait until the trembling big-wigs have stuttered their speeches out, and then I'm going to sail down the centre aisle and listen to Churchill with visible signs of approval. It won't do much to-day, but there was a time when it would have changed the course of an election.... Ah, there's Effie's young man. It's time."

She rose and marched, with the air of going to a last sacrifice, across the deserted sward toward a young man who was passing under the calico flag of the gateway.

"It's all right, Willoughby," she said, as we drew level, "I've found someone else to face the music with me; you can go back to Effie." A bronzed and grateful young man murmured thanks to me.

"It's an awful relief, Granger," he said; "can't think how you can do it. I'm hooked, but you...."

"He's the better man," his mother-in-law-elect said, over her shoulder. She sailed slowly up the aisle beside me, an almost heroic figure of a matron. "Splendidly timed, you see," she said, "do you observe my husband's embarrassment?"

It was splendid to see Churchill again, standing there negligently, with the diffidence of a boy amid the bustle of applause. I understood suddenly why I loved him so, this tall, gray man with the delicate, almost grotesque, mannerisms. He appealed to me by sheer force of picturesqueness, appealed as some forgotten mediaeval city might. I was concerned for him as for some such dying place, standing above the level plains; I was jealous lest it should lose one jot of its glory, of its renown. He advocated his saner policy before all those people; stood up there and spoke gently, persuasively, without any stress of emotion, without more movement than an occasional flutter of the glasses he held in his hand. One would never have recognised that the thing was a fighting speech but for the occasional shiver of his audience. They were thinking of their Slingsbys; he affecting, insouciantly, to treat them as rational people.

It was extraordinary to sit there shut in by that wall of people all of one type, of one idea; the idea of getting back; all conscious that a force of which they knew nothing was dragging them forward over the edge of a glacier, into a crevasse. They wanted to get back, were struggling, panting even — as a nation pants — to get back by their own way that they understood and saw; were hauling, and hauling desperately, at the weighted rope that was dragging them forward. Churchill stood up there and repeated: "Mine is the only way — the saner policy," and his words would fly all over the country to fall upon the deaf ears of the panic-stricken, who could not understand the use of calmness, of trifling even, in the face of danger, who suspected the calmness as one suspects the thing one has not. At the end of it I received his summons to a small door at the back of the building. The speech seemed to have passed out of his mind far more than out of mine.

"So you have come," he said; "that's good, and so.... Let us walk a little way ... out of this. My aunt will pick us up on the road." He linked his arm into mine and propelled

me swiftly down the bright, broad street. "I'm sorry you came in for that, but — one has to do these things."

There was a sort of resisted numbness in his voice, a lack of any resiliency. My heart sank a little. It was as if I were beside an invalid who did not — must not — know his condition; as if I were pledged not to notice anything. In the open the change struck home as a hammer strikes; in the pitiless searching of the unrestrained light, his grayness, his tremulousness, his aloofness from the things about him, came home to me like a pang.

"You look a bit fagged," I said, "perhaps we ought not to talk about work." His thoughts seemed to come back from a great distance, oh, from an infinite distance beyond the horizon, the soft hills of that fat country. "You want rest," I added.

"I — oh, no," he answered, "I can't have it ... till the end of the session. I'm used to it too."

He began talking briskly about the "Cromwell;" proofs had emerged from the infinite and wanted attention. There were innumerable little matters, things to be copied for the appendix and revisions. It was impossible for me to keep my mind upon them.

It had come suddenly home to me that this was the world that I belonged to; that I had come back to it as if from an under world; that to this I owed allegiance. She herself had recognised that; she herself had bidden me tell him what was a-gate against him. It was a duty too; he was my friend. But, face to face with him, it became almost an impossibility. It was impossible even to put it into words. The mere ideas seemed to be untranslatable, to savour of madness. I found myself in the very position that she had occupied at the commencement of our relations: that of having to explain — say, to a Persian — the working principles of the telegraph. And I was not equal to the task. At the same time I had to do something. I had to. It would be abominable to have to go through life forever, alone with the consciousness of that sort of treachery of silence. But how could I tell him even the comprehensibles? What kind of sentence was I to open with? With pluckings of an apologetic string, without prelude at all — or how? I grew conscious that there was need for haste; he was looking behind him down the long white road for the carriage that was to pick us up.

"My dear fellow...." I began. He must have noted a change in my tone, and looked at me with suddenly lifted eyebrows. "You know my sister is going to marry Mr. Gurnard."

"Why, no," he answered — "that is ... I've heard...." he began to offer good wishes.

"No, no," I interrupted him hurriedly, "not that. But I happen to know that Gurnard is meditating ... is going to separate from you in public matters." An expression of dismay spread over his face.

"My dear fellow," he began.

"Oh, I'm not drunk," I said bitterly, "but I've been behind the scenes — for a long time. And I could not ... couldn't let the thing go on without a word."

He stopped in the road and looked at me.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I daresay.... But what does it lead to?... Even if I could listen to you — I can't go behind the scenes. Mr. Gurnard may differ from me in points,

but don't you see?..." He had walked on slowly, but he came to a halt again. "We had better put these matters out of our minds. Of course you are not drunk; but one is tied down in these matters...."

He spoke very gently, as if he did not wish to offend me by this closing of the door. He seemed suddenly to grow very old and very gray. There was a stile in the dusty hedge-row, and he walked toward it, meditating. In a moment he looked back at me. "I had forgotten," he said; "I meant to suggest that we should wait here — I am a little tired." He perched himself on the top bar and became lost in the inspection of the cord of his glasses. I went toward him.

"I knew," I said, "that you could not listen to ... to the sort of thing. But there were reasons. I felt forced. You will forgive me." He looked up at me, starting as if he had forgotten my presence.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I have a certain — I can't think of the right word — say respect — for your judgment and — and motives ... But you see, there are, for instance, my colleagues. I couldn't go to them ..." He lost the thread of his idea.

"To tell the truth," I said, with a sudden impulse for candour, "it isn't the political aspect of the matter, but the personal. I spoke because it was just possible that I might be of service to you — personally — and because I would like you ... to make a good fight for it." I had borrowed her own words.

He looked up at me and smiled. "Thank you," he said. "I believe you think it's a losing game," he added, with a touch of gray humour that was like a genial hour of sunlight on a wintry day. I did not answer. A little way down the road Miss Churchill's carriage whirled into sight, sparkling in the sunlight, and sending up an attendant cloud of dust that melted like smoke through the dog-roses of the leeward hedge.

"So you don't think much of me as a politician," Churchill suddenly deduced smilingly. "You had better not tell that to my aunt."

I went up to town with Churchill that evening. There was nothing waiting for me there, but I did not want to think. I wanted to be among men, among crowds of men, to be dazed, to be stupefied, to hear nothing for the din of life, to be blinded by the blaze of lights.

There were plenty of people in Churchill's carriage; a military member and a local member happened to be in my immediate neighbourhood. Their minds were full of the financial scandals, and they dinned their alternating opinions into me. I assured them that I knew nothing about the matter, and they grew more solicitous for my enlightenment.

"It all comes from having too many eggs in one basket," the local member summed up. "The old-fashioned small enterprises had their disadvantages, but — mind you — these gigantic trusts.... Isn't that so, General?"

"Oh, I quite agree with you," the general barked; "at the same time...." Their voices sounded on, intermingling, indistinguishable, soothing even. I seemed to be listening to the hum of a threshing-machine — a passage of sound booming on one note, a

passage, a half-tone higher, and so on, and so on. Visible things grew hazy, fused into one another.

Chapter 16

We reached London somewhat late in the evening — in the twilight of a summer day. There was the hurry and bustle of arrival, a hurry and bustle that changed the tenor of my thoughts and broke their train. As I stood reflecting before the door of the carriage, I felt a friendly pressure of a hand on my shoulder.

“You’ll see to that,” Churchill’s voice said in my ear. “You’ll set the copyists to work.”

“I’ll go to the Museum to-morrow,” I said. There were certain extracts to be made for the “Life of Cromwell” — extracts from pamphlets that we had not conveniently at disposal. He nodded, walked swiftly toward his brougham, opened the door and entered.

I remember so well that last sight of him — of his long, slim figure bending down for the entrance, woefully solitary, woefully weighted; remember so well the gleam of the carriage panels reflecting the murky light of the bare London terminus, the attitude of the coachman stiffly reining back the horse; the thin hand that reached out, a gleam of white, to turn the gleaming handle. There was something intimately suggestive of the man in the motion of that hand, in its tentative outstretching, its gentle, half-persuasive — almost theoretic — grasp of the handle. The pleasure of its friendly pressure on my shoulder carried me over some minutes of solitude; its weight on my body removing another from my mind. I had feared that my ineffective disclosure had chilled what of regard he had for me. He had said nothing, his manner had said nothing, but I had feared. In the railway carriage he had sat remote from me, buried in papers. But that touch on my shoulder was enough to set me well with myself again, if not to afford scope for pleasant improvisation. It at least showed me that he bore me no ill-will, otherwise he would hardly have touched me. Perhaps, even, he was grateful to me, not for service, but for ineffectual good-will. Whatever I read into it, that was the last time he spoke to me, and the last time he touched me. And I loved him very well. Things went so quickly after that.

In a moderately cheerful frame of mind I strolled the few yards that separated me from my club — intent on dining. In my averseness to solitude I sat down at a table where sat already a little, bald-headed, false-toothed Anglo-Indian, a man who bored me into fits of nervous excitement. He was by way of being an incredibly distant uncle of my own. As a rule I avoided him, to-night I dined with him. He was a person of interminable and incredibly inaccurate reminiscences. His long residence in an indigo-producing swamp had affected his memory, which was supported by only very occasional visits to England.

He told me tales of my poor father and of my poor, dear mother, and of Mr. Bromp-tons and Mrs. Kenwards who had figured on their visiting lists away back in the musty sixties.

“Your poor, dear father was precious badly off then,” he said; “he had a hard struggle for it. I had a bad time of it too; worm had got at all my plantations, so I couldn’t help him, poor chap. I think, mind you, Kenny Granger treated him very badly. He might have done something for him — he had influence, Kenny had.”

Kenny was my uncle, the head of the family, the husband of my aunt.

“They weren’t on terms,” I said.

“Oh, I know, I know,” the old man mumbled, “but still, for one’s only brother ... However, you contrive to do yourselves pretty well. You’re making your pile, aren’t you? Someone said to me the other day — can’t remember who it was — that you were quite one of the rising men — quite one of the men.”

“Very kind of someone,” I said.

“And now I see,” he went on, lifting up a copy of a morning paper, over which I had found him munching his salmon cutlet, “now I see your sister is going to marry a cabinet minister. Ah!” he shook his poor, muddled, baked head, “I remember you both as tiny little dots.”

“Why,” I said, “she can hardly have been born then.”

“Oh, yes,” he affirmed, “that was when I came over in ‘78. She remembered, too, that I brought her over an ivory doll — she remembered.”

“You have seen her?” I asked.

“Oh, I called two or three weeks — no, months — ago. She’s the image of your poor, dear mother,” he added, “at that age; I remarked upon it to your aunt, but, of course, she could not remember. They were not married until after the quarrel.”

A sudden restlessness made me bolt the rest of my tepid dinner. With my return to the upper world, and the return to me of a will, despair of a sort had come back. I had before me the problem — the necessity — of winning her. Once I was out of contact with her she grew smaller, less of an idea, more of a person — that one could win. And there were two ways. I must either woo her as one woos a person barred; must compel her to take flight, to abandon, to cast away everything; or I must go to her as an eligible suitor with the Etchingam acres and possibilities of a future on that basis. This fantastic old man with his mumbled reminiscences spoilt me for the last. One remembers sooner or later that a county-man may not marry his reputed sister without scandal. And I craved her intensely.

She had upon me the effect of an incredible stimulant; away from her I was like a drunkard cut off from his liquor; an opium-taker from his drug. I hardly existed; I hardly thought.

I had an errand at my aunt’s house; had a message to deliver, sympathetic enquiries to make — and I wanted to see her, to gain some sort of information from her; to spy out the land; to ask her for terms. There was a change in the appearance of the house, an adventitious brightness that indicated the rise in the fortunes of the family. For me

the house was empty and the great door closed hollowly behind me. My sister was not at home. It seemed abominable to me that she should be out; that she could be talking to anyone, or could exist without me. I went sullenly across the road to the palings of the square. As I turned the corner I found my head pivoting on my neck. I was looking over my shoulder at the face of the house, was wondering which was her window.

“Like a love-sick boy — like a damn love-sick boy,” I growled at myself. My sense of humour was returning to me. There began a pilgrimage in search of companionship.

London was a desert more solitary than was believable. On those brilliant summer evenings the streets were crowded, were alive, bustled with the chitter-chatter of footsteps, with the chitter-chatter of voices, of laughter.

It was impossible to walk, impossible to do more than tread on one’s own toes; one was almost blinded by the constant passing of faces. It was like being in a wheat-field with one’s eyes on a level with the indistinguishable ears. One was alone in one’s intense contempt for all these faces, all these contented faces; one towered intellectually above them; one towered into regions of rarefaction. And down below they enjoyed themselves. One understood life better; they better how to live. That struck me then — in Oxford Street. There was the intense good-humour, the absolute disregard of the minor inconveniences, of the inconveniences of a crowd, of the ignominy of being one of a crowd. There was the intense poetry of the soft light, the poetry of the summer-night coolness, and they understood how to enjoy it. I turned up an ancient court near Bedford Row.

“In the name of God,” I said, “I will enjoy ...” and I did. The poetry of those old deserted quarters came suddenly home to me — all the little commonplace thoughts; all the commonplace associations of Georgian London. For the time I was done with the meanings of things.

I was seeking Lea — he was not at home. The quarter was honeycombed with the homes of people one knows; of people one used to know, excellent young men who wrote for the papers, who sub-edited papers, who designed posters, who were always just the same. One forgot them for a year or two, one came across them again and found them just the same — still writing for the same papers, still sub-editing the same papers, designing the same posters. I was in the mood to rediscover them in the privacies of their hearths, with the same excellent wives making fair copies of the same manuscripts, with the same gaiety of the same indifferent whiskey, brown or pale or suspicious-looking, in heavy, square, cut-glass stoppered decanters, and with the same indifferent Virginian tobacco at the same level in the same jars.

I was in the mood for this stability, for the excellent household article that was their view of life and literature. I wanted to see it again, to hear again how it was filling the unvarying, allotted columns of the daily, the weekly, or the monthly journals. I wanted to breathe again this mild atmosphere where there are no longer hopes or fears. But, alas!...

I rang bell after bell of that gloomy central London district. You know what happens. One pulls the knob under the name of the person one seeks — pulls it three, or, it

may be, four times in vain. One rings the housekeeper's bell; it reverberates, growing fainter and fainter, gradually stifled by a cavernous subterranean atmosphere. After an age a head peeps round the opening door, the head of a hopeless anachronism, the head of a widow of early Victorian merit, or of an orphan of incredible age. One asks for So-and-so — he's out; for Williams — he's expecting an increase of family, and has gone into the country with madame. And Waring? Oh, he's gone no one knows where, and Johnson who used to live at Number 44 only comes up to town on Tuesdays now. I exhausted the possibilities of that part of Bloomsbury, the possibilities of variety in the types of housekeepers. The rest of London divided itself into bands — into zones. Between here and Kensington the people that I knew could not be called on after dinner, those who lived at Chiswick and beyond were hyperborean — one was bound by the exigencies of time. It was ten o'clock as I stood reflecting on a doorstep — on Johnson's doorstep. I must see somebody, must talk to somebody, before I went to bed in the cheerless room at the club. It was true I might find a political stalwart in the smoking-room — but that was a last resort, a desperate and ignominious *pis aller*.

There was Fox, I should find him at the office. But it needed a change of tone before I could contemplate with equanimity the meeting of that individual. I had been preparing myself to confront all the ethically excellent young men and Fox was, ethically speaking, far from excellent, middle-aged, rubicund, leery — a free lance of genius. I made the necessary change in my tone of mind and ran him to earth.

The Watteau room was further enlivened by the introduction of a scarlet plush couch of sumptuous design. By its side stood a couple of electric lights. The virulent green of their shades made the colours of the be-shepherded wall-panels appear almost unearthly, and threw impossible shadows on the deal partition. Round the couch stood chairs with piles of papers neatly arranged on them; round it, on the floor, were more papers lying like the leaves of autumn that one sings of. On it lay Fox, enveloped in a Shetland shawl — a good shawl that was the only honest piece of workmanship in the torn-tawdry place. Fox was as rubicund as ever, but his features were noticeably peaked and there were heavy lines under his eyes — lines cast into deep shadow by the light by which he was reading. I entered unannounced, and was greeted by an indifferent upward glance that changed into one of something like pleasure as he made out my features in the dim light.

"Hullo, you old country hawbuck," he said, with spasmodic jocularity; "I'm uncommon glad to see you." He came to a jerky close, with an indrawing of his breath. "I'm about done," he went on. "Same old thing — sciatica. Took me just after I got here this afternoon; sent out one of the messengers to buy me a sofa, and here I've been ever since. Well, and what's brought you up — don't answer, I know all about it. I've got to keep on talking until this particular spasm's over, or else I shall scream and disturb the flow of Soane's leader. Well, and now you've come, you'll stop and help me to put the Hour to bed, won't you? And then you can come and put me to bed."

He went on talking at high pressure, exaggerating his expressions, heightening his humorous touches with punctuations of rather wild laughter. At last he came to a stop with a half suppressed "Ah!" and a long indrawing of the breath.

"That's over," he said. "Give me a drop of brandy — there's a good fellow." I gave him his nip. Then I explained to him that I couldn't work for the Hour; that I wasn't on terms with de Mersch.

"Been dropping money over him?" he asked, cheerfully. I explained a little more — that there was a lady.

"Oh, it's that," Fox said. "The man is a fool ... But anyhow Mersch don't count for much in this particular show. He's no money in it even, so you may put your pride in your pocket, or wherever you keep it. It's all right. Straight. He's only the small change."

"But," I said, "everyone says; you said yourself..."

"To be sure," he answered. "But you don't think that I play second fiddle to a bounder of that calibre. Not really?"

He looked at me with a certain seriousness. I remembered, as I had remembered once before, that Fox was a personality — a power. I had never realised till then how entirely — fundamentally — different he was from any other man that I knew. He was surprising enough to have belonged to another race. He looked at me, not as if he cared whether I gave him his due or no, but as if he were astonished at my want of perception of the fact. He let his towzled head fall back upon the plush cushions. "You might kick him from here to Greenland for me," he said; "I wouldn't weep. It suits me to hold him up, and a kicking might restore his equilibrium. I'm sick of him — I've told him so. I knew there was a woman. But don't you worry; I'm the man here."

"If that's the case ..." I said.

"Oh, that's it," he answered.

I helped him to put the paper to bed; took some of the work off his hands. It was all part of the getting back to life; of the resuming of rusty armour; and I wanted to pass the night. I was not unused to it, as it happened. Fox had had several of these fits during my year, and during most of them I had helped him through the night; once or twice for three on end. Once I had had entire control for a matter of five nights. But they gave me a new idea of Fox, those two or three weird hours that night. It was as if I had never seen him before. The attacks grew more virulent as the night advanced. He groaned and raved, and said things — oh, the most astounding things in gibberish that upset one's nerves and everything else. At the height he sang hymns, and then, as the fits passed, relapsed into incredible clear-headedness. It gave me, I say, a new idea of Fox. It was as if, for all the time I had known him, he had been playing a part, and that only now, in the delirium of his pain, in the madness into which he drank himself, were fragments of the real man thrown to the surface. I grew, at last, almost afraid to be alone with him in the dead small hours of the morning, and longed for the time when I could go to bed among the uninspiring, marble-topped furniture of my club.

Chapter 17

At noon of the next day I gave Fox his look in at his own flat. He was stretched upon a sofa — it was evident that I was to take such of his duties as were takeable. He greeted me with words to that effect.

“Don’t go filling the paper with your unbreeched geniuses,” he said, genially, “and don’t overwork yourself. There’s really nothing to do, but you’re being there will keep that little beast Evans from getting too cock-a-hoop. He’d like to jerk me out altogether; thinks they’d get on just as well without me.”

I expressed in my manner general contempt for Evans, and was taking my leave.

“Oh, and — ” Fox called after me. I turned back. “The Greenland mail ought to be in to-day. If Callan’s contrived to get his flood-gates open, run his stuff in, there’s a good chap. It’s a feature and all that, you know.”

“I suppose Soane’s to have a look at it,” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” he answered; “but tell him to keep strictly to old Cal’s lines — rub that into him. If he were to get drunk and run in some of his own tips it’d be awkward. People are expecting Cal’s stuff. Tell you what: you take him out to lunch, eh? Keep an eye on the supplies, and ram it into him that he’s got to stick to Cal’s line of argument.”

“Soane’s as bad as ever, then?” I asked.

“Oh,” Fox answered, “he’ll be all right for the stuff if you get that one idea into him.” A prolonged and acute fit of pain seized him. I fetched his man and left him to his rest.

At the office of the Hour I was greeted by the handing to me of a proof of Callan’s manuscript. Evans, the man across the screen, was the immediate agent.

“I suppose it’s got to go in, so I had it set up,” he said.

“Oh, of course it’s got to go in,” I answered. “It’s to go to Soane first, though.”

“Soane’s not here yet,” he answered. I noted the tone of sub-acid pleasure in his voice. Evans would have enjoyed a fiasco.

“Oh, well,” I answered, nonchalantly, “there’s plenty of time. You allow space on those lines. I’ll send round to hunt Soane up.”

I felt called to be upon my mettle. I didn’t much care about the paper, but I had a definite antipathy to being done by Evans — by a mad Welshman in a stubborn fit. I knew what was going to happen; knew that Evans would feign inconceivable stupidity, the sort of black stupidity that is at command of individuals of his primitive race. I was in for a day of petty worries. In the circumstances it was a thing to be thankful

for; it dragged my mind away from larger issues. One has no time for brooding when one is driving a horse in a jibbing fit.

Evans was grimly conscious that I was moderately ignorant of technical details; he kept them well before my eyes all day long.

At odd moments I tried to read Callan's article. It was impossible. It opened with a description of the squalor of the Greenlander's life, and contained tawdry passages of local colour.

I knew what was coming. This was the view of the Greenlanders of pre-Merschian Greenland, elaborated, after the manner of Callan — the Special Commissioner — so as to bring out the glory and virtue of the work of regeneration. Then in a gush of superlatives the work itself would be described. I knew quite well what was coming, and was temperamentally unable to read more than the first ten lines.

Everything was going wrong. The printers developed one of their sudden crazes for asking idiotic questions. Their messengers came to Evans, Evans sent them round the pitch-pine screen to me. "Mr. Jackson wants to know — —"

The fourth of the messengers that I had despatched to Soane returned with the news that Soane would arrive at half-past nine. I sent out in search of the strongest coffee that the city afforded. Soane arrived. He had been ill, he said, very ill. He desired to be fortified with champagne. I produced the coffee.

Soane was the son of an Irish peer. He had magnificent features — a little blurred nowadays — and a remainder of the grand manner. His nose was a marvel of classic workmanship, but the floods of time had reddened and speckled it — not offensively, but ironically; his hair was turning grey, his eyes were bloodshot, his heavy moustache rather ragged. He inspired one with the respect that one feels for a man who has lived and does not care a curse. He had a weird intermittent genius that made it worth Fox's while to put up with his lapses and his brutal snubs.

I produced the coffee and pointed to the sofa of the night before.

"Damn it," he said, "I'm ill, I tell you; I want ..."

"Exactly!" I cut in. "You want a rest, old fellow. Here's Cal's article. We want something special about it. If you don't feel up to it I'll send round to Jenkins."

"Damn Jenkins," he said; "I'm up to it."

"You understand," I said, "you're to write strictly on Callan's lines. Don't insert any information from extraneous sources. And make it as slashing as you like — on those lines."

He grunted in acquiescence. I left him lying on the sofa, drinking the coffee. I had tenderly arranged the lights for him as Fox had arranged them the night before. As I went out to get my dinner I was comfortably aware of him, holding the slips close to his muddled eyes and philosophically damning the nature of things.

When I returned, Soane, from his sofa, said something that I did not catch — something about Callan and his article.

"Oh, for God's sake," I answered, "don't worry me. Have some more coffee and stick to Cal's line of argument. That's what Fox said. I'm not responsible."

“Deuced queer,” Soane muttered. He began to scribble with a pencil. From the tone of his voice I knew that he had reached the precise stage at which something brilliant — the real thing of its kind — might be expected.

Very late Soane finished his leader. He looked up as he wrote the last word.

“I’ve got it written,” he said. “But ... I say, what the deuce is up?”

It’s like being a tall clock with the mainspring breaking, this.”

I rang the bell for someone to take the copy down.

“Your metaphor’s too much for me, Soane,” I said.

“It’s appropriate all the way along,” he maintained, “if you call me a mainspring. I’ve been wound up and wound up to write old de Mersch and his Greenland up — and it’s been a tight wind, these days, I tell you. Then all of a sudden ...”

A boy appeared and carried off the copy.

“All of a sudden,” Soane resumed, “something gives — I suppose something’s given — and there’s a whirr-rr-rr and the hands fly backwards and old de Mersch and Greenland bump to the bottom, like the weights.”

The boom of the great presses was rattling the window frames. Soane got up and walked toward one of the cupboards.

“Dry work,” he said; “but the simile’s just, isn’t it?”

I gave one swift step toward the bell-button beside the desk. The proof of Callan’s article, from which Soane had been writing, lay a crumpled white streamer on the brown wood of Fox’s desk. I made toward it. As I stretched out my hand the solution slipped into my mind, coming with no more noise than that of a bullet; impinging with all the shock and remaining with all the pain. I had remembered the morning, over there in Paris, when she had told me that she had invited one of de Mersch’s lieutenants to betray him by not concealing from Callan the real horrors of the Systeme Groënlandais — flogged, butchered, miserable natives, the famines, the vices, diseases, and the crimes. There came suddenly before my eyes the tall narrow room in my aunt’s house, the opening of the door and her entry, followed by that of the woebegone governor of a province — the man who was to show Callan things — with his grating “Cest entendu ...”

I remembered the scene distinctly; her words; her looks; my utter unbelief. I remembered, too, that it had not saved me from a momentary sense of revolt against that inflexible intention of a treachery which was to be another step toward the inheritance of the earth. I had rejected the very idea, and here it had come; it was confronting me with all its meaning and consequences. Callan had been shown things he had not been meant to see, and had written the truth as he had seen it. His article was a small thing in itself, but he had been sent out there with tremendous flourishes of de Mersch’s trumpets. He was the man who could be believed. De Mersch’s supporters had practically said: “If he condemns us we are indeed damned.” And now that the condemnation had come, it meant ruin, as it seemed to me, for everybody I had known, worked for, seen, or heard of, during the last year of my life. It was ruin for Fox, for Churchill, for the ministers, and for the men who talk in railway carriages, for shopkeepers and for

the government; it was a menace to the institutions which hold us to the past, that are our guarantees for the future. The safety of everything one respected and believed in was involved in the disclosure of an atrocious fraud, and the disclosure was in my hands. For that night I had the power of the press in my keeping. People were waiting for this pronouncement. De Mersch's last card was his philanthropy; his model state and his happy natives.

The drone of the presses made the floor under my feet quiver, and the whole building vibrated as if the earth itself had trembled. I was alone with my knowledge. Did she know; had she put the power in my hand? But I was alone, and I was free.

I took up the proof and began to read, slanting the page to the fall of the light. It was a phrenetic indictment, but under the paltry rhetoric of the man there was genuine indignation and pain. There were revolting details of cruelty to the miserable, helpless, and defenceless; there were greed, and self-seeking, stripped naked; but more revolting to see without a mask was that falsehood which had been hiding under the words that for ages had spurred men to noble deeds, to self-sacrifice, to heroism. What was appalling was the sudden perception that all the traditional ideals of honour, glory, conscience, had been committed to the upholding of a gigantic and atrocious fraud. The falsehood had spread stealthily, had eaten into the very heart of creeds and convictions that we lean upon on our passage between the past and the future. The old order of things had to live or perish with a lie. I saw all this with the intensity and clearness of a revelation; I saw it as though I had been asleep through a year of work and dreams, and had awakened to the truth. I saw it all; I saw her intention. What was I to do?

Without my marking its approach emotion was upon me. The fingers that held up the extended slips tattooed one on another through its negligible thickness.

"Pretty thick that," Soane said. He was looking back at me from the cupboard he had opened. "I've rubbed it in, too ... there'll be hats on the green to-morrow." He had his head inside the cupboard, and his voice came to me hollowly. He extracted a large bottle with a gilt-foiled neck.

"Won't it upset the apple cart to-morrow," he said, very loudly; "won't it?"

His voice acted on me as the slight shake upon a phial full of waiting chemicals; crystallised them suddenly with a little click. Everything suddenly grew very clear to me. I suddenly understood that all the tortuous intrigue hinged upon what I did in the next few minutes. It rested with me now to stretch out my hand to that button in the wall or to let the whole world — "the ... the probity ... that sort of thing," she had said — fall to pieces. The drone of the presses continued to make itself felt like the quiver of a suppressed emotion. I might stop them or I might not. It rested with me.

Everybody was in my hands; they were quite small. If I let the thing go on, they would be done for utterly, and the new era would begin.

Soane had got hold of a couple of long-stalked glasses. They clinked together whilst he searched the cupboard for something.

“Eh, what?” he said. “It is pretty strong, isn’t it? Ought to shake out some of the supporters, eh? Bill comes on to-morrow ... do for that, I should think.” He wanted a corkscrew very badly.

But that was precisely it — it would “shake out some of the supporters,” and give Gurnard his patent excuse. Churchill, I knew, would stick to his line, the saner policy. But so many of the men who had stuck to Churchill would fall away now, and Gurnard, of course, would lead them to his own triumph.

It was a criminal verdict. Callan had gone out as a commissioner — with a good deal of drum-beating. And this was his report, this shriek. If it sounded across the house-tops — if I let it — good-bye to the saner policy and to Churchill. It did not make any difference that Churchill’s was the saner policy, because there was no one in the nation sane enough to see it. They wanted purity in high places, and here was a definite, criminal indictment against de Mersch. And de Mersch would — in a manner of speaking, have to be lynched, policy or no policy.

She wanted this, and in all the earth she was the only desirable thing.

If I thwarted her — she would ... what would she do now? I looked at Soane.

“What would happen if I stopped the presses?” I asked. Soane was twisting his corkscrew in the wire of the champagne bottle.

It was fatal; I could see nothing on earth but her. What else was there in the world. Wine? The light of the sun? The wind on the heath? Honour!

My God, what was honour to me if I could see nothing but her on earth?

Would honour or wine or sun or wind ever give me what she could give?

Let them go.

“What would happen if what?” Soane grumbled, “D — n this wire.”

“Oh, I was thinking about something,” I answered. The wire gave with a little snap and he began to ease the cork. Was I to let the light pass me by for the sake of ... of Fox, for instance, who trusted me? Well, let Fox go. And Churchill and what Churchill stood for; the probity; the greatness and the spirit of the past from which had sprung my conscience and the consciences of the sleeping millions around me — the woman at the poultry show with her farmers and shopkeepers. Let them go too.

Soane put into my hand one of his charged glasses. He seemed to rise out of the infinite, a forgotten shape. I sat down at the desk opposite him.

“Deuced good idea,” he said, suddenly, “to stop the confounded presses and spoof old Fox. He’s up to some devilry. And, by Jove, I’d like to get my knife in him; Jove, I would. And then chuck up everything and leave for the Sandwich Islands. I’m sick of this life, this dog’s life.... One might have made a pile though, if one’d known this smash was coming. But one can’t get at the innards of things. — No such luck — no such luck, eh?” I looked at him stupidly; took in his blood-shot eyes and his ruffled grizzling hair. I wondered who he was. “Il s’agissait de...?” I seemed to be back in Paris, I couldn’t think of what I had been thinking of. I drank his glass of wine and he filled me another. I drank that too.

Ah yes — even then the thing wasn't settled, even now that I had recognized that Fox and the others were of no account ... What remained was to prove to her that I wasn't a mere chattel, a piece in the game. I was at the very heart of the thing. After all, it was chance that had put me there, the blind chance of all the little things that lead in the inevitable, the future. If, now, I thwarted her, she would ... what would she do? She would have to begin all over again. She wouldn't want to be revenged; she wasn't revengeful. But how if she would never look upon me again?

The thing had reduced itself to a mere matter of policy. Or was it passion?

A clatter of the wheels of heavy carts and of the hoofs of heavy horses on granite struck like hammer blows on my ears, coming from the well of the court-yard below. Soane had finished his bottle and was walking to the cupboard. He paused at the window and stood looking down.

"Strong beggars, those porters," he said; "I couldn't carry that weight of paper — not with my rot on it, let alone Callan's. You'd think it would break down the carts."

I understood that they were loading the carts for the newspaper mails. There was still time to stop them. I got up and went toward the window, very swiftly. I was going to call to them to stop loading. I threw the casement open.

* * * * *

Of course, I did not stop them. The solution flashed on me with the breath of the raw air. It was ridiculously simple. If I thwarted her, well, she would respect me. But her business in life was the inheritance of the earth, and, however much she might respect me — or by so much the more — she would recognise that I was a force to deflect her from the right line — "a disease for me," she had said.

"What I have to do," I said, "is to show her that ... that I had her in my hands and that I co-operated loyally."

The thing was so simple that I triumphed; triumphed with the full glow of wine, triumphed looking down into that murky court-yard where the lanterns danced about in the rays of a great arc lamp. The gilt letters scattered all over the windows blazed forth the names of Fox's innumerable ventures. Well, he ... he had been a power, but I triumphed. I had co-operated loyally with the powers of the future, though I wanted no share in the inheritance of the earth. Only, I was going to push into the future. One of the great carts got into motion amidst a shower of sounds that whirled upward round and round the well. The black hood swayed like the shoulders of an elephant as it passed beneath my feet under the arch. It disappeared — it was co-operating too; in a few hours people at the other end of the country — of the world — would be raising their hands. Oh, yes, it was co-operating loyally.

I closed the window. Soane was holding a champagne bottle in one hand. In the other he had a paper knife of Fox's — a metal thing, a Japanese dagger or a Deccan knife. He sliced the neck off the bottle.

"Thought you were going to throw yourself out," he said; "I wouldn't stop you. I'm sick of it ... sick."

“Look at this ... to-night ... this infernal trick of Fox’s.... And I helped too.... Why?... I must eat.” He paused “... and drink,” he added. “But there is starvation for no end of fools in this little move. A few will be losing their good names too.... I don’t care, I’m off.... By-the-bye: What is he doing it for? Money? Funk? — You ought to know. You must be in it too. It’s not hunger with you. Wonderful what people will do to keep their pet vice going.... Eh?” He swayed a little. “You don’t drink — what’s your pet vice?”

He looked at me very defiantly, clutching the neck of the empty bottle. His drunken and overbearing glare seemed to force upon me a complicity in his squalid bargain with life, rewarded by a squalid freedom. He was pitiful and odious to my eyes; and somehow in a moment he appeared menacing.

“You can’t frighten me,” I said, in response to the strange fear he had inspired. “No one can frighten me now.” A sense of my inaccessibility was the first taste of an achieved triumph. I had done with fear. The poor devil before me appeared infinitely remote. He was lost; but he was only one of the lost; one of those that I could see already overwhelmed by the rush from the flood-gates opened at my touch. He would be destroyed in good company; swept out of my sight together with the past they had known and with the future they had waited for. But he was odious. “I am done with you,” I said.

“Eh; what?... Who wants to frighten?... I wanted to know what’s your pet vice.... Won’t tell? You might safely — I’m off.... No.... Want to tell me mine?... No time.... I’m off.... Ask the policeman ... crossing sweeper will do.... I’m going.”

“You will have to,” I said.

“What.... Dismiss me?... Throw the indispensable Soane overboard like a squeezed lemon?... Would you?... What would Fox say?... Eh? But you can’t, my boy — not you. Tell you ... tell you ... can’t.... Beforehand with you ... sick of it.... I’m off ... to the Islands — the Islands of the Blest.... I’m going to be an ... no, not an angel like Fox ... an ... oh, a beachcomber. Lie on white sand, in the sun ... blue sky and palm-trees — eh?... S.S. Waikato. I’m off.... Come too ... lark ... dismiss yourself out of all this. Warm sand, warm, mind you ... you won’t?” He had an injured expression. “Well, I’m off. See me into the cab, old chap, you’re a decent fellow after all ... not one of these beggars who would sell their best friend ... for a little money ... or some woman. Will see the last of me....”

I didn’t believe he would reach the South Seas, but I went downstairs and watched him march up the street with a slight stagger under the pallid dawn. I suppose it was the lingering chill of the night that made me shiver. I felt unbounded confidence in the future, there was nothing now between her and me. The echo of my footsteps on the flagstones accompanied me, filling the empty earth with the sound of my progress.

Chapter 18

I walked along, got to my club and upstairs into my room peaceably. A feeling of entire tranquillity had come over me. I rested after a strife which had issued in a victory whose meaning was too great to comprehend and enjoy at once. I only knew that it was great because there seemed nothing more left to do. Everything reposed within me — even conscience, even memory, reposed as in death. I had risen above them, and my thoughts moved serenely as in a new light, as men move in sunshine above the graves of the forgotten dead. I felt like a man at the beginning of a long holiday — an indefinite space of idleness with some great felicity — a felicity too great for words, too great for joy — at the end. Everything was delicious and vague; there were no shapes, no persons. Names flitted through my mind — Fox, Churchill, my aunt; but they were living people seen from above, flitting in the dusk, without individuality; things that moved below me in a valley from which I had emerged. I must have been dreaming of them.

I know I dreamed of her. She alone was distinct among these shapes. She appeared dazzling; resplendent with a splendid calmness, and I braced myself to the shock of love, the love I had known, that all men had known; but greater, transcendental, almost terrible, a fit reward for the sacrifice of a whole past. Suddenly she spoke. I heard a sound like the rustling of a wind through trees, and I felt the shock of an unknown emotion made up of fear and of enthusiasm, as though she had been not a woman but only a voice crying strange, unknown words in inspiring tones, promising and cruel, without any passion of love or hate. I listened. It was like the wind in the trees of a little wood. No hate ... no love. No love. There was a crash as of a falling temple. I was borne to the earth, overwhelmed, crushed by an immensity of ruin and of sorrow. I opened my eyes and saw the sun shining through the window-blinds.

I seem to remember I was surprised at it. I don't know why. Perhaps the lingering effect of the ruin in the dream, which had involved sunshine itself. I liked it though, and lay for a time enjoying the — what shall I say? — usualness of it. The sunshine of yesterday — of to-morrow. It occurred to me that the morning must be far advanced, and I got up briskly, as a man rises to his work. But as soon as I got on my legs I felt as if I had already over-worked myself. In reality there was nothing to do. All my muscles twitched with fatigue. I had experienced the same sensations once after an hour's desperate swimming to save myself from being carried out to sea by the tide.

No. There was nothing to do. I descended the staircase, and an utter sense of aimlessness drove me out through the big doors, which swung behind me without noise. I turned toward the river, and on the broad embankment the sunshine enveloped me,

friendly, familiar, and warm like the care of an old friend. A black dumb barge drifted, clumsy and empty, and the solitary man in it wrestled with the heavy sweep, straining his arms, throwing his face up to the sky at every effort. He knew what he was doing, though it was the river that did his work for him.

His exertions impressed me with the idea that I too had something to do. Certainly I had. One always has. Somehow I could not remember. It was intolerable, and even alarming, this blank, this emptiness of the many hours before night came again, till suddenly, it dawned upon me I had to make some extracts in the British Museum for our "Cromwell." Our Cromwell. There was no Cromwell; he had lived, had worked for the future — and now he had ceased to exist. His future — our past, had come to an end. The barge with the man still straining at the oar had gone out of sight under the arch of the bridge, as through a gate into another world. A bizarre sense of solitude stole upon me, and I turned my back upon the river as empty as my day. Hansoms, broughams, streamed with a continuous muffled roll of wheels and a beat of hoofs. A big dray put in a note of thunder and a clank of chains. I found myself curiously unable to understand what possible purpose remained to keep them in motion. The past that had made them had come to an end, and their future had been devoured by a new conception. And what of Churchill? He, too, had worked for the future; he would live on, but he had already ceased to exist. I had evoked him in this poignant thought and he came not alone. He came with a train of all the vanquished in this stealthy, unseen contest for an immense stake in which I was one of the victors. They crowded upon me. I saw Fox, Polehampton, de Mersch himself, crowds of figures without a name, women with whom I had fancied myself in love, men I had shaken by the hand, Lea's reproachful, ironical face. They were near; near enough to touch; nearer. I did not only see them, I absolutely felt them all. Their tumultuous and silent stir seemed to raise a tumult in my breast.

I sprang suddenly to my feet — a sensation that I had had before, that was not new to me, a remembered fear, had me fast; a remembered voice seemed to speak clearly incomprehensible words that had moved me before. The sheer faces of the enormous buildings near at hand seemed to topple forwards like cliffs in an earthquake, and for an instant I saw beyond them into unknown depths that I had seen into before. It was as if the shadow of annihilation had passed over them beneath the sunshine. Then they returned to rest; motionless, but with a changed aspect.

"This is too absurd," I said to myself. "I am not well." I was certainly unfit for any sort of work. "But I must get through the day somehow." To-morrow ... to-morrow.... I had a pale vision of her face as it had appeared to me at sunset on the first day I had met her.

I went back to my club — to lunch, of course. I had no appetite, but I was tormented by the idea of an interminable afternoon before me. I sat idly for a long time. Behind my back two men were talking.

"Churchill ... oh, no better than the rest. He only wants to be found out. If I've any nose for that sort of thing, there's something in the air. It's absurd to be told that he

knew nothing about it.... You've seen the Hour?" I got up to go away, but suddenly found myself standing by their table.

"You are unjust," I said. They looked up at me together with an immense surprise. I didn't know them and I passed on. But I heard one of them ask:

"Who's that fellow?" ...

"Oh — Etchingam Granger...."

"Is he queer?" the other postulated.

I went slowly down the great staircase. A knot of men was huddled round the tape machine; others came, half trotting, half walking, to peer over heads, under arm-pits.

"What's the matter with that thing?" I asked of one of them.

"Oh, Grogram's up," he said, and passed me. Someone from a point of vantage read out:

"The Leader of the House (Sir C. Grogram, Devonport) said that...." The words came haltingly to my ears as the man's voice followed the jerks of the little instrument "... the Government obviously could not ... alter its policy at ... eleventh hour ... at dictates of ... quite irresponsible person in one of ... the daily ... papers."

I was wondering whether it was Soane or Callan who was poor old Grogram's "quite irresponsible person," when I caught the sound of Gurnard's name. I turned irritably away. I didn't want to hear that fool read out the words of that.... It was like the warning croak of a raven in an old ballad.

I began desultorily to descend to the smoking-room. In the Cimmerian gloom of the stairway the voice of a pursuer hailed me.

"I say, Granger! I say, Granger!"

I looked back. The man was one of the rats of the lower journalism, large-boned, rubicund, asthmatic; a mass of flesh that might, to the advantage of his country and himself, have served as a cavalry trooper. He puffed stertorously down towards me.

"I say, I say," his breath came rattling and wheezing. "What's up at the Hour?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I answered curtly.

"They said you took it yesterday. You've been playing the very devil, haven't you? But I suppose it was not off your own bat?"

"Oh, I never play off my own bat," I answered.

"Of course I don't want to intrude," he said again. In the gloom I was beginning to discern the workings of the tortured apoplectic face. "But, I say, what's de Mersch's little game?"

"You'd better ask him," I answered. It was incredibly hateful, this satyr's mask in the dim light.

"He's not in London," it answered, with a wink of the creased eyelids, "but, I suppose, now, Fox and de Mersch haven't had a row, now, have they?"

I did not answer. The thing was wearily hateful, and this was only the beginning. Hundreds more would be asking the same question in a few minutes.

The head wagged on the mountainous shoulders.

"Looks fishy," he said. I recognised that, to force words from me, he was threatening a kind of blackmail. Another voice began to call from the top of the stairs —

"I say, Granger! I say, Granger...."

I pushed the folding-doors apart and went slowly down the gloomy room. I heard the doors swing again, and footsteps patter on the matting behind me. I did not turn; the man came round me and looked at my face. It was Polehampton. There were tears in his eyes.

"I say," he said, "I say, what does it mean; what does it mean?" It was very difficult for me to look at him. "I tell you...." he began again. He had the dictatorial air of a very small, quite hopeless man, a man mystified by a blow of unknown provenance. "I tell you...." he began again.

"But what has it to do with me?" I said roughly.

"Oh, but you ... you advised me to buy." He had become supplicatory. "Didn't you, now?... Didn't you.... You said, you remember ... that...." I didn't answer the man. What had I got to say? He remained looking intently at me, as if it were of the greatest moment to him that I should make the acknowledgment and share the blame — as if it would take an immense load from his shoulders. I couldn't do it; I hated him.

"Didn't you," he began categorically; "didn't you advise me to buy those debentures of de Mersch's?" I did not answer.

"What does it all mean?" he said again. "If this bill doesn't get through, I tell you I shall be ruined. And they say that Mr. Gurnard is going to smash it. They are all saying it, up there; and that you — you on the Hour ... are ... are responsible." He took out a handkerchief and began to blow his nose. I didn't say a single word.

"But what's to be done?" he started again; "what's to be done.... I tell you.... My daughter, you know, she's very brave, she said to me this morning she could work; but she couldn't, you know; she's not been brought up to that sort of thing ... not even typewriting ... and so ... we're all ruined ... everyone of us. And I've more than fifty hands, counting Mr. Lea, and they'll all have to go. It's horrible.... I trusted you, Granger, you know; I trusted you, and they say up there that you...." I turned away from him. I couldn't bear to see the bewildered fear in his eyes. "So many of us," he began again, "everyone I know.... I told them to buy and ... But you might have let us know, Granger, you might have. Think of my poor daughter."

I wanted to say something to the man, wanted to horribly; but there wasn't anything to say — not a word. I was sorry. I took up a paper that sprawled on one of the purple ottomans. I stood with my back to this haggard man and pretended to read.

I noticed incredulously that I was swaying on my legs. I looked round me. Two old men were asleep in armchairs under the gloomy windows. One had his head thrown back, the other was crumpled forward into himself; his frail, white hand just touched the floor. A little further off two young men were talking; they had the air of conspirators over their empty coffee cups.

I was conscious that Polehampton had left me, that he had gone from behind me; but I don't think I was conscious of the passage of time. God knows how long I stood

there. Now and then I saw Polehampton's face before my eyes, with the panic-stricken eyes, the ruffled hair, the lines of tears seaming the cheeks, seeming to look out at me from the crumple of the paper that I held. I knew too, that there were faces like that everywhere; everywhere, faces of panic-stricken little people of no more account than the dead in graveyards, just the material to make graveyards, nothing more; little people of absolutely no use but just to suffer horribly from this blow coming upon them from nowhere. It had never occurred to me at the time that their inheritance had passed to me ... to us. And yet, I began to wonder stupidly, what was the difference between me to-day and me yesterday. There wasn't any, not any at all. Only to-day I had nothing more to do.

The doors at the end of the room flew open, as if burst by a great outcry penetrating from without, and a man appeared running up the room — one of those men who bear news eternally, who catch the distant clamour and carry it into quiet streets. Why did he disturb me? Did I want to hear his news? I wanted to think of Churchill; to think of how to explain.... The man was running up the room.

“I say ... I say, you beggars....”

I was beginning to wonder how it was that I felt such an absolute conviction of being alone, and it was then, I believe, that in this solitude that had descended upon my soul I seemed to see the shape of an approaching Nemesis. It is permitted to no man to break with his past, with the past of his kind, and to throw away the treasure of his future. I began to suspect I had gained nothing; I began to understand that even such a catastrophe was possible. I sat down in the nearest chair. Then my fear passed away. The room was filling; it hummed with excited voices. “Churchill! No better than the others,” I heard somebody saying. Two men had stopped talking. They were middle-aged, a little gray, and ruddy. The face of one was angry, and of the other sad. “He wanted only to be found out. What a fall in the mud.” “No matter,” said the other, “one is made a little sad. He stood for everything I had been pinning my faith to.” They passed on. A brazen voice bellowed in the distance. “The greatest fall of any minister that ever was.” A tall, heavy journalist in a white waistcoat was the centre of a group that turned slowly upon itself, gathering bulk. “Done for — stood up to the last. I saw him get into his brougham. The police had a job.... There's quite a riot down there.... Pale as a ghost. Gurnard? Gurnard magnificent. Very cool and in his best form. Threw them over without as much as a wink. Outraged conscience speech. Magnificent. Why it's the chance of his life.” ... And then for a time the voices and the faces seemed to pass away and die out. I had dropped my paper, and as I stooped to pick it up the voices returned.

— “Granger ... Etchingam Granger.... Sister is going to marry Gurnard.”

I got on to my hands and knees to pick up the paper, of course. What I did not understand was where the water came from. Otherwise it was pretty clear. Somebody seemed to be in a fit. No, he wasn't drunk; look at his teeth. What did they want to look at his teeth for; was he a horse?

* * * * *

It must have been I that was in the fit. There were a lot of men round me, the front row on their knees — holding me, some of them. A man in a red coat and plush breeches — a waiter — was holding a glass of water; another had a small bottle. They were talking about me under their breaths. At one end of the horseshoe someone said:

“He’s the man who...” Then he caught my eye. He lowered his voice, and the abominable whisper ran round among the heads. It was easy to guess: “the man who was got at.” I was to be that for the rest of my life. I was to be famous at last. There came the desire to be out of it.

I struggled to my feet.

Someone said: “Feel better now?” I answered: “I — oh, I’ve got to go and see...”

It was rather difficult to speak distinctly; my tongue got in the way. But I strove to impress the fool with the idea that I had affairs that must be attended to — that I had private affairs.

“You aren’t fit. Let me...”

I pushed him roughly aside — what business was it of his? I slunk hastily out of the room. The others remained. I knew what they were going to do — to talk things over, to gabble about “the man who...”

It was treacherous walking, that tessellated pavement in the hall.

Someone said: “Hullo, Granger,” as I passed. I took no notice.

Where did I wish to go to? There was no one who could minister to me; the whole world had resolved itself into a vast solitary city of closed doors. I had no friend — no one. But I must go somewhere, must hide somewhere, must speak to someone. I mumbled the address of Fox to a cabman. Some idea of expiation must have been in my mind; some idea of seeing the thing through, mingled with that necessity for talking to someone — anyone.

I was afraid too; not of Fox’s rage; not even of anything that he could do — but of the sight of his despair. He had become a tragic figure.

I reached his flat and I had said: “It is I,” and again, “It is I,” and he had not stirred. He was lying on the sofa under a rug, motionless as a corpse. I had paced up and down the room. I remember that the pile of the carpet was so long that it was impossible to walk upon it easily. Everything else in the room was conceived in an exuberance of luxury that now had something of the macabre in it. It was that now — before, it had been unclean. There was a great bed whose lines suggested sinking softness, a glaring yellow satin coverlet, vast, like a sea. The walls were covered with yellow satin, the windows draped with lace worth a king’s ransom, the light was softened, the air dead, the sounds hung slumbrously. And, in the centre of it, that motionless body. It stirred, pivoted on some central axis beneath the rug, and faced me sitting. There was no look of inquiry in the bloodshot eyes — they turned dully upon me, topaz-coloured in a blood-red setting. There was no expression in the suffused face.

“You want?” he said, in a voice that was august by dint of hopelessness.

“I want to explain,” I said. I had no idea that this was what I had come for.

He answered only: "You!" He had the air of one speaking to something infinitely unimportant. It was as if I had no inkling of the real issue.

With a bravery of desperation I began to explain that I hadn't stumbled into the thing; that I had acted open-eyed; for my own ends ... "My own ends." I repeated it several times. I wanted him to understand, and I did explain. I kept nothing from him; neither her coming, nor her words, nor my feelings. I had gone in with my eyes open.

For the first time Fox looked at me as if I were a sentient being. "Oh, you know that much," he said listlessly.

"It's no disgrace to have gone under to her," I said; "we had to." His despair seemed to link him into one "we" with myself. I wanted to put heart into him. I don't know why.

He didn't look at me again.

"Oh, that," he said dully, "I — I understand who you mean.... If I had known before I might have done something. But she came of a higher plane." He seemed to be talking to himself. The half-forgotten horror grew large; I remembered that she had said that Fox, like herself, was one of a race apart, that was to supersede us — Dimensionists. And, when I looked at him now, it was plain to me that he was of a race different to my own, just as he had always seemed different from any other man. He had had a different tone in triumph; he was different now, in his despair. He went on: "I might have managed Gurnard alone, but I never thought of her coming. You see one does one's best, but, somehow, here one grows rather blind. I ought to have stuck to Gurnard, of course; never to have broken with him. We ought all to have kept together. — But I kept my end up as long as he was alone."

He went on talking in an expressionless monotone, perhaps to himself, perhaps to me. I listened as one listens to unmeaning sounds — to that of a distant train at night. He was looking at the floor, his mouth moving mechanically. He sat perfectly square, one hand on either knee, his back bowed out, his head drooping forward. It was as if there were no more muscular force in the whole man — as if he were one of those ancient things one sees sunning themselves on benches by the walls of workhouses.

"But," I said angrily, "it's not all over, you can make a fight for it still."

"You don't seem to understand," he answered, "it is all over — the whole thing. I ran Churchill and his conscious rectitude gang for all they were worth.... Well, I liked them, I was a fool to give way to pity. — But I did. — One grows weak among people like you. Of course I knew that their day was over.... And it's all over," he said again after a long pause.

"And what will you do?" I asked, half hysterically.

"I don't just know," he answered; "we've none of us gone under before.

There haven't been enough really to clash until she came."

The dead tranquillity of his manner was overwhelming; there was nothing to be said. I was in the presence of a man who was not as I was, whose standard of values, absolute to himself, was not to be measured by any of mine.

"I suppose I shall cut my throat," he began again.

I noticed with impersonal astonishment that the length of my right side was covered with the dust of a floor. In my restless motions I came opposite the fireplace. Above it hung a number of tiny, jewelled frames, containing daubs of an astonishing lewdness. The riddle grew painful. What kind of a being could conceive this impossibly barbaric room, could enshrine those impossibly crude designs, and then fold his hands? I turned fiercely upon him. "But you are rich enough to enjoy life," I said.

"What's that?" he asked wearily.

"In the name of God," I shouted, "what do you work for — what have you been plotting and plotting for, if not to enjoy your life at the last?" He made a small indefinite motion of ignorance, as if I had propounded to him a problem that he could not solve, that he did not think worth the solving.

It came to me as the confirmation of a suspicion — that motion. They had no joy, these people who were to supersede us; their clear-sightedness did nothing more for them than just that enabling them to spread desolation among us and take our places. It had been in her manner all along, she was like Fate; like the abominable Fate that desolates the whole length of our lives; that leaves of our hopes, of our plans, nothing but a hideous jumble of fragments like those of statues, smashed by hammers; the senseless, inscrutable, joyless Fate that we hate, and that debases us forever and ever. She had been all that to me ... and to how many more?

"I used to be a decent personality," I vociferated at him. "Do you hear — decent. I could look a man in the face. And you cannot even enjoy. What do you come for? What do you live for? What is at the end of it all?"

"Ah, if I knew ..." he answered, negligently.

Chapter 19

I wanted to see her, to finish it one way or another, and, at my aunt's house, I found her standing in an immense white room; waiting for me. There was a profusion of light. It left her absolutely shadowless, like a white statue in a gallery; inscrutable.

"I have come," I said. I had it in my mind to say: "Because there is nothing for me to do on earth." But I did not, I looked at her instead.

"You have come," she repeated. She had no expression in her voice, in her eyes. It was as if I were nothing to her; as if I were the picture of a man. Well, that was it; I was a picture, she a statue. "I did it," I said at last.

"And you want?" she asked.

"You know," I answered, "I want my..." I could not think of the word. It was either a reward or a just due. She looked at me, quite suddenly. It made an effect as if the Venus of Milo had turned its head toward me. She began to speak, as if the statue were speaking, as if a passing bell were speaking; recording a passing passionlessly.

"You have done nothing at all," she said. "Nothing."

"And yet," I said, "I was at the heart of it all."

"Nothing at all," she repeated. "You were at the heart, yes; but at the heart of a machine." Her words carried a sort of strong conviction. I seemed suddenly to see an immense machine — unconcerned, soulless, but all its parts made up of bodies of men: a great mill grinding out the dust of centuries; a great wine-press. She was continuing her speech.

"As for you — you are only a detail, like all the others; you were set in a place because you would act as you did. It was in your character. We inherit the earth and you, your day is over.... You remember that day, when I found you — the first day?"

I remembered that day. It was on the downland, under the immense sky, amid the sound of larks. She had explained the nature of things. She had talked expressionlessly in pregnant words; she was talking now. I knew no more of her to-day, after all these days, after I had given up to her my past and my future.

"You remember that day. I was looking for such a man, and I found you."

"And you ..." I said, "you have done this thing! Think of it!... I have nobody — nothing — nowhere in the world. I cannot look a man in the face, not even Churchill. I can never go to him again." I paused, expecting a sign of softening. None came. "I have parted with my past and you tell me there is no future."

"None," she echoed. Then, coldly, as a swan takes the water, she began to speak:

"Well, yes! I've hurt you. You have suffered and in your pain you think me vile, but remember that for ages the virtue of to-morrow has been the vileness of to-day.

That which outstrips one, one calls vile. My virtue lies in gaining my end. Pity for you would have been a crime for me. You have suffered. And then? What are you to me? As I came among you I am to-day; that is where I am triumphant and virtuous. I have succeeded. When I came here I came into a world of — of shadows of men. What were their passions, their joys, their fears, their despair, their outcry, to me? If I had ears, my virtue was to close them to the cries. There was no other way. There was one of us — your friend Fox, I mean. He came into the world, but had not the virtue to hold himself aloof. He has told you, ‘One goes blind down here.’ He began to feel a little like the people round him. He contracted likings and dislikings. He liked you ... and you betrayed him. So he went under. He grew blind down here. I have not grown blind. I see as I saw. I move as I did in a world of ... of the pictures of men. They despair. I hear groans ... well, they are the groans of the dead to me. This to you, down near it, is a mass of tortuous intrigue; vile in its pettiest detail. But come further off; stand beside me, and what does it look like? It is a mighty engine of disintegration. It has crushed out a whole fabric, a whole plane of society. It has done that. I guided it. I had to have my eyes on every little strand of it; to be forever on the watch.”

“And now I stand alone. Yesterday that fabric was everything to you; it seemed solid enough. And where is it to-day? What is it to you more than to me? There stood Virtue ... and Probity ... and all the things that all those people stood for. Well, to-day they are gone; the very belief in them is gone. Who will believe in them, now that it is proved that their tools were people ... like de Mersch? And it was I that did it. That, too, is to be accounted to me for virtue.”

“Well, I have inherited the earth. I am the worm at the very heart of the rose of it. You are thinking that all that I have gained is the hand of Gurnard. But it is more than that. It is a matter of a chess-board; and Gurnard is the only piece that remains. And I am the hand that moves him. As for a marriage; well, it is a marriage of minds, a union for a common purpose. But mine is the master mind. As for you. Well, you have parted with your past ... and there is no future for you. That is true. You have nowhere to go to; have nothing left, nothing in the world. That is true too. But what is that to me? A set of facts — that you have parted with your past and have no future. You had to do the work; I had to make you do it. I chose you because you would do it. That is all... I knew you; knew your secret places, your weaknesses. That is my power. I stand for the Inevitable, for the future that goes on its way; you for the past that lies by the roadside. If for your sake I had swerved one jot from my allotted course, I should have been untrue. There was a danger, once, for a minute... But I stood out against it. What would you have had me do? Go under as Fox went under? Speak like him, look as he looks now.... Me? Well, I did not.”

“I was in the hands of the future; I never swerved; I went on my way. I had to judge men as I judged you; to corrupt, as I corrupted you. I cajoled; I bribed; I held out hopes; and with every one, as with you, I succeeded. It is in that power that the secret of the greatness which is virtue, lies. I had to set about a work of art, of an art strange to you; as strange, as alien as the arts of dead peoples. You are the dead now, mine

the art of an ensuing day. All that remains to you is to fold your hands and wonder, as you wondered before the gates of Nineveh. I had to sound the knell of the old order; of your virtues, of your honours, of your faiths, of ... of altruism, if you like. Well, it is sounded. I was forever on the watch; I foresaw; I forestalled; I have never rested. And you....”

“And I ...” I said, “I only loved you.”

There was a silence. I seemed for a moment to see myself a tenuous, bodiless thing, like a ghost in a bottomless cleft between the past and the to come. And I was to be that forever.

“You only loved me,” she repeated. “Yes, you loved me. But what claim upon me does that give you? You loved me.... Well, if I had loved you it would have given you a claim.... All your misery; your heartache comes from ... from love; your love for me, your love for the things of the past, for what was doomed.... You loved the others too ... in a way, and you betrayed them and you are wretched. If you had not loved them you would not be wretched now; if you had not loved me you would not have betrayed your — your very self. At the first you stood alone; as much alone as I. All these people were nothing to you. I was nothing to you. But you must needs love them and me. You should have let them remain nothing to the end. But you did not. What were they to you? — Shapes, shadows on a sheet. They looked real. But were they — any one of them? You will never see them again; you will never see me again; we shall be all parts of a past of shadows. If you had been as I am, you could have looked back upon them unmoved or could have forgotten.... But you ... ‘you only loved’ and you will have no more ease. And, even now, it is only yourself that matters. It is because you broke; because you were false to your standards at a supreme moment; because you have discovered that your honour will not help you to stand a strain. It is not the thought of the harm you have done the others.... What are they — what is Churchill who has fallen or Fox who is dead — to you now? It is yourself that you bemoan. That is your tragedy, that you can never go again to Churchill with the old look in your eyes, that you can never go to anyone for fear of contempt.... Oh, I know you, I know you.”

She knew me. It was true, what she said.

I had had my eyes on the ground all this while; now I looked at her, trying to realise that I should never see her again. It was impossible. There was that intense beauty, that shadowlessness that was like translucence. And there was her voice. It was impossible to understand that I was never to see her again, never to hear her voice, after this.

She was silent for a long time and I said nothing — nothing at all. It was the thought of her making Fox’s end; of her sitting as Fox had sat, hopelessly, lifelessly, like a man waiting at the end of the world. At last she said: “There is no hope. We have to go our ways; you yours, I mine. And then if you will — if you cannot forget — you may remember that I cared; that, for a moment, in between two breaths, I thought of ... of failing. That is all I can do ... for your sake.”

That silenced me. Even if I could have spoken to any purpose, I would have held my tongue now.

I had not looked at her; but stood with my eyes averted, very conscious of her standing before me; of her great beauty, of her great glory.

* * * * *

After a long time I went away. I never saw her again. I never saw any one of them all again. Fox was dead and Churchill I have never had the heart to face. That was the end of all that part of my life. It passed away and left me only a consciousness of weakness and ... and regrets. She remains. One recognises her hand in the trend of events. Well, it is not a very gay world. Gurnard, they say, is the type of the age — of its spirit. And they say that I, the Granger of Etchingam, am not on terms with my brother-in-law.

Typhoon

This short novel was serialised in Pall Mall Magazine from January to March 1902. It is a classic sea yarn concerning how Captain MacWhirr sails the Siamese steamer Nan-Shan into a typhoon. Other characters include the young Jukes and Solomon, the head engineer. The novel classically evokes the sea-faring life at the turn of the century. While Macwhirr is emotionally estranged from his family and crew, and though he refuses to consider an alternate course to skirt the typhoon, his indomitable will in the face of a superior natural force elicits grudging admiration.

Far as the Mariner on Highest Mast
Can see all around upon the calmed vast,
So wide was Neptune's hall . . . — KEATS

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The main characteristic of this volume consists in this, that all the stories composing it belong not only to the same period but have been written one after another in the order in which they appear in the book.

The period is that which follows on my connection with Blackwood's Magazine. I had just finished writing "The End of the Tether" and was casting about for some subject which could be developed in a shorter form than the tales in the volume of "Youth" when the instance of a steamship full of returning coolies from Singapore to some port in northern China occurred to my recollection. Years before I had heard it being talked about in the East as a recent occurrence. It was for us merely one subject of conversation amongst many others of the kind. Men earning their bread in any very specialized occupation will talk shop, not only because it is the most vital interest of their lives but also because they have not much knowledge of other subjects. They have never had the time to get acquainted with them. Life, for most of us, is not so much a hard as an exacting taskmaster.

I never met anybody personally concerned in this affair, the interest of which for us was, of course, not the bad weather but the extraordinary complication brought into the ship's life at a moment of exceptional stress by the human element below her deck. Neither was the story itself ever enlarged upon in my hearing. In that company each of us could imagine easily what the whole thing was like. The financial difficulty of it, presenting also a human problem, was solved by a mind much too simple to be perplexed by anything in the world except men's idle talk for which it was not adapted.

From the first the mere anecdote, the mere statement I might say, that such a thing had happened on the high seas, appeared to me a sufficient subject for meditation. Yet it was but a bit of a sea yarn after all. I felt that to bring out its deeper significance which was quite apparent to me, something other, something more was required; a leading motive that would harmonize all these violent noises, and a point of view that would put all that elemental fury into its proper place.

What was needed of course was Captain MacWhirr. Directly I perceived him I could see that he was the man for the situation. I don't mean to say that I ever saw Captain MacWhirr in the flesh, or had ever come in contact with his literal mind and his dauntless temperament. MacWhirr is not an acquaintance of a few hours, or a few weeks, or a few months. He is the product of twenty years of life. My own life. Conscious invention had little to do with him. If it is true that Captain MacWhirr never walked and breathed on this earth (which I find for my part extremely difficult to believe) I can also assure my readers that he is perfectly authentic. I may venture to assert the same of every aspect of the story, while I confess that the particular typhoon of the tale was not a typhoon of my actual experience.

At its first appearance "Typhoon," the story, was classed by some critics as a deliberately intended storm-piece. Others picked out MacWhirr, in whom they perceived a definite symbolic intention. Neither was exclusively my intention. Both the typhoon and Captain MacWhirr presented themselves to me as the necessities of the deep conviction with which I approached the subject of the story. It was their opportunity. It was also my opportunity; and it would be vain to discourse about what I made of it in a handful of pages, since the pages themselves are here, between the covers of this volume, to speak for themselves.

This is a belated reflection. If it had occurred to me before it would have perhaps done away with the existence of this Author's Note; for, indeed, the same remark applies to every story in this volume. None of them are stories of experience in the absolute sense of the word. Experience in them is but the canvas of the attempted picture. Each of them has its more than one intention. With each the question is what the writer has done with his opportunity; and each answers the question for itself in words which, if I may say so without undue solemnity, were written with a conscientious regard for the truth of my own sensations. And each of those stories, to mean something, must justify itself in its own way to the conscience of each successive reader.

"Falk" — the second story in the volume — offended the delicacy of one critic at least by certain peculiarities of its subject. But what is the subject of "Falk"? I personally do not feel so very certain about it. He who reads must find out for himself. My intention in writing "Falk" was not to shock anybody. As in most of my writings I insist not on the events but on their effect upon the persons in the tale. But in everything I have written there is always one invariable intention, and that is to capture the reader's attention, by securing his interest and enlisting his sympathies for the matter in hand,

whatever it may be, within the limits of the visible world and within the boundaries of human emotions.

I may safely say that Falk is absolutely true to my experience of certain straightforward characters combining a perfectly natural ruthlessness with a certain amount of moral delicacy. Falk obeys the law of self-preservation without the slightest misgivings as to his right, but at a crucial turn of that ruthlessly preserved life he will not condescend to dodge the truth. As he is presented as sensitive enough to be affected permanently by a certain unusual experience, that experience had to be set by me before the reader vividly; but it is not the subject of the tale. If we go by mere facts then the subject is Falk's attempt to get married; in which the narrator of the tale finds himself unexpectedly involved both on its ruthless and its delicate side.

"Falk" shares with one other of my stories ("The Return" in the "Tales of Unrest" volume) the distinction of never having been serialized. I think the copy was shown to the editor of some magazine who rejected it indignantly on the sole ground that "the girl never says anything." This is perfectly true. From first to last Hermann's niece utters no word in the tale — and it is not because she is dumb, but for the simple reason that whenever she happens to come under the observation of the narrator she has either no occasion or is too profoundly moved to speak. The editor, who obviously had read the story, might have perceived that for himself. Apparently he did not, and I refrained from pointing out the impossibility to him because, since he did not venture to say that "the girl" did not live, I felt no concern at his indignation.

All the other stories were serialized. The "Typhoon" appeared in the early numbers of the Pall Mall Magazine, then under the direction of the late Mr. Halkett. It was on that occasion, too, that I saw for the first time my conceptions rendered by an artist in another medium. Mr. Maurice Grieffenhagen knew how to combine in his illustrations the effect of his own most distinguished personal vision with an absolute fidelity to the inspiration of the writer. "Amy Foster" was published in The Illustrated London News with a fine drawing of Amy on her day out giving tea to the children at her home, in a hat with a big feather. "To-morrow" appeared first in the Pall Mall Magazine. Of that story I will only say that it struck many people by its adaptability to the stage and that I was induced to dramatize it under the title of "One Day More"; up to the present my only effort in that direction. I may also add that each of the four stories on their appearance in book form was picked out on various grounds as the "best of the lot" by different critics, who reviewed the volume with a warmth of appreciation and understanding, a sympathetic insight and a friendliness of expression for which I cannot be sufficiently grateful.

1919. J. C.

Chapter 1

Captain MacWhirr, of the steamer Nan-Shan, had a physiognomy that, in the order of material appearances, was the exact counterpart of his mind: it presented no marked characteristics of firmness or stupidity; it had no pronounced characteristics whatever; it was simply ordinary, irresponsive, and unruffled.

The only thing his aspect might have been said to suggest, at times, was bashfulness; because he would sit, in business offices ashore, sunburnt and smiling faintly, with downcast eyes. When he raised them, they were perceived to be direct in their glance and of blue colour. His hair was fair and extremely fine, clasping from temple to temple the bald dome of his skull in a clamp as of fluffy silk. The hair of his face, on the contrary, carrotty and flaming, resembled a growth of copper wire clipped short to the line of the lip; while, no matter how close he shaved, fiery metallic gleams passed, when he moved his head, over the surface of his cheeks. He was rather below the medium height, a bit round-shouldered, and so sturdy of limb that his clothes always looked a shade too tight for his arms and legs. As if unable to grasp what is due to the difference of latitudes, he wore a brown bowler hat, a complete suit of a brownish hue, and clumsy black boots. These harbour togs gave to his thick figure an air of stiff and uncouth smartness. A thin silver watch chain looped his waistcoat, and he never left his ship for the shore without clutching in his powerful, hairy fist an elegant umbrella of the very best quality, but generally unrolled. Young Jukes, the chief mate, attending his commander to the gangway, would sometimes venture to say, with the greatest gentleness, "Allow me, sir" — and possessing himself of the umbrella deferentially, would elevate the ferule, shake the folds, twirl a neat furl in a jiffy, and hand it back; going through the performance with a face of such portentous gravity, that Mr. Solomon Rout, the chief engineer, smoking his morning cigar over the skylight, would turn away his head in order to hide a smile. "Oh! aye! The blessed gamp. . . . Thank 'ee, Jukes, thank 'ee," would mutter Captain MacWhirr, heartily, without looking up.

Having just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself; and from the very same cause he was not in the least conceited. It is your imaginative superior who is touchy, overbearing, and difficult to please; but every ship Captain MacWhirr commanded was the floating abode of harmony and peace. It was, in truth, as impossible for him to take a flight of fancy as it would be for a watchmaker to put together a chronometer with nothing except a two-pound hammer and a whip-saw in the way of tools. Yet the uninteresting lives of men so entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence have their mysterious

side. It was impossible in Captain MacWhirr's case, for instance, to understand what under heaven could have induced that perfectly satisfactory son of a petty grocer in Belfast to run away to sea. And yet he had done that very thing at the age of fifteen. It was enough, when you thought it over, to give you the idea of an immense, potent, and invisible hand thrust into the ant-heap of the earth, laying hold of shoulders, knocking heads together, and setting the unconscious faces of the multitude towards inconceivable goals and in undreamt-of directions.

His father never really forgave him for this undutiful stupidity. "We could have got on without him," he used to say later on, "but there's the business. And he an only son, too!" His mother wept very much after his disappearance. As it had never occurred to him to leave word behind, he was mourned over for dead till, after eight months, his first letter arrived from Talcahuano. It was short, and contained the statement: "We had very fine weather on our passage out." But evidently, in the writer's mind, the only important intelligence was to the effect that his captain had, on the very day of writing, entered him regularly on the ship's articles as Ordinary Seaman. "Because I can do the work," he explained. The mother again wept copiously, while the remark, "Tom's an ass," expressed the emotions of the father. He was a corpulent man, with a gift for sly chaffing, which to the end of his life he exercised in his intercourse with his son, a little pityingly, as if upon a half-witted person.

MacWhirr's visits to his home were necessarily rare, and in the course of years he despatched other letters to his parents, informing them of his successive promotions and of his movements upon the vast earth. In these missives could be found sentences like this: "The heat here is very great." Or: "On Christmas day at 4 P. M. we fell in with some icebergs." The old people ultimately became acquainted with a good many names of ships, and with the names of the skippers who commanded them — with the names of Scots and English shipowners — with the names of seas, oceans, straits, promontories — with outlandish names of lumber-ports, of rice-ports, of cotton-ports — with the names of islands — with the name of their son's young woman. She was called Lucy. It did not suggest itself to him to mention whether he thought the name pretty. And then they died.

The great day of MacWhirr's marriage came in due course, following shortly upon the great day when he got his first command.

All these events had taken place many years before the morning when, in the chart-room of the steamer Nan-Shan, he stood confronted by the fall of a barometer he had no reason to distrust. The fall — taking into account the excellence of the instrument, the time of the year, and the ship's position on the terrestrial globe — was of a nature ominously prophetic; but the red face of the man betrayed no sort of inward disturbance. Omens were as nothing to him, and he was unable to discover the message of a prophecy till the fulfilment had brought it home to his very door. "That's a fall, and no mistake," he thought. "There must be some uncommonly dirty weather knocking about."

The Nan-Shan was on her way from the southward to the treaty port of Fu-chau, with some cargo in her lower holds, and two hundred Chinese coolies returning to their village homes in the province of Fo-kien, after a few years of work in various tropical colonies. The morning was fine, the oily sea heaved without a sparkle, and there was a queer white misty patch in the sky like a halo of the sun. The fore-deck, packed with Chinamen, was full of sombre clothing, yellow faces, and pigtailed, sprinkled over with a good many naked shoulders, for there was no wind, and the heat was close. The coolies lounged, talked, smoked, or stared over the rail; some, drawing water over the side, sluiced each other; a few slept on hatches, while several small parties of six sat on their heels surrounding iron trays with plates of rice and tiny teacups; and every single Celestial of them was carrying with him all he had in the world — a wooden chest with a ringing lock and brass on the corners, containing the savings of his labours: some clothes of ceremony, sticks of incense, a little opium maybe, bits of nameless rubbish of conventional value, and a small hoard of silver dollars, toiled for in coal lighters, won in gambling-houses or in petty trading, grubbed out of earth, sweated out in mines, on railway lines, in deadly jungle, under heavy burdens — amassed patiently, guarded with care, cherished fiercely.

A cross swell had set in from the direction of Formosa Channel about ten o'clock, without disturbing these passengers much, because the Nan-Shan, with her flat bottom, rolling chocks on bilges, and great breadth of beam, had the reputation of an exceptionally steady ship in a sea-way. Mr. Jukes, in moments of expansion on shore, would proclaim loudly that the "old girl was as good as she was pretty." It would never have occurred to Captain MacWhirr to express his favourable opinion so loud or in terms so fanciful.

She was a good ship, undoubtedly, and not old either. She had been built in Dumbarton less than three years before, to the order of a firm of merchants in Siam — Messrs. Sigg and Son. When she lay afloat, finished in every detail and ready to take up the work of her life, the builders contemplated her with pride.

"Sigg has asked us for a reliable skipper to take her out," remarked one of the partners; and the other, after reflecting for a while, said: "I think MacWhirr is ashore just at present." "Is he? Then wire him at once. He's the very man," declared the senior, without a moment's hesitation.

Next morning MacWhirr stood before them unperturbed, having travelled from London by the midnight express after a sudden but undemonstrative parting with his wife. She was the daughter of a superior couple who had seen better days.

"We had better be going together over the ship, Captain," said the senior partner; and the three men started to view the perfections of the Nan-Shan from stem to stern, and from her keelson to the trucks of her two stumpy pole-masts.

Captain MacWhirr had begun by taking off his coat, which he hung on the end of a steam windless embodying all the latest improvements.

"My uncle wrote of you favourably by yesterday's mail to our good friends — Messrs. Sigg, you know — and doubtless they'll continue you out there in command," said the

junior partner. "You'll be able to boast of being in charge of the handiest boat of her size on the coast of China, Captain," he added.

"Have you? Thank 'ee," mumbled vaguely MacWhirr, to whom the view of a distant eventuality could appeal no more than the beauty of a wide landscape to a purblind tourist; and his eyes happening at the moment to be at rest upon the lock of the cabin door, he walked up to it, full of purpose, and began to rattle the handle vigorously, while he observed, in his low, earnest voice, "You can't trust the workmen nowadays. A brand-new lock, and it won't act at all. Stuck fast. See? See?"

As soon as they found themselves alone in their office across the yard: "You praised that fellow up to Sigg. What is it you see in him?" asked the nephew, with faint contempt.

"I admit he has nothing of your fancy skipper about him, if that's what you mean," said the elder man, curtly. "Is the foreman of the joiners on the Nan-Shan outside? . . . Come in, Bates. How is it that you let Tait's people put us off with a defective lock on the cabin door? The Captain could see directly he set eye on it. Have it replaced at once. The little straws, Bates . . . the little straws. . . ."

The lock was replaced accordingly, and a few days afterwards the Nan-Shan steamed out to the East, without MacWhirr having offered any further remark as to her fittings, or having been heard to utter a single word hinting at pride in his ship, gratitude for his appointment, or satisfaction at his prospects.

With a temperament neither loquacious nor taciturn he found very little occasion to talk. There were matters of duty, of course — directions, orders, and so on; but the past being to his mind done with, and the future not there yet, the more general actualities of the day required no comment — because facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision.

Old Mr. Sigg liked a man of few words, and one that "you could be sure would not try to improve upon his instructions." MacWhirr satisfying these requirements, was continued in command of the Nan-Shan, and applied himself to the careful navigation of his ship in the China seas. She had come out on a British register, but after some time Messrs. Sigg judged it expedient to transfer her to the Siamese flag.

At the news of the contemplated transfer Jukes grew restless, as if under a sense of personal affront. He went about grumbling to himself, and uttering short scornful laughs. "Fancy having a ridiculous Noah's Ark elephant in the ensign of one's ship," he said once at the engine-room door. "Dash me if I can stand it: I'll throw up the billet. Don't it make you sick, Mr. Rout?" The chief engineer only cleared his throat with the air of a man who knows the value of a good billet.

The first morning the new flag floated over the stern of the Nan-Shan Jukes stood looking at it bitterly from the bridge. He struggled with his feelings for a while, and then remarked, "Queer flag for a man to sail under, sir."

"What's the matter with the flag?" inquired Captain MacWhirr. "Seems all right to me." And he walked across to the end of the bridge to have a good look.

“Well, it looks queer to me,” burst out Jukes, greatly exasperated, and flung off the bridge.

Captain MacWhirr was amazed at these manners. After a while he stepped quietly into the chart-room, and opened his International Signal Code-book at the plate where the flags of all the nations are correctly figured in gaudy rows. He ran his finger over them, and when he came to Siam he contemplated with great attention the red field and the white elephant. Nothing could be more simple; but to make sure he brought the book out on the bridge for the purpose of comparing the coloured drawing with the real thing at the flagstaff astern. When next Jukes, who was carrying on the duty that day with a sort of suppressed fierceness, happened on the bridge, his commander observed:

“There’s nothing amiss with that flag.”

“Isn’t there?” mumbled Jukes, falling on his knees before a deck-locker and jerking therefrom viciously a spare lead-line.

“No. I looked up the book. Length twice the breadth and the elephant exactly in the middle. I thought the people ashore would know how to make the local flag. Stands to reason. You were wrong, Jukes. . . .”

“Well, sir,” began Jukes, getting up excitedly, “all I can say — ” He fumbled for the end of the coil of line with trembling hands.

“That’s all right.” Captain MacWhirr soothed him, sitting heavily on a little canvas folding-stool he greatly affected. “All you have to do is to take care they don’t hoist the elephant upside-down before they get quite used to it.”

Jukes flung the new lead-line over on the fore-deck with a loud “Here you are, bo’s’s’en — don’t forget to wet it thoroughly,” and turned with immense resolution towards his commander; but Captain MacWhirr spread his elbows on the bridge-rail comfortably.

“Because it would be, I suppose, understood as a signal of distress,” he went on. “What do you think? That elephant there, I take it, stands for something in the nature of the Union Jack in the flag. . . .”

“Does it!” yelled Jukes, so that every head on the Nan-Shan’s decks looked towards the bridge. Then he sighed, and with sudden resignation: “It would certainly be a dam’ distressful sight,” he said, meekly.

Later in the day he accosted the chief engineer with a confidential, “Here, let me tell you the old man’s latest.”

Mr. Solomon Rout (frequently alluded to as Long Sol, Old Sol, or Father Rout), from finding himself almost invariably the tallest man on board every ship he joined, had acquired the habit of a stooping, leisurely condescension. His hair was scant and sandy, his flat cheeks were pale, his bony wrists and long scholarly hands were pale, too, as though he had lived all his life in the shade.

He smiled from on high at Jukes, and went on smoking and glancing about quietly, in the manner of a kind uncle lending an ear to the tale of an excited schoolboy. Then, greatly amused but impassive, he asked:

“And did you throw up the billet?”

“No,” cried Jukes, raising a weary, discouraged voice above the harsh buzz of the Nan-Shan’s friction winches. All of them were hard at work, snatching slings of cargo, high up, to the end of long derricks, only, as it seemed, to let them rip down recklessly by the run. The cargo chains groaned in the gins, clinked on coamings, rattled over the side; and the whole ship quivered, with her long gray flanks smoking in wreaths of steam. “No,” cried Jukes, “I didn’t. What’s the good? I might just as well fling my resignation at this bulkhead. I don’t believe you can make a man like that understand anything. He simply knocks me over.”

At that moment Captain MacWhirr, back from the shore, crossed the deck, umbrella in hand, escorted by a mournful, self-possessed Chinaman, walking behind in paper-soled silk shoes, and who also carried an umbrella.

The master of the Nan-Shan, speaking just audibly and gazing at his boots as his manner was, remarked that it would be necessary to call at Fu-chau this trip, and desired Mr. Rout to have steam up to-morrow afternoon at one o’clock sharp. He pushed back his hat to wipe his forehead, observing at the same time that he hated going ashore anyhow; while overtopping him Mr. Rout, without deigning a word, smoked austere, nursing his right elbow in the palm of his left hand. Then Jukes was directed in the same subdued voice to keep the forward ‘tween-deck clear of cargo. Two hundred coolies were going to be put down there. The Bun Hin Company were sending that lot home. Twenty-five bags of rice would be coming off in a sampan directly, for stores. All seven-years’-men they were, said Captain MacWhirr, with a camphor-wood chest to every man. The carpenter should be set to work nailing three-inch battens along the deck below, fore and aft, to keep these boxes from shifting in a sea-way. Jukes had better look to it at once. “D’ye hear, Jukes?” This chinaman here was coming with the ship as far as Fu-chau — a sort of interpreter he would be. Bun Hin’s clerk he was, and wanted to have a look at the space. Jukes had better take him forward. “D’ye hear, Jukes?”

Jukes took care to punctuate these instructions in proper places with the obligatory “Yes, sir,” ejaculated without enthusiasm. His brusque “Come along, John; make look see” set the Chinaman in motion at his heels.

“Wanchee look see, all same look see can do,” said Jukes, who having no talent for foreign languages mangled the very pidgin-English cruelly. He pointed at the open hatch. “Catchee number one piecie place to sleep in. Eh?”

He was gruff, as became his racial superiority, but not unfriendly. The Chinaman, gazing sad and speechless into the darkness of the hatchway, seemed to stand at the head of a yawning grave.

“No catchee rain down there — savee?” pointed out Jukes. “Suppose all’ee same fine weather, one piecie coolie-man come topside,” he pursued, warming up imaginatively. “Make so — Phooooo!” He expanded his chest and blew out his cheeks. “Savee, John? Breathe — fresh air. Good. Eh? Washee him piecie pants, chow-chow top-side — see, John?”

With his mouth and hands he made exuberant motions of eating rice and washing clothes; and the Chinaman, who concealed his distrust of this pantomime under a collected demeanour tinged by a gentle and refined melancholy, glanced out of his almond eyes from Jukes to the hatch and back again. "Velly good," he murmured, in a disconsolate undertone, and hastened smoothly along the decks, dodging obstacles in his course. He disappeared, ducking low under a sling of ten dirty gunny-bags full of some costly merchandise and exhaling a repulsive smell.

Captain MacWhirr meantime had gone on the bridge, and into the chart-room, where a letter, commenced two days before, awaited termination. These long letters began with the words, "My darling wife," and the steward, between the scrubbing of the floors and the dusting of chronometer-boxes, snatched at every opportunity to read them. They interested him much more than they possibly could the woman for whose eye they were intended; and this for the reason that they related in minute detail each successive trip of the Nan-Shan.

Her master, faithful to facts, which alone his consciousness reflected, would set them down with painstaking care upon many pages. The house in a northern suburb to which these pages were addressed had a bit of garden before the bow-windows, a deep porch of good appearance, coloured glass with imitation lead frame in the front door. He paid five-and-forty pounds a year for it, and did not think the rent too high, because Mrs. MacWhirr (a pretentious person with a scraggy neck and a disdainful manner) was admittedly ladylike, and in the neighbourhood considered as "quite superior." The only secret of her life was her abject terror of the time when her husband would come home to stay for good. Under the same roof there dwelt also a daughter called Lydia and a son, Tom. These two were but slightly acquainted with their father. Mainly, they knew him as a rare but privileged visitor, who of an evening smoked his pipe in the dining-room and slept in the house. The lanky girl, upon the whole, was rather ashamed of him; the boy was frankly and utterly indifferent in a straightforward, delightful, unaffected way manly boys have.

And Captain MacWhirr wrote home from the coast of China twelve times every year, desiring quaintly to be "remembered to the children," and subscribing himself "your loving husband," as calmly as if the words so long used by so many men were, apart from their shape, worn-out things, and of a faded meaning.

The China seas north and south are narrow seas. They are seas full of every-day, eloquent facts, such as islands, sand-banks, reefs, swift and changeable currents — tangled facts that nevertheless speak to a seaman in clear and definite language. Their speech appealed to Captain MacWhirr's sense of realities so forcibly that he had given up his state-room below and practically lived all his days on the bridge of his ship, often having his meals sent up, and sleeping at night in the chart-room. And he indited there his home letters. Each of them, without exception, contained the phrase, "The weather has been very fine this trip," or some other form of a statement to that effect. And this statement, too, in its wonderful persistence, was of the same perfect accuracy as all the others they contained.

Mr. Rout likewise wrote letters; only no one on board knew how chatty he could be pen in hand, because the chief engineer had enough imagination to keep his desk locked. His wife relished his style greatly. They were a childless couple, and Mrs. Rout, a big, high-bosomed, jolly woman of forty, shared with Mr. Rout's toothless and venerable mother a little cottage near Teddington. She would run over her correspondence, at breakfast, with lively eyes, and scream out interesting passages in a joyous voice at the deaf old lady, prefacing each extract by the warning shout, "Solomon says!" She had the trick of firing off Solomon's utterances also upon strangers, astonishing them easily by the unfamiliar text and the unexpectedly jocular vein of these quotations. On the day the new curate called for the first time at the cottage, she found occasion to remark, "As Solomon says: 'the engineers that go down to the sea in ships behold the wonders of sailor nature';" when a change in the visitor's countenance made her stop and stare.

"Solomon. . . . Oh! . . . Mrs. Rout," stuttered the young man, very red in the face, "I must say . . . I don't. . . ."

"He's my husband," she announced in a great shout, throwing herself back in the chair. Perceiving the joke, she laughed immoderately with a handkerchief to her eyes, while he sat wearing a forced smile, and, from his inexperience of jolly women, fully persuaded that she must be deplorably insane. They were excellent friends afterwards; for, absolving her from irreverent intention, he came to think she was a very worthy person indeed; and he learned in time to receive without flinching other scraps of Solomon's wisdom.

"For my part," Solomon was reported by his wife to have said once, "give me the dullest ass for a skipper before a rogue. There is a way to take a fool; but a rogue is smart and slippery." This was an airy generalization drawn from the particular case of Captain MacWhirr's honesty, which, in itself, had the heavy obviousness of a lump of clay. On the other hand, Mr. Jukes, unable to generalize, unmarried, and unengaged, was in the habit of opening his heart after another fashion to an old chum and former shipmate, actually serving as second officer on board an Atlantic liner.

First of all he would insist upon the advantages of the Eastern trade, hinting at its superiority to the Western ocean service. He extolled the sky, the seas, the ships, and the easy life of the Far East. The Nan-Shan, he affirmed, was second to none as a sea-boat.

"We have no brass-bound uniforms, but then we are like brothers here," he wrote. "We all mess together and live like fighting-cocks. . . . All the chaps of the black-squad are as decent as they make that kind, and old Sol, the Chief, is a dry stick. We are good friends. As to our old man, you could not find a quieter skipper. Sometimes you would think he hadn't sense enough to see anything wrong. And yet it isn't that. Can't be. He has been in command for a good few years now. He doesn't do anything actually foolish, and gets his ship along all right without worrying anybody. I believe he hasn't brains enough to enjoy kicking up a row. I don't take advantage of him. I would scorn it. Outside the routine of duty he doesn't seem to understand more than half of what

you tell him. We get a laugh out of this at times; but it is dull, too, to be with a man like this — in the long-run. Old Sol says he hasn't much conversation. Conversation! O Lord! He never talks. The other day I had been yarning under the bridge with one of the engineers, and he must have heard us. When I came up to take my watch, he steps out of the chart-room and has a good look all round, peeps over at the sidelights, glances at the compass, squints upward at the stars. That's his regular performance. By-and-by he says: 'Was that you talking just now in the port alleyway?' 'Yes, sir.' 'With the third engineer?' 'Yes, sir.' He walks off to starboard, and sits under the dodger on a little campstool of his, and for half an hour perhaps he makes no sound, except that I heard him sneeze once. Then after a while I hear him getting up over there, and he strolls across to port, where I was. 'I can't understand what you can find to talk about,' says he. 'Two solid hours. I am not blaming you. I see people ashore at it all day long, and then in the evening they sit down and keep at it over the drinks. Must be saying the same things over and over again. I can't understand.'

"Did you ever hear anything like that? And he was so patient about it. It made me quite sorry for him. But he is exasperating, too, sometimes. Of course one would not do anything to vex him even if it were worth while. But it isn't. He's so jolly innocent that if you were to put your thumb to your nose and wave your fingers at him he would only wonder gravely to himself what got into you. He told me once quite simply that he found it very difficult to make out what made people always act so queerly. He's too dense to trouble about, and that's the truth."

Thus wrote Mr. Jukes to his chum in the Western ocean trade, out of the fulness of his heart and the liveliness of his fancy.

He had expressed his honest opinion. It was not worthwhile trying to impress a man of that sort. If the world had been full of such men, life would have probably appeared to Jukes an unentertaining and unprofitable business. He was not alone in his opinion. The sea itself, as if sharing Mr. Jukes' good-natured forbearance, had never put itself out to startle the silent man, who seldom looked up, and wandered innocently over the waters with the only visible purpose of getting food, raiment, and house-room for three people ashore. Dirty weather he had known, of course. He had been made wet, uncomfortable, tired in the usual way, felt at the time and presently forgotten. So that upon the whole he had been justified in reporting fine weather at home. But he had never been given a glimpse of immeasurable strength and of immoderate wrath, the wrath that passes exhausted but never appeased — the wrath and fury of the passionate sea. He knew it existed, as we know that crime and abominations exist; he had heard of it as a peaceable citizen in a town hears of battles, famines, and floods, and yet knows nothing of what these things mean — though, indeed, he may have been mixed up in a street row, have gone without his dinner once, or been soaked to the skin in a shower. Captain MacWhirr had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of

perfidy, of violence, and of terror. There are on sea and land such men thus fortunate
— or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea.

Chapter 2

Observing the steady fall of the barometer, Captain MacWhirr thought, "There's some dirty weather knocking about." This is precisely what he thought. He had had an experience of moderately dirty weather — the term dirty as applied to the weather implying only moderate discomfort to the seaman. Had he been informed by an indisputable authority that the end of the world was to be finally accomplished by a catastrophic disturbance of the atmosphere, he would have assimilated the information under the simple idea of dirty weather, and no other, because he had no experience of cataclysms, and belief does not necessarily imply comprehension. The wisdom of his county had pronounced by means of an Act of Parliament that before he could be considered as fit to take charge of a ship he should be able to answer certain simple questions on the subject of circular storms such as hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons; and apparently he had answered them, since he was now in command of the Nan-Shan in the China seas during the season of typhoons. But if he had answered he remembered nothing of it. He was, however, conscious of being made uncomfortable by the clammy heat. He came out on the bridge, and found no relief to this oppression. The air seemed thick. He gasped like a fish, and began to believe himself greatly out of sorts.

The Nan-Shan was ploughing a vanishing furrow upon the circle of the sea that had the surface and the shimmer of an undulating piece of gray silk. The sun, pale and without rays, poured down leaden heat in a strangely indecisive light, and the Chinamen were lying prostrate about the decks. Their bloodless, pinched, yellow faces were like the faces of bilious invalids. Captain MacWhirr noticed two of them especially, stretched out on their backs below the bridge. As soon as they had closed their eyes they seemed dead. Three others, however, were quarrelling barbarously away forward; and one big fellow, half naked, with herculean shoulders, was hanging limply over a winch; another, sitting on the deck, his knees up and his head drooping sideways in a girlish attitude, was plaiting his pigtail with infinite languor depicted in his whole person and in the very movement of his fingers. The smoke struggled with difficulty out of the funnel, and instead of streaming away spread itself out like an infernal sort of cloud, smelling of sulphur and raining soot all over the decks.

"What the devil are you doing there, Mr. Jukes?" asked Captain MacWhirr.

This unusual form of address, though mumbled rather than spoken, caused the body of Mr. Jukes to start as though it had been prodded under the fifth rib. He had had a low bench brought on the bridge, and sitting on it, with a length of rope curled about his feet and a piece of canvas stretched over his knees, was pushing a sail-needle

vigorously. He looked up, and his surprise gave to his eyes an expression of innocence and candour.

“I am only roping some of that new set of bags we made last trip for whipping up coals,” he remonstrated, gently. “We shall want them for the next coaling, sir.”

“What became of the others?”

“Why, worn out of course, sir.”

Captain MacWhirr, after glaring down irresolutely at his chief mate, disclosed the gloomy and cynical conviction that more than half of them had been lost overboard, “if only the truth was known,” and retired to the other end of the bridge. Jukes, exasperated by this unprovoked attack, broke the needle at the second stitch, and dropping his work got up and cursed the heat in a violent undertone.

The propeller thumped, the three Chinamen forward had given up squabbling very suddenly, and the one who had been plaiting his tail clasped his legs and stared dejectedly over his knees. The lurid sunshine cast faint and sickly shadows. The swell ran higher and swifter every moment, and the ship lurched heavily in the smooth, deep hollows of the sea.

“I wonder where that beastly swell comes from,” said Jukes aloud, recovering himself after a stagger.

“North-east,” grunted the literal MacWhirr, from his side of the bridge. “There’s some dirty weather knocking about. Go and look at the glass.”

When Jukes came out of the chart-room, the cast of his countenance had changed to thoughtfulness and concern. He caught hold of the bridge-rail and stared ahead.

The temperature in the engine-room had gone up to a hundred and seventeen degrees. Irritated voices were ascending through the skylight and through the fiddle of the stokehold in a harsh and resonant uproar, mingled with angry clangs and scrapes of metal, as if men with limbs of iron and throats of bronze had been quarrelling down there. The second engineer was falling foul of the stokers for letting the steam go down. He was a man with arms like a blacksmith, and generally feared; but that afternoon the stokers were answering him back recklessly, and slammed the furnace doors with the fury of despair. Then the noise ceased suddenly, and the second engineer appeared, emerging out of the stokehold streaked with grime and soaking wet like a chimney-sweep coming out of a well. As soon as his head was clear of the fiddle he began to scold Jukes for not trimming properly the stokehold ventilators; and in answer Jukes made with his hands deprecatory soothing signs meaning: “No wind — can’t be helped — you can see for yourself.” But the other wouldn’t hear reason. His teeth flashed angrily in his dirty face. He didn’t mind, he said, the trouble of punching their blanked heads down there, blank his soul, but did the condemned sailors think you could keep steam up in the God-forsaken boilers simply by knocking the blanked stokers about? No, by George! You had to get some draught, too — may he be everlastingly blanked for a swab-headed deck-hand if you didn’t! And the chief, too, rampaging before the steam-gauge and carrying on like a lunatic up and down the engine-room ever since

noon. What did Jukes think he was stuck up there for, if he couldn't get one of his decayed, good-for-nothing deck-cripples to turn the ventilators to the wind?

The relations of the "engine-room" and the "deck" of the Nan-Shan were, as is known, of a brotherly nature; therefore Jukes leaned over and begged the other in a restrained tone not to make a disgusting ass of himself; the skipper was on the other side of the bridge. But the second declared mutinously that he didn't care a rap who was on the other side of the bridge, and Jukes, passing in a flash from lofty disapproval into a state of exaltation, invited him in unflattering terms to come up and twist the beastly things to please himself, and catch such wind as a donkey of his sort could find. The second rushed up to the fray. He flung himself at the port ventilator as though he meant to tear it out bodily and toss it overboard. All he did was to move the cowl round a few inches, with an enormous expenditure of force, and seemed spent in the effort. He leaned against the back of the wheelhouse, and Jukes walked up to him.

"Oh, Heavens!" ejaculated the engineer in a feeble voice. He lifted his eyes to the sky, and then let his glassy stare descend to meet the horizon that, tilting up to an angle of forty degrees, seemed to hang on a slant for a while and settled down slowly. "Heavens! Phew! What's up, anyhow?"

Jukes, straddling his long legs like a pair of compasses, put on an air of superiority. "We're going to catch it this time," he said. "The barometer is tumbling down like anything, Harry. And you trying to kick up that silly row. . . ."

The word "barometer" seemed to revive the second engineer's mad animosity. Collecting afresh all his energies, he directed Jukes in a low and brutal tone to shove the unmentionable instrument down his gory throat. Who cared for his crimson barometer? It was the steam — the steam — that was going down; and what between the firemen going faint and the chief going silly, it was worse than a dog's life for him; he didn't care a tinker's curse how soon the whole show was blown out of the water. He seemed on the point of having a cry, but after regaining his breath he muttered darkly, "I'll faint them," and dashed off. He stopped upon the fiddle long enough to shake his fist at the unnatural daylight, and dropped into the dark hole with a whoop.

When Jukes turned, his eyes fell upon the rounded back and the big red ears of Captain MacWhirr, who had come across. He did not look at his chief officer, but said at once, "That's a very violent man, that second engineer."

"Jolly good second, anyhow," grunted Jukes. "They can't keep up steam," he added, rapidly, and made a grab at the rail against the coming lurch.

Captain MacWhirr, unprepared, took a run and brought himself up with a jerk by an awning stanchion.

"A profane man," he said, obstinately. "If this goes on, I'll have to get rid of him the first chance."

"It's the heat," said Jukes. "The weather's awful. It would make a saint swear. Even up here I feel exactly as if I had my head tied up in a woollen blanket."

Captain MacWhirr looked up. "D'ye mean to say, Mr. Jukes, you ever had your head tied up in a blanket? What was that for?"

"It's a manner of speaking, sir," said Jukes, stolidly.

"Some of you fellows do go on! What's that about saints swearing? I wish you wouldn't talk so wild. What sort of saint would that be that would swear? No more saint than yourself, I expect. And what's a blanket got to do with it — or the weather either. . . . The heat does not make me swear — does it? It's filthy bad temper. That's what it is. And what's the good of your talking like this?"

Thus Captain MacWhirr expostulated against the use of images in speech, and at the end electrified Jukes by a contemptuous snort, followed by words of passion and resentment: "Damme! I'll fire him out of the ship if he don't look out."

And Jukes, incorrigible, thought: "Goodness me! Somebody's put a new inside to my old man. Here's temper, if you like. Of course it's the weather; what else? It would make an angel quarrelsome — let alone a saint."

All the Chinamen on deck appeared at their last gasp.

At its setting the sun had a diminished diameter and an expiring brown, rayless glow, as if millions of centuries elapsing since the morning had brought it near its end. A dense bank of cloud became visible to the northward; it had a sinister dark olive tint, and lay low and motionless upon the sea, resembling a solid obstacle in the path of the ship. She went floundering towards it like an exhausted creature driven to its death. The coppery twilight retired slowly, and the darkness brought out overhead a swarm of unsteady, big stars, that, as if blown upon, flickered exceedingly and seemed to hang very near the earth. At eight o'clock Jukes went into the chart-room to write up the ship's log.

He copies neatly out of the rough-book the number of miles, the course of the ship, and in the column for "wind" scrawled the word "calm" from top to bottom of the eight hours since noon. He was exasperated by the continuous, monotonous rolling of the ship. The heavy inkstand would slide away in a manner that suggested perverse intelligence in dodging the pen. Having written in the large space under the head of "Remarks" "Heat very oppressive," he stuck the end of the penholder in his teeth, pipe fashion, and mopped his face carefully.

"Ship rolling heavily in a high cross swell," he began again, and commented to himself, "Heavily is no word for it." Then he wrote: "Sunset threatening, with a low bank of clouds to N. and E. Sky clear overhead."

Sprawling over the table with arrested pen, he glanced out of the door, and in that frame of his vision he saw all the stars flying upwards between the teakwood jambs on a black sky. The whole lot took flight together and disappeared, leaving only a blackness flecked with white flashes, for the sea was as black as the sky and speckled with foam afar. The stars that had flown to the roll came back on the return swing of the ship, rushing downwards in their glittering multitude, not of fiery points, but enlarged to tiny discs brilliant with a clear wet sheen.

Jukes watched the flying big stars for a moment, and then wrote: "8 P.M. Swell increasing. Ship labouring and taking water on her decks. Battened down the coolies for the night. Barometer still falling." He paused, and thought to himself, "Perhaps nothing

whatever'll come of it." And then he closed resolutely his entries: "Every appearance of a typhoon coming on."

On going out he had to stand aside, and Captain MacWhirr strode over the doorstep without saying a word or making a sign.

"Shut the door, Mr. Jukes, will you?" he cried from within.

Jukes turned back to do so, muttering ironically: "Afraid to catch cold, I suppose." It was his watch below, but he yearned for communion with his kind; and he remarked cheerily to the second mate: "Doesn't look so bad, after all — does it?"

The second mate was marching to and fro on the bridge, tripping down with small steps one moment, and the next climbing with difficulty the shifting slope of the deck. At the sound of Jukes' voice he stood still, facing forward, but made no reply.

"Hallo! That's a heavy one," said Jukes, swaying to meet the long roll till his lowered hand touched the planks. This time the second mate made in his throat a noise of an unfriendly nature.

He was an oldish, shabby little fellow, with bad teeth and no hair on his face. He had been shipped in a hurry in Shanghai, that trip when the second officer brought from home had delayed the ship three hours in port by contriving (in some manner Captain MacWhirr could never understand) to fall overboard into an empty coal-lighter lying alongside, and had to be sent ashore to the hospital with concussion of the brain and a broken limb or two.

Jukes was not discouraged by the unsympathetic sound. "The Chinamen must be having a lovely time of it down there," he said. "It's lucky for them the old girl has the easiest roll of any ship I've ever been in. There now! This one wasn't so bad."

"You wait," snarled the second mate.

With his sharp nose, red at the tip, and his thin pinched lips, he always looked as though he were raging inwardly; and he was concise in his speech to the point of rudeness. All his time off duty he spent in his cabin with the door shut, keeping so still in there that he was supposed to fall asleep as soon as he had disappeared; but the man who came in to wake him for his watch on deck would invariably find him with his eyes wide open, flat on his back in the bunk, and glaring irritably from a soiled pillow. He never wrote any letters, did not seem to hope for news from anywhere; and though he had been heard once to mention West Hartlepool, it was with extreme bitterness, and only in connection with the extortionate charges of a boarding-house. He was one of those men who are picked up at need in the ports of the world. They are competent enough, appear hopelessly hard up, show no evidence of any sort of vice, and carry about them all the signs of manifest failure. They come aboard on an emergency, care for no ship afloat, live in their own atmosphere of casual connection amongst their shipmates who know nothing of them, and make up their minds to leave at inconvenient times. They clear out with no words of leavetaking in some God-forsaken port other men would fear to be stranded in, and go ashore in company of a shabby sea-chest, corded like a treasure-box, and with an air of shaking the ship's dust off their feet.

“You wait,” he repeated, balanced in great swings with his back to Jukes, motionless and implacable.

“Do you mean to say we are going to catch it hot?” asked Jukes with boyish interest.

“Say? . . . I say nothing. You don’t catch me,” snapped the little second mate, with a mixture of pride, scorn, and cunning, as if Jukes’ question had been a trap cleverly detected. “Oh, no! None of you here shall make a fool of me if I know it,” he mumbled to himself.

Jukes reflected rapidly that this second mate was a mean little beast, and in his heart he wished poor Jack Allen had never smashed himself up in the coal-lighter. The far-off blackness ahead of the ship was like another night seen through the starry night of the earth — the starless night of the immensities beyond the created universe, revealed in its appalling stillness through a low fissure in the glittering sphere of which the earth is the kernel.

“Whatever there might be about,” said Jukes, “we are steaming straight into it.”

“You’ve said it,” caught up the second mate, always with his back to Jukes. “You’ve said it, mind — not I.”

“Oh, go to Jericho!” said Jukes, frankly; and the other emitted a triumphant little chuckle.

“You’ve said it,” he repeated.

“And what of that?”

“I’ve known some real good men get into trouble with their skippers for saying a dam’ sight less,” answered the second mate feverishly. “Oh, no! You don’t catch me.”

“You seem deucedly anxious not to give yourself away,” said Jukes, completely soured by such absurdity. “I wouldn’t be afraid to say what I think.”

“Aye, to me! That’s no great trick. I am nobody, and well I know it.”

The ship, after a pause of comparative steadiness, started upon a series of rolls, one worse than the other, and for a time Jukes, preserving his equilibrium, was too busy to open his mouth. As soon as the violent swinging had quieted down somewhat, he said: “This is a bit too much of a good thing. Whether anything is coming or not I think she ought to be put head on to that swell. The old man is just gone in to lie down. Hang me if I don’t speak to him.”

But when he opened the door of the chart-room he saw his captain reading a book. Captain MacWhirr was not lying down: he was standing up with one hand grasping the edge of the bookshelf and the other holding open before his face a thick volume. The lamp wriggled in the gimbals, the loosened books toppled from side to side on the shelf, the long barometer swung in jerky circles, the table altered its slant every moment. In the midst of all this stir and movement Captain MacWhirr, holding on, showed his eyes above the upper edge, and asked, “What’s the matter?”

“Swell getting worse, sir.”

“Noticed that in here,” muttered Captain MacWhirr. “Anything wrong?”

Jukes, inwardly disconcerted by the seriousness of the eyes looking at him over the top of the book, produced an embarrassed grin.

"Rolling like old boots," he said, sheepishly.

"Aye! Very heavy — very heavy. What do you want?"

At this Jukes lost his footing and began to flounder. "I was thinking of our passengers," he said, in the manner of a man clutching at a straw.

"Passengers?" wondered the Captain, gravely. "What passengers?"

"Why, the Chinamen, sir," explained Jukes, very sick of this conversation.

"The Chinamen! Why don't you speak plainly? Couldn't tell what you meant. Never heard a lot of coolies spoken of as passengers before. Passengers, indeed! What's come to you?"

Captain MacWhirr, closing the book on his forefinger, lowered his arm and looked completely mystified. "Why are you thinking of the Chinamen, Mr. Jukes?" he inquired.

Jukes took a plunge, like a man driven to it. "She's rolling her decks full of water, sir. Thought you might put her head on perhaps — for a while. Till this goes down a bit — very soon, I dare say. Head to the eastward. I never knew a ship roll like this."

He held on in the doorway, and Captain MacWhirr, feeling his grip on the shelf inadequate, made up his mind to let go in a hurry, and fell heavily on the couch.

"Head to the eastward?" he said, struggling to sit up. "That's more than four points off her course."

"Yes, sir. Fifty degrees. . . . Would just bring her head far enough round to meet this. . . ."

Captain MacWhirr was now sitting up. He had not dropped the book, and he had not lost his place.

"To the eastward?" he repeated, with dawning astonishment. "To the . . . Where do you think we are bound to? You want me to haul a full-powered steamship four points off her course to make the Chinamen comfortable! Now, I've heard more than enough of mad things done in the world — but this. . . . If I didn't know you, Jukes, I would think you were in liquor. Steer four points off. . . . And what afterwards? Steer four points over the other way, I suppose, to make the course good. What put it into your head that I would start to tack a steamer as if she were a sailing-ship?"

"Jolly good thing she isn't," threw in Jukes, with bitter readiness. "She would have rolled every blessed stick out of her this afternoon."

"Aye! And you just would have had to stand and see them go," said Captain MacWhirr, showing a certain animation. "It's a dead calm, isn't it?"

"It is, sir. But there's something out of the common coming, for sure."

"Maybe. I suppose you have a notion I should be getting out of the way of that dirt," said Captain MacWhirr, speaking with the utmost simplicity of manner and tone, and fixing the oilcloth on the floor with a heavy stare. Thus he noticed neither Jukes' discomfiture nor the mixture of vexation and astonished respect on his face.

"Now, here's this book," he continued with deliberation, slapping his thigh with the closed volume. "I've been reading the chapter on the storms there."

This was true. He had been reading the chapter on the storms. When he had entered the chart-room, it was with no intention of taking the book down. Some influence in

the air — the same influence, probably, that caused the steward to bring without orders the Captain's sea-boots and oilskin coat up to the chart-room — had as it were guided his hand to the shelf; and without taking the time to sit down he had waded with a conscious effort into the terminology of the subject. He lost himself amongst advancing semi-circles, left- and right-hand quadrants, the curves of the tracks, the probable bearing of the centre, the shifts of wind and the readings of barometer. He tried to bring all these things into a definite relation to himself, and ended by becoming contemptuously angry with such a lot of words, and with so much advice, all head-work and supposition, without a glimmer of certitude.

"It's the damnedest thing, Jukes," he said. "If a fellow was to believe all that's in there, he would be running most of his time all over the sea trying to get behind the weather."

Again he slapped his leg with the book; and Jukes opened his mouth, but said nothing.

"Running to get behind the weather! Do you understand that, Mr. Jukes? It's the maddest thing!" ejaculated Captain MacWhirr, with pauses, gazing at the floor profoundly. "You would think an old woman had been writing this. It passes me. If that thing means anything useful, then it means that I should at once alter the course away, away to the devil somewhere, and come booming down on Fu-chau from the northward at the tail of this dirty weather that's supposed to be knocking about in our way. From the north! Do you understand, Mr. Jukes? Three hundred extra miles to the distance, and a pretty coal bill to show. I couldn't bring myself to do that if every word in there was gospel truth, Mr. Jukes. Don't you expect me. . . ."

And Jukes, silent, marvelled at this display of feeling and loquacity.

"But the truth is that you don't know if the fellow is right, anyhow. How can you tell what a gale is made of till you get it? He isn't aboard here, is he? Very well. Here he says that the centre of them things bears eight points off the wind; but we haven't got any wind, for all the barometer falling. Where's his centre now?"

"We will get the wind presently," mumbled Jukes.

"Let it come, then," said Captain MacWhirr, with dignified indignation. "It's only to let you see, Mr. Jukes, that you don't find everything in books. All these rules for dodging breezes and circumventing the winds of heaven, Mr. Jukes, seem to me the maddest thing, when you come to look at it sensibly."

He raised his eyes, saw Jukes gazing at him dubiously, and tried to illustrate his meaning.

"About as queer as your extraordinary notion of dodging the ship head to sea, for I don't know how long, to make the Chinamen comfortable; whereas all we've got to do is to take them to Fu-chau, being timed to get there before noon on Friday. If the weather delays me — very well. There's your log-book to talk straight about the weather. But suppose I went swinging off my course and came in two days late, and they asked me: 'Where have you been all that time, Captain?' What could I say to that? 'Went around to dodge the bad weather,' I would say. 'It must've been dam'

bad,' they would say. 'Don't know,' I would have to say; 'I've dodged clear of it.' See that, Jukes? I have been thinking it all out this afternoon."

He looked up again in his unseeing, unimaginative way. No one had ever heard him say so much at one time. Jukes, with his arms open in the doorway, was like a man invited to behold a miracle. Unbounded wonder was the intellectual meaning of his eye, while incredulity was seated in his whole countenance.

"A gale is a gale, Mr. Jukes," resumed the Captain, "and a full-powered steam-ship has got to face it. There's just so much dirty weather knocking about the world, and the proper thing is to go through it with none of what old Captain Wilson of the *Melita* calls 'storm strategy.' The other day ashore I heard him hold forth about it to a lot of shipmasters who came in and sat at a table next to mine. It seemed to me the greatest nonsense. He was telling them how he outmanoeuvred, I think he said, a terrific gale, so that it never came nearer than fifty miles to him. A neat piece of head-work he called it. How he knew there was a terrific gale fifty miles off beats me altogether. It was like listening to a crazy man. I would have thought Captain Wilson was old enough to know better."

Captain MacWhirr ceased for a moment, then said, "It's your watch below, Mr. Jukes?"

Jukes came to himself with a start. "Yes, sir."

"Leave orders to call me at the slightest change," said the Captain. He reached up to put the book away, and tucked his legs upon the couch. "Shut the door so that it don't fly open, will you? I can't stand a door banging. They've put a lot of rubbishy locks into this ship, I must say."

Captain MacWhirr closed his eyes.

He did so to rest himself. He was tired, and he experienced that state of mental vacuity which comes at the end of an exhaustive discussion that has liberated some belief matured in the course of meditative years. He had indeed been making his confession of faith, had he only known it; and its effect was to make Jukes, on the other side of the door, stand scratching his head for a good while.

Captain MacWhirr opened his eyes.

He thought he must have been asleep. What was that loud noise? Wind? Why had he not been called? The lamp wriggled in its gimbals, the barometer swung in circles, the table altered its slant every moment; a pair of limp sea-boots with collapsed tops went sliding past the couch. He put out his hand instantly, and captured one.

Jukes' face appeared in a crack of the door: only his face, very red, with staring eyes. The flame of the lamp leaped, a piece of paper flew up, a rush of air enveloped Captain MacWhirr. Beginning to draw on the boot, he directed an expectant gaze at Jukes' swollen, excited features.

"Came on like this," shouted Jukes, "five minutes ago . . . all of a sudden."

The head disappeared with a bang, and a heavy splash and patter of drops swept past the closed door as if a pailful of melted lead had been flung against the house. A whistling could be heard now upon the deep vibrating noise outside. The stuffy

chart-room seemed as full of draughts as a shed. Captain MacWhirr collared the other sea-boot on its violent passage along the floor. He was not flustered, but he could not find at once the opening for inserting his foot. The shoes he had flung off were scurrying from end to end of the cabin, gambolling playfully over each other like puppies. As soon as he stood up he kicked at them viciously, but without effect.

He threw himself into the attitude of a lunging fencer, to reach after his oilskin coat; and afterwards he staggered all over the confined space while he jerked himself into it. Very grave, straddling his legs far apart, and stretching his neck, he started to tie deliberately the strings of his sou'-wester under his chin, with thick fingers that trembled slightly. He went through all the movements of a woman putting on her bonnet before a glass, with a strained, listening attention, as though he had expected every moment to hear the shout of his name in the confused clamour that had suddenly beset his ship. Its increase filled his ears while he was getting ready to go out and confront whatever it might mean. It was tumultuous and very loud — made up of the rush of the wind, the crashes of the sea, with that prolonged deep vibration of the air, like the roll of an immense and remote drum beating the charge of the gale.

He stood for a moment in the light of the lamp, thick, clumsy, shapeless in his panoply of combat, vigilant and red-faced.

“There’s a lot of weight in this,” he muttered.

As soon as he attempted to open the door the wind caught it. Clinging to the handle, he was dragged out over the doorstep, and at once found himself engaged with the wind in a sort of personal scuffle whose object was the shutting of that door. At the last moment a tongue of air scurried in and licked out the flame of the lamp.

Ahead of the ship he perceived a great darkness lying upon a multitude of white flashes; on the starboard beam a few amazing stars drooped, dim and fitful, above an immense waste of broken seas, as if seen through a mad drift of smoke.

On the bridge a knot of men, indistinct and toiling, were making great efforts in the light of the wheelhouse windows that shone mistily on their heads and backs. Suddenly darkness closed upon one pane, then on another. The voices of the lost group reached him after the manner of men’s voices in a gale, in shreds and fragments of forlorn shouting snatched past the ear. All at once Jukes appeared at his side, yelling, with his head down.

“Watch — put in — wheelhouse shutters — glass — afraid — blow in.”

Jukes heard his commander upbraiding.

“This — come — anything — warning — call me.”

He tried to explain, with the uproar pressing on his lips.

“Light air — remained — bridge — sudden — north-east — could turn — thought — you — sure — hear.”

They had gained the shelter of the weather-cloth, and could converse with raised voices, as people quarrel.

“I got the hands along to cover up all the ventilators. Good job I had remained on deck. I didn’t think you would be asleep, and so . . . What did you say, sir? What?”

“Nothing,” cried Captain MacWhirr. “I said — all right.”

“By all the powers! We’ve got it this time,” observed Jukes in a howl.

“You haven’t altered her course?” inquired Captain MacWhirr, straining his voice.

“No, sir. Certainly not. Wind came out right ahead. And here comes the head sea.”

A plunge of the ship ended in a shock as if she had landed her forefoot upon something solid. After a moment of stillness a lofty flight of sprays drove hard with the wind upon their faces.

“Keep her at it as long as we can,” shouted Captain MacWhirr.

Before Jukes had squeezed the salt water out of his eyes all the stars had disappeared.

Chapter 3

Jukes was as ready a man as any half-dozen young mates that may be caught by casting a net upon the waters; and though he had been somewhat taken aback by the startling viciousness of the first squall, he had pulled himself together on the instant, had called out the hands and had rushed them along to secure such openings about the deck as had not been already battened down earlier in the evening. Shouting in his fresh, stentorian voice, "Jump, boys, and bear a hand!" he led in the work, telling himself the while that he had "just expected this."

But at the same time he was growing aware that this was rather more than he had expected. From the first stir of the air felt on his cheek the gale seemed to take upon itself the accumulated impetus of an avalanche. Heavy sprays enveloped the Nan-Shan from stem to stern, and instantly in the midst of her regular rolling she began to jerk and plunge as though she had gone mad with fright.

Jukes thought, "This is no joke." While he was exchanging explanatory yells with his captain, a sudden lowering of the darkness came upon the night, falling before their vision like something palpable. It was as if the masked lights of the world had been turned down. Jukes was uncritically glad to have his captain at hand. It relieved him as though that man had, by simply coming on deck, taken most of the gale's weight upon his shoulders. Such is the prestige, the privilege, and the burden of command.

Captain MacWhirr could expect no relief of that sort from any one on earth. Such is the loneliness of command. He was trying to see, with that watchful manner of a seaman who stares into the wind's eye as if into the eye of an adversary, to penetrate the hidden intention and guess the aim and force of the thrust. The strong wind swept at him out of a vast obscurity; he felt under his feet the uneasiness of his ship, and he could not even discern the shadow of her shape. He wished it were not so; and very still he waited, feeling stricken by a blind man's helplessness.

To be silent was natural to him, dark or shine. Jukes, at his elbow, made himself heard yelling cheerily in the gusts, "We must have got the worst of it at once, sir." A faint burst of lightning quivered all round, as if flashed into a cavern — into a black and secret chamber of the sea, with a floor of foaming crests.

It unveiled for a sinister, fluttering moment a ragged mass of clouds hanging low, the lurch of the long outlines of the ship, the black figures of men caught on the bridge, heads forward, as if petrified in the act of butting. The darkness palpitated down upon all this, and then the real thing came at last.

It was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath. It seemed to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion and a rush

of great waters, as if an immense dam had been blown up to windward. In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it were — without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him.

Jukes was driven away from his commander. He fancied himself whirled a great distance through the air. Everything disappeared — even, for a moment, his power of thinking; but his hand had found one of the rail-stanchions. His distress was by no means alleviated by an inclination to disbelieve the reality of this experience. Though young, he had seen some bad weather, and had never doubted his ability to imagine the worst; but this was so much beyond his powers of fancy that it appeared incompatible with the existence of any ship whatever. He would have been incredulous about himself in the same way, perhaps, had he not been so harassed by the necessity of exerting a wrestling effort against a force trying to tear him away from his hold. Moreover, the conviction of not being utterly destroyed returned to him through the sensations of being half-drowned, bestially shaken, and partly choked.

It seemed to him he remained there precariously alone with the stanchion for a long, long time. The rain poured on him, flowed, drove in sheets. He breathed in gasps; and sometimes the water he swallowed was fresh and sometimes it was salt. For the most part he kept his eyes shut tight, as if suspecting his sight might be destroyed in the immense flurry of the elements. When he ventured to blink hastily, he derived some moral support from the green gleam of the starboard light shining feebly upon the flight of rain and sprays. He was actually looking at it when its ray fell upon the uprearing sea which put it out. He saw the head of the wave topple over, adding the mite of its crash to the tremendous uproar raging around him, and almost at the same instant the stanchion was wrenched away from his embracing arms. After a crushing thump on his back he found himself suddenly afloat and borne upwards. His first irresistible notion was that the whole China Sea had climbed on the bridge. Then, more sanely, he concluded himself gone overboard. All the time he was being tossed, flung, and rolled in great volumes of water, he kept on repeating mentally, with the utmost precipitation, the words: "My God! My God! My God! My God!"

All at once, in a revolt of misery and despair, he formed the crazy resolution to get out of that. And he began to thresh about with his arms and legs. But as soon as he commenced his wretched struggles he discovered that he had become somehow mixed up with a face, an oilskin coat, somebody's boots. He clawed ferociously all these things in turn, lost them, found them again, lost them once more, and finally was himself caught in the firm clasp of a pair of stout arms. He returned the embrace closely round a thick solid body. He had found his captain.

They tumbled over and over, tightening their hug. Suddenly the water let them down with a brutal bang; and, stranded against the side of the wheelhouse, out of

breath and bruised, they were left to stagger up in the wind and hold on where they could.

Jukes came out of it rather horrified, as though he had escaped some unparalleled outrage directed at his feelings. It weakened his faith in himself. He started shouting aimlessly to the man he could feel near him in that fiendish blackness, "Is it you, sir? Is it you, sir?" till his temples seemed ready to burst. And he heard in answer a voice, as if crying far away, as if screaming to him fretfully from a very great distance, the one word "Yes!" Other seas swept again over the bridge. He received them defencelessly right over his bare head, with both his hands engaged in holding.

The motion of the ship was extravagant. Her lurches had an appalling helplessness: she pitched as if taking a header into a void, and seemed to find a wall to hit every time. When she rolled she fell on her side headlong, and she would be righted back by such a demolishing blow that Jukes felt her reeling as a clubbed man reels before he collapses. The gale howled and scuffled about gigantically in the darkness, as though the entire world were one black gully. At certain moments the air streamed against the ship as if sucked through a tunnel with a concentrated solid force of impact that seemed to lift her clean out of the water and keep her up for an instant with only a quiver running through her from end to end. And then she would begin her tumbling again as if dropped back into a boiling cauldron. Jukes tried hard to compose his mind and judge things coolly.

The sea, flattened down in the heavier gusts, would uprise and overwhelm both ends of the Nan-Shan in snowy rushes of foam, expanding wide, beyond both rails, into the night. And on this dazzling sheet, spread under the blackness of the clouds and emitting a bluish glow, Captain MacWhirr could catch a desolate glimpse of a few tiny specks black as ebony, the tops of the hatches, the battened companions, the heads of the covered winches, the foot of a mast. This was all he could see of his ship. Her middle structure, covered by the bridge which bore him, his mate, the closed wheelhouse where a man was steering shut up with the fear of being swept overboard together with the whole thing in one great crash — her middle structure was like a half-tide rock awash upon a coast. It was like an outlying rock with the water boiling up, streaming over, pouring off, beating round — like a rock in the surf to which shipwrecked people cling before they let go — only it rose, it sank, it rolled continuously, without respite and rest, like a rock that should have miraculously struck adrift from a coast and gone wallowing upon the sea.

The Nan-Shan was being looted by the storm with a senseless, destructive fury: trysails torn out of the extra gaskets, double-lashed awnings blown away, bridge swept clean, weather-cloths burst, rails twisted, light-screens smashed — and two of the boats had gone already. They had gone unheard and unseen, melting, as it were, in the shock and smother of the wave. It was only later, when upon the white flash of another high sea hurling itself amidships, Jukes had a vision of two pairs of davits leaping black and empty out of the solid blackness, with one overhauled fall flying and an iron-bound

block capering in the air, that he became aware of what had happened within about three yards of his back.

He poked his head forward, groping for the ear of his commander. His lips touched it — big, fleshy, very wet. He cried in an agitated tone, "Our boats are going now, sir."

And again he heard that voice, forced and ringing feebly, but with a penetrating effect of quietness in the enormous discord of noises, as if sent out from some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes of the gale; again he heard a man's voice — the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution and purpose, that shall be pronouncing confident words on the last day, when heavens fall, and justice is done — again he heard it, and it was crying to him, as if from very, very far — "All right."

He thought he had not managed to make himself understood. "Our boats — I say boats — the boats, sir! Two gone!"

The same voice, within a foot of him and yet so remote, yelled sensibly, "Can't be helped."

Captain MacWhirr had never turned his face, but Jukes caught some more words on the wind.

"What can — expect — when hammering through — such — Bound to leave — something behind — stands to reason."

Watchfully Jukes listened for more. No more came. This was all Captain MacWhirr had to say; and Jukes could picture to himself rather than see the broad squat back before him. An impenetrable obscurity pressed down upon the ghostly glimmers of the sea. A dull conviction seized upon Jukes that there was nothing to be done.

If the steering-gear did not give way, if the immense volumes of water did not burst the deck in or smash one of the hatches, if the engines did not give up, if way could be kept on the ship against this terrific wind, and she did not bury herself in one of these awful seas, of whose white crests alone, topping high above her bows, he could now and then get a sickening glimpse — then there was a chance of her coming out of it. Something within him seemed to turn over, bringing uppermost the feeling that the Nan-Shan was lost.

"She's done for," he said to himself, with a surprising mental agitation, as though he had discovered an unexpected meaning in this thought. One of these things was bound to happen. Nothing could be prevented now, and nothing could be remedied. The men on board did not count, and the ship could not last. This weather was too impossible.

Jukes felt an arm thrown heavily over his shoulders; and to this overture he responded with great intelligence by catching hold of his captain round the waist.

They stood clasped thus in the blind night, bracing each other against the wind, cheek to cheek and lip to ear, in the manner of two hulks lashed stem to stern together.

And Jukes heard the voice of his commander hardly any louder than before, but nearer, as though, starting to march athwart the prodigious rush of the hurricane, it

had approached him, bearing that strange effect of quietness like the serene glow of a halo.

“D’ye know where the hands got to?” it asked, vigorous and evanescent at the same time, overcoming the strength of the wind, and swept away from Jukes instantly.

Jukes didn’t know. They were all on the bridge when the real force of the hurricane struck the ship. He had no idea where they had crawled to. Under the circumstances they were nowhere, for all the use that could be made of them. Somehow the Captain’s wish to know distressed Jukes.

“Want the hands, sir?” he cried, apprehensively.

“Ought to know,” asserted Captain MacWhirr. “Hold hard.”

They held hard. An outburst of unchained fury, a vicious rush of the wind absolutely steadied the ship; she rocked only, quick and light like a child’s cradle, for a terrific moment of suspense, while the whole atmosphere, as it seemed, streamed furiously past her, roaring away from the tenebrous earth.

It suffocated them, and with eyes shut they tightened their grasp. What from the magnitude of the shock might have been a column of water running upright in the dark, butted against the ship, broke short, and fell on her bridge, crushingly, from on high, with a dead burying weight.

A flying fragment of that collapse, a mere splash, enveloped them in one swirl from their feet over their heads, filling violently their ears, mouths and nostrils with salt water. It knocked out their legs, wrenched in haste at their arms, seethed away swiftly under their chins; and opening their eyes, they saw the piled-up masses of foam dashing to and fro amongst what looked like the fragments of a ship. She had given way as if driven straight in. Their panting hearts yielded, too, before the tremendous blow; and all at once she sprang up again to her desperate plunging, as if trying to scramble out from under the ruins.

The seas in the dark seemed to rush from all sides to keep her back where she might perish. There was hate in the way she was handled, and a ferocity in the blows that fell. She was like a living creature thrown to the rage of a mob: hustled terribly, struck at, borne up, flung down, leaped upon. Captain MacWhirr and Jukes kept hold of each other, deafened by the noise, gagged by the wind; and the great physical tumult beating about their bodies, brought, like an unbridled display of passion, a profound trouble to their souls. One of those wild and appalling shrieks that are heard at times passing mysteriously overhead in the steady roar of a hurricane, swooped, as if borne on wings, upon the ship, and Jukes tried to outscreech it.

“Will she live through this?”

The cry was wrenched out of his breast. It was as unintentional as the birth of a thought in the head, and he heard nothing of it himself. It all became extinct at once — thought, intention, effort — and of his cry the inaudible vibration added to the tempest waves of the air.

He expected nothing from it. Nothing at all. For indeed what answer could be made? But after a while he heard with amazement the frail and resisting voice in his ear, the dwarf sound, unconquered in the giant tumult.

“She may!”

It was a dull yell, more difficult to seize than a whisper. And presently the voice returned again, half submerged in the vast crashes, like a ship battling against the waves of an ocean.

“Let’s hope so!” it cried — small, lonely and unmoved, a stranger to the visions of hope or fear; and it flickered into disconnected words: “Ship. . . . This. . . . Never — Anyhow . . . for the best.” Jukes gave it up.

Then, as if it had come suddenly upon the one thing fit to withstand the power of a storm, it seemed to gain force and firmness for the last broken shouts:

“Keep on hammering . . . builders . . . good men. . . . And chance it . . . engines. . . . Rout . . . good man.”

Captain MacWhirr removed his arm from Jukes’ shoulders, and thereby ceased to exist for his mate, so dark it was; Jukes, after a tense stiffening of every muscle, would let himself go limp all over. The gnawing of profound discomfort existed side by side with an incredible disposition to somnolence, as though he had been buffeted and worried into drowsiness. The wind would get hold of his head and try to shake it off his shoulders; his clothes, full of water, were as heavy as lead, cold and dripping like an armour of melting ice: he shivered — it lasted a long time; and with his hands closed hard on his hold, he was letting himself sink slowly into the depths of bodily misery. His mind became concentrated upon himself in an aimless, idle way, and when something pushed lightly at the back of his knees he nearly, as the saying is, jumped out of his skin.

In the start forward he bumped the back of Captain MacWhirr, who didn’t move; and then a hand gripped his thigh. A lull had come, a menacing lull of the wind, the holding of a stormy breath — and he felt himself pawed all over. It was the boatswain. Jukes recognized these hands, so thick and enormous that they seemed to belong to some new species of man.

The boatswain had arrived on the bridge, crawling on all fours against the wind, and had found the chief mate’s legs with the top of his head. Immediately he crouched and began to explore Jukes’ person upwards with prudent, apologetic touches, as became an inferior.

He was an ill-favoured, undersized, gruff sailor of fifty, coarsely hairy, short-legged, long-armed, resembling an elderly ape. His strength was immense; and in his great lumpy paws, bulging like brown boxing-gloves on the end of furry forearms, the heaviest objects were handled like playthings. Apart from the grizzled pelt on his chest, the menacing demeanour and the hoarse voice, he had none of the classical attributes of his rating. His good nature almost amounted to imbecility: the men did what they liked with him, and he had not an ounce of initiative in his character, which was easy-going

and talkative. For these reasons Jukes disliked him; but Captain MacWhirr, to Jukes' scornful disgust, seemed to regard him as a first-rate petty officer.

He pulled himself up by Jukes' coat, taking that liberty with the greatest moderation, and only so far as it was forced upon him by the hurricane.

"What is it, boss'n, what is it?" yelled Jukes, impatiently. What could that fraud of a boss'n want on the bridge? The typhoon had got on Jukes' nerves. The husky bellowings of the other, though unintelligible, seemed to suggest a state of lively satisfaction.

There could be no mistake. The old fool was pleased with something.

The boatswain's other hand had found some other body, for in a changed tone he began to inquire: "Is it you, sir? Is it you, sir?" The wind strangled his howls.

"Yes!" cried Captain MacWhirr.

Chapter 4

All that the boatswain, out of a superabundance of yells, could make clear to Captain MacWhirr was the bizarre intelligence that “All them Chinamen in the fore ‘tween deck have fetched away, sir.”

Jukes to leeward could hear these two shouting within six inches of his face, as you may hear on a still night half a mile away two men conversing across a field. He heard Captain MacWhirr’s exasperated “What? What?” and the strained pitch of the other’s hoarseness. “In a lump . . . seen them myself. . . . Awful sight, sir . . . thought . . . tell you.”

Jukes remained indifferent, as if rendered irresponsible by the force of the hurricane, which made the very thought of action utterly vain. Besides, being very young, he had found the occupation of keeping his heart completely steeled against the worst so engrossing that he had come to feel an overpowering dislike towards any other form of activity whatever. He was not scared; he knew this because, firmly believing he would never see another sunrise, he remained calm in that belief.

These are the moments of do-nothing heroics to which even good men surrender at times. Many officers of ships can no doubt recall a case in their experience when just such a trance of confounded stoicism would come all at once over a whole ship’s company. Jukes, however, had no wide experience of men or storms. He conceived himself to be calm — inexorably calm; but as a matter of fact he was daunted; not abjectly, but only so far as a decent man may, without becoming loathsome to himself.

It was rather like a forced-on numbness of spirit. The long, long stress of a gale does it; the suspense of the interminably culminating catastrophe; and there is a bodily fatigue in the mere holding on to existence within the excessive tumult; a searching and insidious fatigue that penetrates deep into a man’s breast to cast down and sadden his heart, which is incorrigible, and of all the gifts of the earth — even before life itself — aspires to peace.

Jukes was benumbed much more than he supposed. He held on — very wet, very cold, stiff in every limb; and in a momentary hallucination of swift visions (it is said that a drowning man thus reviews all his life) he beheld all sorts of memories altogether unconnected with his present situation. He remembered his father, for instance: a worthy business man, who at an unfortunate crisis in his affairs went quietly to bed and died forthwith in a state of resignation. Jukes did not recall these circumstances, of course, but remaining otherwise unconcerned he seemed to see distinctly the poor man’s face; a certain game of nap played when quite a boy in Table Bay on board a ship, since lost with all hands; the thick eyebrows of his first skipper; and without

any emotion, as he might years ago have walked listlessly into her room and found her sitting there with a book, he remembered his mother — dead, too, now — the resolute woman, left badly off, who had been very firm in his bringing up.

It could not have lasted more than a second, perhaps not so much. A heavy arm had fallen about his shoulders; Captain MacWhirr's voice was speaking his name into his ear.

“Jukes! Jukes!”

He detected the tone of deep concern. The wind had thrown its weight on the ship, trying to pin her down amongst the seas. They made a clean breach over her, as over a deep-swimming log; and the gathered weight of crashes menaced monstrously from afar. The breakers flung out of the night with a ghostly light on their crests — the light of sea-foam that in a ferocious, boiling-up pale flash showed upon the slender body of the ship the toppling rush, the downfall, and the seething mad scurry of each wave. Never for a moment could she shake herself clear of the water; Jukes, rigid, perceived in her motion the ominous sign of haphazard floundering. She was no longer struggling intelligently. It was the beginning of the end; and the note of busy concern in Captain MacWhirr's voice sickened him like an exhibition of blind and pernicious folly.

The spell of the storm had fallen upon Jukes. He was penetrated by it, absorbed by it; he was rooted in it with a rigour of dumb attention. Captain MacWhirr persisted in his cries, but the wind got between them like a solid wedge. He hung round Jukes' neck as heavy as a millstone, and suddenly the sides of their heads knocked together.

“Jukes! Mr. Jukes, I say!”

He had to answer that voice that would not be silenced. He answered in the customary manner: “. . . Yes, sir.”

And directly, his heart, corrupted by the storm that breeds a craving for peace, rebelled against the tyranny of training and command.

Captain MacWhirr had his mate's head fixed firm in the crook of his elbow, and pressed it to his yelling lips mysteriously. Sometimes Jukes would break in, admonishing hastily: “Look out, sir!” or Captain MacWhirr would bawl an earnest exhortation to “Hold hard, there!” and the whole black universe seemed to reel together with the ship. They paused. She floated yet. And Captain MacWhirr would resume, his shouts. “. . . . Says . . . whole lot . . . fetched away. . . . Ought to see . . . what's the matter.”

Directly the full force of the hurricane had struck the ship, every part of her deck became untenable; and the sailors, dazed and dismayed, took shelter in the port alleyway under the bridge. It had a door aft, which they shut; it was very black, cold, and dismal. At each heavy fling of the ship they would groan all together in the dark, and tons of water could be heard scuttling about as if trying to get at them from above. The boatswain had been keeping up a gruff talk, but a more unreasonable lot of men, he said afterwards, he had never been with. They were snug enough there, out of harm's way, and not wanted to do anything, either; and yet they did nothing but grumble and complain peevishly like so many sick kids. Finally, one of them said that if there had been at least some light to see each other's noses by, it wouldn't be so bad.

It was making him crazy, he declared, to lie there in the dark waiting for the blamed hooker to sink.

“Why don’t you step outside, then, and be done with it at once?” the boatswain turned on him.

This called up a shout of execration. The boatswain found himself overwhelmed with reproaches of all sorts. They seemed to take it ill that a lamp was not instantly created for them out of nothing. They would whine after a light to get drowned by — anyhow! And though the unreason of their revilings was patent — since no one could hope to reach the lamp-room, which was forward — he became greatly distressed. He did not think it was decent of them to be nagging at him like this. He told them so, and was met by general contumely. He sought refuge, therefore, in an embittered silence. At the same time their grumbling and sighing and muttering worried him greatly, but by-and-by it occurred to him that there were six globe lamps hung in the ‘tween-deck, and that there could be no harm in depriving the coolies of one of them.

The Nan-Shan had an athwartship coal-bunker, which, being at times used as cargo space, communicated by an iron door with the fore ‘tween-deck. It was empty then, and its manhole was the foremost one in the alleyway. The boatswain could get in, therefore, without coming out on deck at all; but to his great surprise he found he could induce no one to help him in taking off the manhole cover. He groped for it all the same, but one of the crew lying in his way refused to budge.

“Why, I only want to get you that blamed light you are crying for,” he expostulated, almost pitifully.

Somebody told him to go and put his head in a bag. He regretted he could not recognize the voice, and that it was too dark to see, otherwise, as he said, he would have put a head on that son of a sea-cook, anyway, sink or swim. Nevertheless, he had made up his mind to show them he could get a light, if he were to die for it.

Through the violence of the ship’s rolling, every movement was dangerous. To be lying down seemed labour enough. He nearly broke his neck dropping into the bunker. He fell on his back, and was sent shooting helplessly from side to side in the dangerous company of a heavy iron bar — a coal-trimmer’s slice probably — left down there by somebody. This thing made him as nervous as though it had been a wild beast. He could not see it, the inside of the bunker coated with coal-dust being perfectly and impenetrably black; but he heard it sliding and clattering, and striking here and there, always in the neighbourhood of his head. It seemed to make an extraordinary noise, too — to give heavy thumps as though it had been as big as a bridge girder. This was remarkable enough for him to notice while he was flung from port to starboard and back again, and clawing desperately the smooth sides of the bunker in the endeavour to stop himself. The door into the ‘tween-deck not fitting quite true, he saw a thread of dim light at the bottom.

Being a sailor, and a still active man, he did not want much of a chance to regain his feet; and as luck would have it, in scrambling up he put his hand on the iron slice, picking it up as he rose. Otherwise he would have been afraid of the thing breaking his

legs, or at least knocking him down again. At first he stood still. He felt unsafe in this darkness that seemed to make the ship's motion unfamiliar, unforeseen, and difficult to counteract. He felt so much shaken for a moment that he dared not move for fear of "taking charge again." He had no mind to get battered to pieces in that bunker.

He had struck his head twice; he was dazed a little. He seemed to hear yet so plainly the clatter and bangs of the iron slice flying about his ears that he tightened his grip to prove to himself he had it there safely in his hand. He was vaguely amazed at the plainness with which down there he could hear the gale raging. Its howls and shrieks seemed to take on, in the emptiness of the bunker, something of the human character, of human rage and pain — being not vast but infinitely poignant. And there were, with every roll, thumps, too — profound, ponderous thumps, as if a bulky object of five-ton weight or so had got play in the hold. But there was no such thing in the cargo. Something on deck? Impossible. Or alongside? Couldn't be.

He thought all this quickly, clearly, competently, like a seaman, and in the end remained puzzled. This noise, though, came deadened from outside, together with the washing and pouring of water on deck above his head. Was it the wind? Must be. It made down there a row like the shouting of a big lot of crazed men. And he discovered in himself a desire for a light, too — if only to get drowned by — and a nervous anxiety to get out of that bunker as quickly as possible.

He pulled back the bolt: the heavy iron plate turned on its hinges; and it was as though he had opened the door to the sounds of the tempest. A gust of hoarse yelling met him: the air was still; and the rushing of water overhead was covered by a tumult of strangled, throaty shrieks that produced an effect of desperate confusion. He straddled his legs the whole width of the doorway and stretched his neck. And at first he perceived only what he had come to seek: six small yellow flames swinging violently on the great body of the dusk.

It was stayed like the gallery of a mine, with a row of stanchions in the middle, and cross-beams overhead, penetrating into the gloom ahead — indefinitely. And to port there loomed, like the caving in of one of the sides, a bulky mass with a slanting outline. The whole place, with the shadows and the shapes, moved all the time. The boatswain glared: the ship lurched to starboard, and a great howl came from that mass that had the slant of fallen earth.

Pieces of wood whizzed past. Planks, he thought, inexpressibly startled, and flinging back his head. At his feet a man went sliding over, open-eyed, on his back, straining with uplifted arms for nothing: and another came bounding like a detached stone with his head between his legs and his hands clenched. His pigtail whipped in the air; he made a grab at the boatswain's legs, and from his opened hand a bright white disc rolled against the boatswain's foot. He recognized a silver dollar, and yelled at it with astonishment. With a precipitated sound of trampling and shuffling of bare feet, and with guttural cries, the mound of writhing bodies piled up to port detached itself from the ship's side and sliding, inert and struggling, shifted to starboard, with a dull, brutal thump. The cries ceased. The boatswain heard a long moan through the roar

and whistling of the wind; he saw an inextricable confusion of heads and shoulders, naked soles kicking upwards, fists raised, tumbling backs, legs, pigtailed, faces.

“Good Lord!” he cried, horrified, and banged to the iron door upon this vision.

This was what he had come on the bridge to tell. He could not keep it to himself; and on board ship there is only one man to whom it is worth while to unburden yourself. On his passage back the hands in the alleyway swore at him for a fool. Why didn’t he bring that lamp? What the devil did the coolies matter to anybody? And when he came out, the extremity of the ship made what went on inside of her appear of little moment.

At first he thought he had left the alleyway in the very moment of her sinking. The bridge ladders had been washed away, but an enormous sea filling the after-deck floated him up. After that he had to lie on his stomach for some time, holding to a ring-bolt, getting his breath now and then, and swallowing salt water. He struggled farther on his hands and knees, too frightened and distracted to turn back. In this way he reached the after-part of the wheelhouse. In that comparatively sheltered spot he found the second mate.

The boatswain was pleasantly surprised — his impression being that everybody on deck must have been washed away a long time ago. He asked eagerly where the Captain was.

The second mate was lying low, like a malignant little animal under a hedge.

“Captain? Gone overboard, after getting us into this mess.” The mate, too, for all he knew or cared. Another fool. Didn’t matter. Everybody was going by-and-by.

The boatswain crawled out again into the strength of the wind; not because he much expected to find anybody, he said, but just to get away from “that man.” He crawled out as outcasts go to face an inclement world. Hence his great joy at finding Jukes and the Captain. But what was going on in the ‘tween-deck was to him a minor matter by that time. Besides, it was difficult to make yourself heard. But he managed to convey the idea that the Chinaman had broken adrift together with their boxes, and that he had come up on purpose to report this. As to the hands, they were all right. Then, appeased, he subsided on the deck in a sitting posture, hugging with his arms and legs the stand of the engine-room telegraph — an iron casting as thick as a post. When that went, why, he expected he would go, too. He gave no more thought to the coolies.

Captain MacWhirr had made Jukes understand that he wanted him to go down below — to see.

“What am I to do then, sir?” And the trembling of his whole wet body caused Jukes’ voice to sound like bleating.

“See first . . . Boss’n . . . says . . . adrift.”

“That boss’n is a confounded fool,” howled Jukes, shakily.

The absurdity of the demand made upon him revolted Jukes. He was as unwilling to go as if the moment he had left the deck the ship were sure to sink.

“I must know . . . can’t leave. . . .”

"They'll settle, sir."

"Fight . . . boss'n says they fight. . . . Why? Can't have . . . fighting . . . board ship. . . . Much rather keep you here . . . case . . . I should . . . washed overboard myself. . . . Stop it . . . some way. You see and tell me . . . through engine-room tube. Don't want you . . . come up here . . . too often. Dangerous . . . moving about . . . deck."

Jukes, held with his head in chancery, had to listen to what seemed horrible suggestions.

"Don't want . . . you get lost . . . so long . . . ship isn't. . . . Rout . . . Good man . . . Ship . . . may . . . through this . . . all right yet."

All at once Jukes understood he would have to go.

"Do you think she may?" he screamed.

But the wind devoured the reply, out of which Jukes heard only the one word, pronounced with great energy ". . . Always. . . ."

Captain MacWhirr released Jukes, and bending over the boatswain, yelled, "Get back with the mate." Jukes only knew that the arm was gone off his shoulders. He was dismissed with his orders — to do what? He was exasperated into letting go his hold carelessly, and on the instant was blown away. It seemed to him that nothing could stop him from being blown right over the stern. He flung himself down hastily, and the boatswain, who was following, fell on him.

"Don't you get up yet, sir," cried the boatswain. "No hurry!"

A sea swept over. Jukes understood the boatswain to splutter that the bridge ladders were gone. "I'll lower you down, sir, by your hands," he screamed. He shouted also something about the smoke-stack being as likely to go overboard as not. Jukes thought it very possible, and imagined the fires out, the ship helpless. . . . The boatswain by his side kept on yelling. "What? What is it?" Jukes cried distressfully; and the other repeated, "What would my old woman say if she saw me now?"

In the alleyway, where a lot of water had got in and splashed in the dark, the men were still as death, till Jukes stumbled against one of them and cursed him savagely for being in the way. Two or three voices then asked, eager and weak, "Any chance for us, sir?"

"What's the matter with you fools?" he said brutally. He felt as though he could throw himself down amongst them and never move any more. But they seemed cheered; and in the midst of obsequious warnings, "Look out! Mind that manhole lid, sir," they lowered him into the bunker. The boatswain tumbled down after him, and as soon as he had picked himself up he remarked, "She would say, 'Serve you right, you old fool, for going to sea.'"

The boatswain had some means, and made a point of alluding to them frequently. His wife — a fat woman — and two grown-up daughters kept a greengrocer's shop in the East-end of London.

In the dark, Jukes, unsteady on his legs, listened to a faint thunderous patter. A deadened screaming went on steadily at his elbow, as it were; and from above the louder tumult of the storm descended upon these near sounds. His head swam. To him,

too, in that bunker, the motion of the ship seemed novel and menacing, sapping his resolution as though he had never been afloat before.

He had half a mind to scramble out again; but the remembrance of Captain MacWhirr's voice made this impossible. His orders were to go and see. What was the good of it, he wanted to know. Enraged, he told himself he would see — of course. But the boatswain, staggering clumsily, warned him to be careful how he opened that door; there was a blamed fight going on. And Jukes, as if in great bodily pain, desired irritably to know what the devil they were fighting for.

“Dollars! Dollars, sir. All their rotten chests got burst open. Blamed money skipping all over the place, and they are tumbling after it head over heels — tearing and biting like anything. A regular little hell in there.”

Jukes convulsively opened the door. The short boatswain peered under his arm.

One of the lamps had gone out, broken perhaps. Rancorous, guttural cries burst out loudly on their ears, and a strange panting sound, the working of all these straining breasts. A hard blow hit the side of the ship: water fell above with a stunning shock, and in the forefront of the gloom, where the air was reddish and thick, Jukes saw a head bang the deck violently, two thick calves waving on high, muscular arms twined round a naked body, a yellow-face, open-mouthed and with a set wild stare, look up and slide away. An empty chest clattered turning over; a man fell head first with a jump, as if lifted by a kick; and farther off, indistinct, others streamed like a mass of rolling stones down a bank, thumping the deck with their feet and flourishing their arms wildly. The hatchway ladder was loaded with coolies swarming on it like bees on a branch. They hung on the steps in a crawling, stirring cluster, beating madly with their fists the underside of the battened hatch, and the headlong rush of the water above was heard in the intervals of their yelling. The ship heeled over more, and they began to drop off: first one, then two, then all the rest went away together, falling straight off with a great cry.

Jukes was confounded. The boatswain, with gruff anxiety, begged him, “Don't you go in there, sir.”

The whole place seemed to twist upon itself, jumping incessantly the while; and when the ship rose to a sea Jukes fancied that all these men would be shot upon him in a body. He backed out, swung the door to, and with trembling hands pushed at the bolt. . . .

As soon as his mate had gone Captain MacWhirr, left alone on the bridge, sidled and staggered as far as the wheelhouse. Its door being hinged forward, he had to fight the gale for admittance, and when at last he managed to enter, it was with an instantaneous clatter and a bang, as though he had been fired through the wood. He stood within, holding on to the handle.

The steering-gear leaked steam, and in the confined space the glass of the binnacle made a shiny oval of light in a thin white fog. The wind howled, hummed, whistled, with sudden booming gusts that rattled the doors and shutters in the vicious patter of sprays. Two coils of lead-line and a small canvas bag hung on a long lanyard, swung

wide off, and came back clinging to the bulkheads. The gratings underfoot were nearly afloat; with every sweeping blow of a sea, water squirted violently through the cracks all round the door, and the man at the helm had flung down his cap, his coat, and stood propped against the gear-casing in a striped cotton shirt open on his breast. The little brass wheel in his hands had the appearance of a bright and fragile toy. The cords of his neck stood hard and lean, a dark patch lay in the hollow of his throat, and his face was still and sunken as in death.

Captain MacWhirr wiped his eyes. The sea that had nearly taken him overboard had, to his great annoyance, washed his sou'-wester hat off his bald head. The fluffy, fair hair, soaked and darkened, resembled a mean skein of cotton threads festooned round his bare skull. His face, glistening with sea-water, had been made crimson with the wind, with the sting of sprays. He looked as though he had come off sweating from before a furnace.

"You here?" he muttered, heavily.

The second mate had found his way into the wheelhouse some time before. He had fixed himself in a corner with his knees up, a fist pressed against each temple; and this attitude suggested rage, sorrow, resignation, surrender, with a sort of concentrated unforgiveness. He said mournfully and defiantly, "Well, it's my watch below now: ain't it?"

The steam gear clattered, stopped, clattered again; and the helmsman's eyeballs seemed to project out of a hungry face as if the compass card behind the binnacle glass had been meat. God knows how long he had been left there to steer, as if forgotten by all his shipmates. The bells had not been struck; there had been no reliefs; the ship's routine had gone down wind; but he was trying to keep her head north-north-east. The rudder might have been gone for all he knew, the fires out, the engines broken down, the ship ready to roll over like a corpse. He was anxious not to get muddled and lose control of her head, because the compass-card swung far both ways, wriggling on the pivot, and sometimes seemed to whirl right round. He suffered from mental stress. He was horribly afraid, also, of the wheelhouse going. Mountains of water kept on tumbling against it. When the ship took one of her desperate dives the corners of his lips twitched.

Captain MacWhirr looked up at the wheelhouse clock. Screwed to the bulk-head, it had a white face on which the black hands appeared to stand quite still. It was half-past one in the morning.

"Another day," he muttered to himself.

The second mate heard him, and lifting his head as one grieving amongst ruins, "You won't see it break," he exclaimed. His wrists and his knees could be seen to shake violently. "No, by God! You won't. . . ."

He took his face again between his fists.

The body of the helmsman had moved slightly, but his head didn't budge on his neck, — like a stone head fixed to look one way from a column. During a roll that all but took his booted legs from under him, and in the very stagger to save himself,

Captain MacWhirr said austerely, "Don't you pay any attention to what that man says." And then, with an indefinable change of tone, very grave, he added, "He isn't on duty."

The sailor said nothing.

The hurricane boomed, shaking the little place, which seemed air-tight; and the light of the binnacle flickered all the time.

"You haven't been relieved," Captain MacWhirr went on, looking down. "I want you to stick to the helm, though, as long as you can. You've got the hang of her. Another man coming here might make a mess of it. Wouldn't do. No child's play. And the hands are probably busy with a job down below. . . . Think you can?"

The steering-gear leaped into an abrupt short clatter, stopped smouldering like an ember; and the still man, with a motionless gaze, burst out, as if all the passion in him had gone into his lips: "By Heavens, sir! I can steer for ever if nobody talks to me."

"Oh! aye! All right. . . ." The Captain lifted his eyes for the first time to the man, ". . . Hackett."

And he seemed to dismiss this matter from his mind. He stooped to the engine-room speaking-tube, blew in, and bent his head. Mr. Rout below answered, and at once Captain MacWhirr put his lips to the mouthpiece.

With the uproar of the gale around him he applied alternately his lips and his ear, and the engineer's voice mounted to him, harsh and as if out of the heat of an engagement. One of the stokers was disabled, the others had given in, the second engineer and the donkey-man were firing-up. The third engineer was standing by the steam-valve. The engines were being tended by hand. How was it above?

"Bad enough. It mostly rests with you," said Captain MacWhirr. Was the mate down there yet? No? Well, he would be presently. Would Mr. Rout let him talk through the speaking-tube? — through the deck speaking-tube, because he — the Captain — was going out again on the bridge directly. There was some trouble amongst the Chinamen. They were fighting, it seemed. Couldn't allow fighting anyhow. . . .

Mr. Rout had gone away, and Captain MacWhirr could feel against his ear the pulsation of the engines, like the beat of the ship's heart. Mr. Rout's voice down there shouted something distantly. The ship pitched headlong, the pulsation leaped with a hissing tumult, and stopped dead. Captain MacWhirr's face was impassive, and his eyes were fixed aimlessly on the crouching shape of the second mate. Again Mr. Rout's voice cried out in the depths, and the pulsating beats recommenced, with slow strokes — growing swifter.

Mr. Rout had returned to the tube. "It don't matter much what they do," he said, hastily; and then, with irritation, "She takes these dives as if she never meant to come up again."

"Awful sea," said the Captain's voice from above.

"Don't let me drive her under," barked Solomon Rout up the pipe.

"Dark and rain. Can't see what's coming," uttered the voice. "Must — keep — her — moving — enough to steer — and chance it," it went on to state distinctly.

"I am doing as much as I dare."

"We are — getting — smashed up — a good deal up here," proceeded the voice mildly. "Doing — fairly well — though. Of course, if the wheelhouse should go. . . ."

Mr. Rout, bending an attentive ear, muttered peevishly something under his breath.

But the deliberate voice up there became animated to ask: "Jukes turned up yet?" Then, after a short wait, "I wish he would bear a hand. I want him to be done and come up here in case of anything. To look after the ship. I am all alone. The second mate's lost. . . ."

"What?" shouted Mr. Rout into the engine-room, taking his head away. Then up the tube he cried, "Gone overboard?" and clapped his ear to.

"Lost his nerve," the voice from above continued in a matter-of-fact tone. "Damned awkward circumstance."

Mr. Rout, listening with bowed neck, opened his eyes wide at this. However, he heard something like the sounds of a scuffle and broken exclamations coming down to him. He strained his hearing; and all the time Beale, the third engineer, with his arms uplifted, held between the palms of his hands the rim of a little black wheel projecting at the side of a big copper pipe.

He seemed to be poising it above his head, as though it were a correct attitude in some sort of game.

To steady himself, he pressed his shoulder against the white bulkhead, one knee bent, and a sweat-rag tucked in his belt hanging on his hip. His smooth cheek was begrimed and flushed, and the coal dust on his eyelids, like the black pencilling of a make-up, enhanced the liquid brilliance of the whites, giving to his youthful face something of a feminine, exotic and fascinating aspect. When the ship pitched he would with hasty movements of his hands screw hard at the little wheel.

"Gone crazy," began the Captain's voice suddenly in the tube. "Rushed at me. . . . Just now. Had to knock him down. . . . This minute. You heard, Mr. Rout?"

"The devil!" muttered Mr. Rout. "Look out, Beale!"

His shout rang out like the blast of a warning trumpet, between the iron walls of the engine-room. Painted white, they rose high into the dusk of the skylight, sloping like a roof; and the whole lofty space resembled the interior of a monument, divided by floors of iron grating, with lights flickering at different levels, and a mass of gloom lingering in the middle, within the columnar stir of machinery under the motionless swelling of the cylinders. A loud and wild resonance, made up of all the noises of the hurricane, dwelt in the still warmth of the air. There was in it the smell of hot metal, of oil, and a slight mist of steam. The blows of the sea seemed to traverse it in an unringing, stunning shock, from side to side.

Gleams, like pale long flames, trembled upon the polish of metal; from the flooring below the enormous crank-heads emerged in their turns with a flash of brass and steel — going over; while the connecting-rods, big-jointed, like skeleton limbs, seemed to thrust them down and pull them up again with an irresistible precision. And deep in the half-light other rods dodged deliberately to and fro, crossheads nodded, discs

of metal rubbed smoothly against each other, slow and gentle, in a commingling of shadows and gleams.

Sometimes all those powerful and unerring movements would slow down simultaneously, as if they had been the functions of a living organism, stricken suddenly by the blight of languor; and Mr. Rout's eyes would blaze darker in his long sallow face. He was fighting this fight in a pair of carpet slippers. A short shiny jacket barely covered his loins, and his white wrists protruded far out of the tight sleeves, as though the emergency had added to his stature, had lengthened his limbs, augmented his pallor, hollowed his eyes.

He moved, climbing high up, disappearing low down, with a restless, purposeful industry, and when he stood still, holding the guard-rail in front of the starting-gear, he would keep glancing to the right at the steam-gauge, at the water-gauge, fixed upon the white wall in the light of a swaying lamp. The mouths of two speaking-tubes gaped stupidly at his elbow, and the dial of the engine-room telegraph resembled a clock of large diameter, bearing on its face curt words instead of figures. The grouped letters stood out heavily black, around the pivot-head of the indicator, emphatically symbolic of loud exclamations: AHEAD, ASTERN, SLOW, Half, STAND BY; and the fat black hand pointed downwards to the word FULL, which, thus singled out, captured the eye as a sharp cry secures attention.

The wood-encased bulk of the low-pressure cylinder, frowning portly from above, emitted a faint wheeze at every thrust, and except for that low hiss the engines worked their steel limbs headlong or slow with a silent, determined smoothness. And all this, the white walls, the moving steel, the floor plates under Solomon Rout's feet, the floors of iron grating above his head, the dusk and the gleams, uprose and sank continuously, with one accord, upon the harsh wash of the waves against the ship's side. The whole loftiness of the place, booming hollow to the great voice of the wind, swayed at the top like a tree, would go over bodily, as if borne down this way and that by the tremendous blasts.

"You've got to hurry up," shouted Mr. Rout, as soon as he saw Jukes appear in the stokehold doorway.

Jukes' glance was wandering and tipsy; his red face was puffy, as though he had overslept himself. He had had an arduous road, and had travelled over it with immense vivacity, the agitation of his mind corresponding to the exertions of his body. He had rushed up out of the bunker, stumbling in the dark alleyway amongst a lot of bewildered men who, trod upon, asked "What's up, sir?" in awed mutters all round him; — down the stokehold ladder, missing many iron rungs in his hurry, down into a place deep as a well, black as Tophet, tipping over back and forth like a see-saw. The water in the bilges thundered at each roll, and lumps of coal skipped to and fro, from end to end, rattling like an avalanche of pebbles on a slope of iron.

Somebody in there moaned with pain, and somebody else could be seen crouching over what seemed the prone body of a dead man; a lusty voice blasphemed; and the

glow under each fire-door was like a pool of flaming blood radiating quietly in a velvety blackness.

A gust of wind struck upon the nape of Jukes' neck and next moment he felt it streaming about his wet ankles. The stokehold ventilators hummed: in front of the six fire-doors two wild figures, stripped to the waist, staggered and stooped, wrestling with two shovels.

"Hallo! Plenty of draught now," yelled the second engineer at once, as though he had been all the time looking out for Jukes. The donkeyman, a dapper little chap with a dazzling fair skin and a tiny, gingery moustache, worked in a sort of mute transport. They were keeping a full head of steam, and a profound rumbling, as of an empty furniture van trotting over a bridge, made a sustained bass to all the other noises of the place.

"Blowing off all the time," went on yelling the second. With a sound as of a hundred scoured saucepans, the orifice of a ventilator spat upon his shoulder a sudden gush of salt water, and he volleyed a stream of curses upon all things on earth including his own soul, ripping and raving, and all the time attending to his business. With a sharp clash of metal the ardent pale glare of the fire opened upon his bullet head, showing his spluttering lips, his insolent face, and with another clang closed like the white-hot wink of an iron eye.

"Where's the blooming ship? Can you tell me? blast my eyes! Under water — or what? It's coming down here in tons. Are the condemned cowls gone to Hades? Hey? Don't you know anything — you jolly sailor-man you . . . ?"

Jukes, after a bewildered moment, had been helped by a roll to dart through; and as soon as his eyes took in the comparative vastness, peace and brilliance of the engine-room, the ship, setting her stern heavily in the water, sent him charging head down upon Mr. Rout.

The chief's arm, long like a tentacle, and straightening as if worked by a spring, went out to meet him, and deflected his rush into a spin towards the speaking-tubes. At the same time Mr. Rout repeated earnestly:

"You've got to hurry up, whatever it is."

Jukes yelled "Are you there, sir?" and listened. Nothing. Suddenly the roar of the wind fell straight into his ear, but presently a small voice shoved aside the shouting hurricane quietly.

"You, Jukes? — Well?"

Jukes was ready to talk: it was only time that seemed to be wanting. It was easy enough to account for everything. He could perfectly imagine the coolies battened down in the reeking 'tween-deck, lying sick and scared between the rows of chests. Then one of these chests — or perhaps several at once — breaking loose in a roll, knocking out others, sides splitting, lids flying open, and all these clumsy Chinamen rising up in a body to save their property. Afterwards every fling of the ship would hurl that tramping, yelling mob here and there, from side to side, in a whirl of smashed wood, torn clothing, rolling dollars. A struggle once started, they would be unable to stop

themselves. Nothing could stop them now except main force. It was a disaster. He had seen it, and that was all he could say. Some of them must be dead, he believed. The rest would go on fighting. . . .

He sent up his words, tripping over each other, crowding the narrow tube. They mounted as if into a silence of an enlightened comprehension dwelling alone up there with a storm. And Jukes wanted to be dismissed from the face of that odious trouble intruding on the great need of the ship.

Chapter 5

He waited. Before his eyes the engines turned with slow labour, that in the moment of going off into a mad fling would stop dead at Mr. Rout's shout, "Look out, Beale!" They paused in an intelligent immobility, stilled in mid-stroke, a heavy crank arrested on the cant, as if conscious of danger and the passage of time. Then, with a "Now, then!" from the chief, and the sound of a breath expelled through clenched teeth, they would accomplish the interrupted revolution and begin another.

There was the prudent sagacity of wisdom and the deliberation of enormous strength in their movements. This was their work — this patient coaxing of a distracted ship over the fury of the waves and into the very eye of the wind. At times Mr. Rout's chin would sink on his breast, and he watched them with knitted eyebrows as if lost in thought.

The voice that kept the hurricane out of Jukes' ear began: "Take the hands with you . . .," and left off unexpectedly.

"What could I do with them, sir?"

A harsh, abrupt, imperious clang exploded suddenly. The three pairs of eyes flew up to the telegraph dial to see the hand jump from FULL to STOP, as if snatched by a devil. And then these three men in the engine-room had the intimate sensation of a check upon the ship, of a strange shrinking, as if she had gathered herself for a desperate leap.

"Stop her!" bellowed Mr. Rout.

Nobody — not even Captain MacWhirr, who alone on deck had caught sight of a white line of foam coming on at such a height that he couldn't believe his eyes — nobody was to know the steepness of that sea and the awful depth of the hollow the hurricane had scooped out behind the running wall of water.

It raced to meet the ship, and, with a pause, as of girding the loins, the Nan-Shan lifted her bows and leaped. The flames in all the lamps sank, darkening the engine-room. One went out. With a tearing crash and a swirling, raving tumult, tons of water fell upon the deck, as though the ship had darted under the foot of a cataract.

Down there they looked at each other, stunned.

"Swept from end to end, by God!" bawled Jukes.

She dipped into the hollow straight down, as if going over the edge of the world. The engine-room toppled forward menacingly, like the inside of a tower nodding in an earthquake. An awful racket, of iron things falling, came from the stokehold. She hung on this appalling slant long enough for Beale to drop on his hands and knees and begin to crawl as if he meant to fly on all fours out of the engine-room, and for Mr. Rout

to turn his head slowly, rigid, cavernous, with the lower jaw dropping. Jukes had shut his eyes, and his face in a moment became hopelessly blank and gentle, like the face of a blind man.

At last she rose slowly, staggering, as if she had to lift a mountain with her bows.

Mr. Rout shut his mouth; Jukes blinked; and little Beale stood up hastily.

“Another one like this, and that’s the last of her,” cried the chief.

He and Jukes looked at each other, and the same thought came into their heads. The Captain! Everything must have been swept away. Steering-gear gone — ship like a log. All over directly.

“Rush!” ejaculated Mr. Rout thickly, glaring with enlarged, doubtful eyes at Jukes, who answered him by an irresolute glance.

The clang of the telegraph gong soothed them instantly. The black hand dropped in a flash from STOP to FULL.

“Now then, Beale!” cried Mr. Rout.

The steam hissed low. The piston-rods slid in and out. Jukes put his ear to the tube. The voice was ready for him. It said: “Pick up all the money. Bear a hand now. I’ll want you up here.” And that was all.

“Sir?” called up Jukes. There was no answer.

He staggered away like a defeated man from the field of battle. He had got, in some way or other, a cut above his left eyebrow — a cut to the bone. He was not aware of it in the least: quantities of the China Sea, large enough to break his neck for him, had gone over his head, had cleaned, washed, and salted that wound. It did not bleed, but only gaped red; and this gash over the eye, his dishevelled hair, the disorder of his clothes, gave him the aspect of a man worsted in a fight with fists.

“Got to pick up the dollars.” He appealed to Mr. Rout, smiling pitifully at random.

“What’s that?” asked Mr. Rout, wildly. “Pick up . . . ? I don’t care. . . .” Then, quivering in every muscle, but with an exaggeration of paternal tone, “Go away now, for God’s sake. You deck people’ll drive me silly. There’s that second mate been going for the old man. Don’t you know? You fellows are going wrong for want of something to do. . . .”

At these words Jukes discovered in himself the beginnings of anger. Want of something to do — indeed. . . . Full of hot scorn against the chief, he turned to go the way he had come. In the stokehold the plump donkeyman toiled with his shovel mutely, as if his tongue had been cut out; but the second was carrying on like a noisy, undaunted maniac, who had preserved his skill in the art of stoking under a marine boiler.

“Hallo, you wandering officer! Hey! Can’t you get some of your slush-slingers to wind up a few of them ashes? I am getting choked with them here. Curse it! Hallo! Hey! Remember the articles: Sailors and firemen to assist each other. Hey! D’ye hear?”

Jukes was climbing out frantically, and the other, lifting up his face after him, howled, “Can’t you speak? What are you poking about here for? What’s your game, anyhow?”

A frenzy possessed Jukes. By the time he was back amongst the men in the darkness of the alleyway, he felt ready to wring all their necks at the slightest sign of hanging back. The very thought of it exasperated him. He couldn't hang back. They shouldn't.

The impetuosity with which he came amongst them carried them along. They had already been excited and startled at all his comings and goings — by the fierceness and rapidity of his movements; and more felt than seen in his rushes, he appeared formidable — busied with matters of life and death that brooked no delay. At his first word he heard them drop into the bunker one after another obediently, with heavy thumps.

They were not clear as to what would have to be done. “What is it? What is it?” they were asking each other. The boatswain tried to explain; the sounds of a great scuffle surprised them: and the mighty shocks, reverberating awfully in the black bunker, kept them in mind of their danger. When the boatswain threw open the door it seemed that an eddy of the hurricane, stealing through the iron sides of the ship, had set all these bodies whirling like dust: there came to them a confused uproar, a tempestuous tumult, a fierce mutter, gusts of screams dying away, and the tramping of feet mingling with the blows of the sea.

For a moment they glared amazed, blocking the doorway. Jukes pushed through them brutally. He said nothing, and simply darted in. Another lot of coolies on the ladder, struggling suicidally to break through the battened hatch to a swamped deck, fell off as before, and he disappeared under them like a man overtaken by a landslide.

The boatswain yelled excitedly: “Come along. Get the mate out. He'll be trampled to death. Come on.”

They charged in, stamping on breasts, on fingers, on faces, catching their feet in heaps of clothing, kicking broken wood; but before they could get hold of him Jukes emerged waist deep in a multitude of clawing hands. In the instant he had been lost to view, all the buttons of his jacket had gone, its back had got split up to the collar, his waistcoat had been torn open. The central struggling mass of Chinamen went over to the roll, dark, indistinct, helpless, with a wild gleam of many eyes in the dim light of the lamps.

“Leave me alone — damn you. I am all right,” screeched Jukes. “Drive them forward. Watch your chance when she pitches. Forward with 'em. Drive them against the bulkhead. Jam 'em up.”

The rush of the sailors into the seething 'tween-deck was like a splash of cold water into a boiling cauldron. The commotion sank for a moment.

The bulk of Chinamen were locked in such a compact scrimmage that, linking their arms and aided by an appalling dive of the ship, the seamen sent it forward in one great shove, like a solid block. Behind their backs small clusters and loose bodies tumbled from side to side.

The boatswain performed prodigious feats of strength. With his long arms open, and each great paw clutching at a stanchion, he stopped the rush of seven entwined Chinamen rolling like a boulder. His joints cracked; he said, “Ha!” and they flew apart.

But the carpenter showed the greater intelligence. Without saying a word to anybody he went back into the alleyway, to fetch several coils of cargo gear he had seen there — chain and rope. With these life-lines were rigged.

There was really no resistance. The struggle, however it began, had turned into a scramble of blind panic. If the coolies had started up after their scattered dollars they were by that time fighting only for their footing. They took each other by the throat merely to save themselves from being hurled about. Whoever got a hold anywhere would kick at the others who caught at his legs and hung on, till a roll sent them flying together across the deck.

The coming of the white devils was a terror. Had they come to kill? The individuals torn out of the ruck became very limp in the seamen's hands: some, dragged aside by the heels, were passive, like dead bodies, with open, fixed eyes. Here and there a coolie would fall on his knees as if begging for mercy; several, whom the excess of fear made unruly, were hit with hard fists between the eyes, and cowered; while those who were hurt submitted to rough handling, blinking rapidly without a plaint. Faces streamed with blood; there were raw places on the shaven heads, scratches, bruises, torn wounds, gashes. The broken porcelain out of the chests was mostly responsible for the latter. Here and there a Chinaman, wild-eyed, with his tail unplaited, nursed a bleeding sole.

They had been ranged closely, after having been shaken into submission, cuffed a little to allay excitement, addressed in gruff words of encouragement that sounded like promises of evil. They sat on the deck in ghastly, drooping rows, and at the end the carpenter, with two hands to help him, moved busily from place to place, setting taut and hitching the life-lines. The boatswain, with one leg and one arm embracing a stanchion, struggled with a lamp pressed to his breast, trying to get a light, and growling all the time like an industrious gorilla. The figures of seamen stooped repeatedly, with the movements of gleaners, and everything was being flung into the bunker: clothing, smashed wood, broken china, and the dollars, too, gathered up in men's jackets. Now and then a sailor would stagger towards the doorway with his arms full of rubbish; and dolorous, slanting eyes followed his movements.

With every roll of the ship the long rows of sitting Celestials would sway forward brokenly, and her headlong dives knocked together the line of shaven polls from end to end. When the wash of water rolling on the deck died away for a moment, it seemed to Jukes, yet quivering from his exertions, that in his mad struggle down there he had overcome the wind somehow: that a silence had fallen upon the ship, a silence in which the sea struck thunderously at her sides.

Everything had been cleared out of the 'tween-deck — all the wreckage, as the men said. They stood erect and tottering above the level of heads and drooping shoulders. Here and there a coolie sobbed for his breath. Where the high light fell, Jukes could see the salient ribs of one, the yellow, wistful face of another; bowed necks; or would meet a dull stare directed at his face. He was amazed that there had been no corpses; but the lot of them seemed at their last gasp, and they appeared to him more pitiful than if they had been all dead.

Suddenly one of the coolies began to speak. The light came and went on his lean, straining face; he threw his head up like a baying hound. From the bunker came the sounds of knocking and the tinkle of some dollars rolling loose; he stretched out his arm, his mouth yawned black, and the incomprehensible guttural hooting sounds, that did not seem to belong to a human language, penetrated Jukes with a strange emotion as if a brute had tried to be eloquent.

Two more started mouthing what seemed to Jukes fierce denunciations; the others stirred with grunts and growls. Jukes ordered the hands out of the 'tweendecks hurriedly. He left last himself, backing through the door, while the grunts rose to a loud murmur and hands were extended after him as after a malefactor. The boatswain shot the bolt, and remarked uneasily, "Seems as if the wind had dropped, sir."

The seamen were glad to get back into the alleyway. Secretly each of them thought that at the last moment he could rush out on deck — and that was a comfort. There is something horribly repugnant in the idea of being drowned under a deck. Now they had done with the Chinamen, they again became conscious of the ship's position.

Jukes on coming out of the alleyway found himself up to the neck in the noisy water. He gained the bridge, and discovered he could detect obscure shapes as if his sight had become preternaturally acute. He saw faint outlines. They recalled not the familiar aspect of the Nan-Shan, but something remembered — an old dismantled steamer he had seen years ago rotting on a mudbank. She recalled that wreck.

There was no wind, not a breath, except the faint currents created by the lurches of the ship. The smoke tossed out of the funnel was settling down upon her deck. He breathed it as he passed forward. He felt the deliberate throb of the engines, and heard small sounds that seemed to have survived the great uproar: the knocking of broken fittings, the rapid tumbling of some piece of wreckage on the bridge. He perceived dimly the squat shape of his captain holding on to a twisted bridge-rail, motionless and swaying as if rooted to the planks. The unexpected stillness of the air oppressed Jukes.

"We have done it, sir," he gasped.

"Thought you would," said Captain MacWhirr.

"Did you?" murmured Jukes to himself.

"Wind fell all at once," went on the Captain.

Jukes burst out: "If you think it was an easy job — "

But his captain, clinging to the rail, paid no attention. "According to the books the worst is not over yet."

"If most of them hadn't been half dead with seasickness and fright, not one of us would have come out of that 'tween-deck alive," said Jukes.

"Had to do what's fair by them," mumbled MacWhirr, stolidly. "You don't find everything in books."

"Why, I believe they would have risen on us if I hadn't ordered the hands out of that pretty quick," continued Jukes with warmth.

After the whisper of their shouts, their ordinary tones, so distinct, rang out very loud to their ears in the amazing stillness of the air. It seemed to them they were talking in a dark and echoing vault.

Through a jagged aperture in the dome of clouds the light of a few stars fell upon the black sea, rising and falling confusedly. Sometimes the head of a watery cone would topple on board and mingle with the rolling flurry of foam on the swamped deck; and the Nan-Shan wallowed heavily at the bottom of a circular cistern of clouds. This ring of dense vapours, gyrating madly round the calm of the centre, encompassed the ship like a motionless and unbroken wall of an aspect inconceivably sinister. Within, the sea, as if agitated by an internal commotion, leaped in peaked mounds that jostled each other, slapping heavily against her sides; and a low moaning sound, the infinite plaint of the storm's fury, came from beyond the limits of the menacing calm. Captain MacWhirr remained silent, and Jukes' ready ear caught suddenly the faint, long-drawn roar of some immense wave rushing unseen under that thick blackness, which made the appalling boundary of his vision.

"Of course," he started resentfully, "they thought we had caught at the chance to plunder them. Of course! You said — pick up the money. Easier said than done. They couldn't tell what was in our heads. We came in, smash — right into the middle of them. Had to do it by a rush."

"As long as it's done . . . ," mumbled the Captain, without attempting to look at Jukes. "Had to do what's fair."

"We shall find yet there's the devil to pay when this is over," said Jukes, feeling very sore. "Let them only recover a bit, and you'll see. They will fly at our throats, sir. Don't forget, sir, she isn't a British ship now. These brutes know it well, too. The damned Siamese flag."

"We are on board, all the same," remarked Captain MacWhirr.

"The trouble's not over yet," insisted Jukes, prophetically, reeling and catching on. "She's a wreck," he added, faintly.

"The trouble's not over yet," assented Captain MacWhirr, half aloud "Look out for her a minute."

"Are you going off the deck, sir?" asked Jukes, hurriedly, as if the storm were sure to pounce upon him as soon as he had been left alone with the ship.

He watched her, battered and solitary, labouring heavily in a wild scene of mountainous black waters lit by the gleams of distant worlds. She moved slowly, breathing into the still core of the hurricane the excess of her strength in a white cloud of steam — and the deep-toned vibration of the escape was like the defiant trumpeting of a living creature of the sea impatient for the renewal of the contest. It ceased suddenly. The still air moaned. Above Jukes' head a few stars shone into a pit of black vapours. The inky edge of the cloud-disc frowned upon the ship under the patch of glittering sky. The stars, too, seemed to look at her intently, as if for the last time, and the cluster of their splendour sat like a diadem on a lowering brow.

Captain MacWhirr had gone into the chart-room. There was no light there; but he could feel the disorder of that place where he used to live tidily. His armchair was upset. The books had tumbled out on the floor: he scrunched a piece of glass under his boot. He groped for the matches, and found a box on a shelf with a deep ledge. He struck one, and puckering the corners of his eyes, held out the little flame towards the barometer whose glittering top of glass and metals nodded at him continuously.

It stood very low — incredibly low, so low that Captain MacWhirr grunted. The match went out, and hurriedly he extracted another, with thick, stiff fingers.

Again a little flame flared up before the nodding glass and metal of the top. His eyes looked at it, narrowed with attention, as if expecting an imperceptible sign. With his grave face he resembled a booted and misshapen pagan burning incense before the oracle of a Joss. There was no mistake. It was the lowest reading he had ever seen in his life.

Captain MacWhirr emitted a low whistle. He forgot himself till the flame diminished to a blue spark, burnt his fingers and vanished. Perhaps something had gone wrong with the thing!

There was an aneroid glass screwed above the couch. He turned that way, struck another match, and discovered the white face of the other instrument looking at him from the bulkhead, meaningly, not to be gainsaid, as though the wisdom of men were made unerring by the indifference of matter. There was no room for doubt now. Captain MacWhirr pshawed at it, and threw the match down.

The worst was to come, then — and if the books were right this worst would be very bad. The experience of the last six hours had enlarged his conception of what heavy weather could be like. “It’ll be terrific,” he pronounced, mentally. He had not consciously looked at anything by the light of the matches except at the barometer; and yet somehow he had seen that his water-bottle and the two tumblers had been flung out of their stand. It seemed to give him a more intimate knowledge of the tossing the ship had gone through. “I wouldn’t have believed it,” he thought. And his table had been cleared, too; his rulers, his pencils, the inkstand — all the things that had their safe appointed places — they were gone, as if a mischievous hand had plucked them out one by one and flung them on the wet floor. The hurricane had broken in upon the orderly arrangements of his privacy. This had never happened before, and the feeling of dismay reached the very seat of his composure. And the worst was to come yet! He was glad the trouble in the ‘tween-deck had been discovered in time. If the ship had to go after all, then, at least, she wouldn’t be going to the bottom with a lot of people in her fighting teeth and claw. That would have been odious. And in that feeling there was a humane intention and a vague sense of the fitness of things.

These instantaneous thoughts were yet in their essence heavy and slow, partaking of the nature of the man. He extended his hand to put back the matchbox in its corner of the shelf. There were always matches there — by his order. The steward had his instructions impressed upon him long before. “A box . . . just there, see? Not so very

full . . . where I can put my hand on it, steward. Might want a light in a hurry. Can't tell on board ship what you might want in a hurry. Mind, now."

And of course on his side he would be careful to put it back in its place scrupulously. He did so now, but before he removed his hand it occurred to him that perhaps he would never have occasion to use that box any more. The vividness of the thought checked him and for an infinitesimal fraction of a second his fingers closed again on the small object as though it had been the symbol of all these little habits that chain us to the weary round of life. He released it at last, and letting himself fall on the settee, listened for the first sounds of returning wind.

Not yet. He heard only the wash of water, the heavy splashes, the dull shocks of the confused seas boarding his ship from all sides. She would never have a chance to clear her decks.

But the quietude of the air was startlingly tense and unsafe, like a slender hair holding a sword suspended over his head. By this awful pause the storm penetrated the defences of the man and unsealed his lips. He spoke out in the solitude and the pitch darkness of the cabin, as if addressing another being awakened within his breast.

"I shouldn't like to lose her," he said half aloud.

He sat unseen, apart from the sea, from his ship, isolated, as if withdrawn from the very current of his own existence, where such freaks as talking to himself surely had no place. His palms reposed on his knees, he bowed his short neck and puffed heavily, surrendering to a strange sensation of weariness he was not enlightened enough to recognize for the fatigue of mental stress.

From where he sat he could reach the door of a washstand locker. There should have been a towel there. There was. Good. . . . He took it out, wiped his face, and afterwards went on rubbing his wet head. He towelled himself with energy in the dark, and then remained motionless with the towel on his knees. A moment passed, of a stillness so profound that no one could have guessed there was a man sitting in that cabin. Then a murmur arose.

"She may come out of it yet."

When Captain MacWhirr came out on deck, which he did brusquely, as though he had suddenly become conscious of having stayed away too long, the calm had lasted already more than fifteen minutes — long enough to make itself intolerable even to his imagination. Jukes, motionless on the forepart of the bridge, began to speak at once. His voice, blank and forced as though he were talking through hard-set teeth, seemed to flow away on all sides into the darkness, deepening again upon the sea.

"I had the wheel relieved. Hackett began to sing out that he was done. He's lying in there alongside the steering-gear with a face like death. At first I couldn't get anybody to crawl out and relieve the poor devil. That boss'n's worse than no good, I always said. Thought I would have had to go myself and haul out one of them by the neck."

"Ah, well," muttered the Captain. He stood watchful by Jukes' side.

"The second mate's in there, too, holding his head. Is he hurt, sir?"

"No — crazy," said Captain MacWhirr, curtly.

“Looks as if he had a tumble, though.”

“I had to give him a push,” explained the Captain.

Jukes gave an impatient sigh.

“It will come very sudden,” said Captain MacWhirr, “and from over there, I fancy. God only knows though. These books are only good to muddle your head and make you jumpy. It will be bad, and there’s an end. If we only can steam her round in time to meet it. . . .”

A minute passed. Some of the stars winked rapidly and vanished.

“You left them pretty safe?” began the Captain abruptly, as though the silence were unbearable.

“Are you thinking of the coolies, sir? I rigged lifelines all ways across that ‘tween-deck.”

“Did you? Good idea, Mr. Jukes.”

“I didn’t . . . think you cared to . . . know,” said Jukes — the lurching of the ship cut his speech as though somebody had been jerking him around while he talked — “how I got on with . . . that infernal job. We did it. And it may not matter in the end.”

“Had to do what’s fair, for all — they are only Chinamen. Give them the same chance with ourselves — hang it all. She isn’t lost yet. Bad enough to be shut up below in a gale — ”

“That’s what I thought when you gave me the job, sir,” interjected Jukes, moodily.

“ — without being battered to pieces,” pursued Captain MacWhirr with rising vehemence. “Couldn’t let that go on in my ship, if I knew she hadn’t five minutes to live. Couldn’t bear it, Mr. Jukes.”

A hollow echoing noise, like that of a shout rolling in a rocky chasm, approached the ship and went away again. The last star, blurred, enlarged, as if returning to the fiery mist of its beginning, struggled with the colossal depth of blackness hanging over the ship — and went out.

“Now for it!” muttered Captain MacWhirr. “Mr. Jukes.”

“Here, sir.”

The two men were growing indistinct to each other.

“We must trust her to go through it and come out on the other side. That’s plain and straight. There’s no room for Captain Wilson’s storm-strategy here.”

“No, sir.”

“She will be smothered and swept again for hours,” mumbled the Captain. “There’s not much left by this time above deck for the sea to take away — unless you or me.”

“Both, sir,” whispered Jukes, breathlessly.

“You are always meeting trouble half way, Jukes,” Captain MacWhirr remonstrated quaintly. “Though it’s a fact that the second mate is no good. D’ye hear, Mr. Jukes? You would be left alone if. . . .”

Captain MacWhirr interrupted himself, and Jukes, glancing on all sides, remained silent.

“Don’t you be put out by anything,” the Captain continued, mumbling rather fast. “Keep her facing it. They may say what they like, but the heaviest seas run with the wind. Facing it — always facing it — that’s the way to get through. You are a young sailor. Face it. That’s enough for any man. Keep a cool head.”

“Yes, sir,” said Jukes, with a flutter of the heart.

In the next few seconds the Captain spoke to the engine-room and got an answer.

For some reason Jukes experienced an access of confidence, a sensation that came from outside like a warm breath, and made him feel equal to every demand. The distant muttering of the darkness stole into his ears. He noted it unmoved, out of that sudden belief in himself, as a man safe in a shirt of mail would watch a point.

The ship laboured without intermission amongst the black hills of water, paying with this hard tumbling the price of her life. She rumbled in her depths, shaking a white plummet of steam into the night, and Jukes’ thought skimmed like a bird through the engine-room, where Mr. Rout — good man — was ready. When the rumbling ceased it seemed to him that there was a pause of every sound, a dead pause in which Captain MacWhirr’s voice rang out startlingly.

“What’s that? A puff of wind?” — it spoke much louder than Jukes had ever heard it before — ”On the bow. That’s right. She may come out of it yet.”

The mutter of the winds drew near apace. In the forefront could be distinguished a drowsy waking plaint passing on, and far off the growth of a multiple clamour, marching and expanding. There was the throb as of many drums in it, a vicious rushing note, and like the chant of a tramping multitude.

Jukes could no longer see his captain distinctly. The darkness was absolutely piling itself upon the ship. At most he made out movements, a hint of elbows spread out, of a head thrown up.

Captain MacWhirr was trying to do up the top button of his oilskin coat with unwonted haste. The hurricane, with its power to madden the seas, to sink ships, to uproot trees, to overturn strong walls and dash the very birds of the air to the ground, had found this taciturn man in its path, and, doing its utmost, had managed to wring out a few words. Before the renewed wrath of winds swooped on his ship, Captain MacWhirr was moved to declare, in a tone of vexation, as it were: “I wouldn’t like to lose her.”

He was spared that annoyance.

Chapter 6

On A bright sunshiny day, with the breeze chasing her smoke far ahead, the Nan-Shan came into Fu-chau. Her arrival was at once noticed on shore, and the seamen in harbour said: "Look! Look at that steamer. What's that? Siamese — isn't she? Just look at her!"

She seemed, indeed, to have been used as a running target for the secondary batteries of a cruiser. A hail of minor shells could not have given her upper works a more broken, torn, and devastated aspect: and she had about her the worn, weary air of ships coming from the far ends of the world — and indeed with truth, for in her short passage she had been very far; sighting, verily, even the coast of the Great Beyond, whence no ship ever returns to give up her crew to the dust of the earth. She was incrustated and gray with salt to the trucks of her masts and to the top of her funnel; as though (as some facetious seaman said) "the crowd on board had fished her out somewhere from the bottom of the sea and brought her in here for salvage." And further, excited by the felicity of his own wit, he offered to give five pounds for her — "as she stands."

Before she had been quite an hour at rest, a meagre little man, with a red-tipped nose and a face cast in an angry mould, landed from a sampan on the quay of the Foreign Concession, and incontinently turned to shake his fist at her.

A tall individual, with legs much too thin for a rotund stomach, and with watery eyes, strolled up and remarked, "Just left her — eh? Quick work."

He wore a soiled suit of blue flannel with a pair of dirty cricketing shoes; a dingy gray moustache drooped from his lip, and daylight could be seen in two places between the rim and the crown of his hat.

"Hallo! what are you doing here?" asked the ex-second-mate of the Nan-Shan, shaking hands hurriedly.

"Standing by for a job — chance worth taking — got a quiet hint," explained the man with the broken hat, in jerky, apathetic wheezes.

The second shook his fist again at the Nan-Shan. "There's a fellow there that ain't fit to have the command of a scow," he declared, quivering with passion, while the other looked about listlessly.

"Is there?"

But he caught sight on the quay of a heavy seaman's chest, painted brown under a fringed sailcloth cover, and lashed with new manila line. He eyed it with awakened interest.

"I would talk and raise trouble if it wasn't for that damned Siamese flag. Nobody to go to — or I would make it hot for him. The fraud! Told his chief engineer — that's

another fraud for you — I had lost my nerve. The greatest lot of ignorant fools that ever sailed the seas. No! You can't think . . ."

"Got your money all right?" inquired his seedy acquaintance suddenly.

"Yes. Paid me off on board," raged the second mate. "'Get your breakfast on shore,' says he."

"Mean skunk!" commented the tall man, vaguely, and passed his tongue on his lips. "What about having a drink of some sort?"

"He struck me," hissed the second mate.

"No! Struck! You don't say?" The man in blue began to bustle about sympathetically. "Can't possibly talk here. I want to know all about it. Struck — eh? Let's get a fellow to carry your chest. I know a quiet place where they have some bottled beer. . . ."

Mr. Jukes, who had been scanning the shore through a pair of glasses, informed the chief engineer afterwards that "our late second mate hasn't been long in finding a friend. A chap looking uncommonly like a bummer. I saw them walk away together from the quay."

The hammering and banging of the needful repairs did not disturb Captain MacWhirr. The steward found in the letter he wrote, in a tidy chart-room, passages of such absorbing interest that twice he was nearly caught in the act. But Mrs. MacWhirr, in the drawing-room of the forty-pound house, stifled a yawn — perhaps out of self-respect — for she was alone.

She reclined in a plush-bottomed and gilt hammock-chair near a tiled fireplace, with Japanese fans on the mantel and a glow of coals in the grate. Lifting her hands, she glanced wearily here and there into the many pages. It was not her fault they were so prosy, so completely uninteresting — from "My darling wife" at the beginning, to "Your loving husband" at the end. She couldn't be really expected to understand all these ship affairs. She was glad, of course, to hear from him, but she had never asked herself why, precisely.

". . . They are called typhoons . . . The mate did not seem to like it . . . Not in books . . . Couldn't think of letting it go on. . . ."

The paper rustled sharply. ". . . A calm that lasted more than twenty minutes," she read perfunctorily; and the next words her thoughtless eyes caught, on the top of another page, were: "see you and the children again. . . ." She had a movement of impatience. He was always thinking of coming home. He had never had such a good salary before. What was the matter now?

It did not occur to her to turn back overleaf to look. She would have found it recorded there that between 4 and 6 A. M. on December 25th, Captain MacWhirr did actually think that his ship could not possibly live another hour in such a sea, and that he would never see his wife and children again. Nobody was to know this (his letters got mislaid so quickly) — nobody whatever but the steward, who had been greatly impressed by that disclosure. So much so, that he tried to give the cook some idea of the "narrow squeak we all had" by saying solemnly, "The old man himself had a dam' poor opinion of our chance."

“How do you know?” asked, contemptuously, the cook, an old soldier. “He hasn’t told you, maybe?”

“Well, he did give me a hint to that effect,” the steward brazened it out.

“Get along with you! He will be coming to tell me next,” jeered the old cook, over his shoulder.

Mrs. MacWhirr glanced farther, on the alert. “. . . Do what’s fair. . . Miserable objects . . . Only three, with a broken leg each, and one . . . Thought had better keep the matter quiet . . . hope to have done the fair thing. . . .”

She let fall her hands. No: there was nothing more about coming home. Must have been merely expressing a pious wish. Mrs. MacWhirr’s mind was set at ease, and a black marble clock, priced by the local jeweller at 3L. 18s. 6d., had a discreet stealthy tick.

The door flew open, and a girl in the long-legged, short-frocked period of existence, flung into the room.

A lot of colourless, rather lanky hair was scattered over her shoulders. Seeing her mother, she stood still, and directed her pale prying eyes upon the letter.

“From father,” murmured Mrs. MacWhirr. “What have you done with your ribbon?”

The girl put her hands up to her head and pouted.

“He’s well,” continued Mrs. MacWhirr languidly. “At least I think so. He never says.” She had a little laugh. The girl’s face expressed a wandering indifference, and Mrs. MacWhirr surveyed her with fond pride.

“Go and get your hat,” she said after a while. “I am going out to do some shopping. There is a sale at Linom’s.”

“Oh, how jolly!” uttered the child, impressively, in unexpectedly grave vibrating tones, and bounded out of the room.

It was a fine afternoon, with a gray sky and dry sidewalks. Outside the draper’s Mrs. MacWhirr smiled upon a woman in a black mantle of generous proportions armoured in jet and crowned with flowers blooming falsely above a bilious matronly countenance. They broke into a swift little babble of greetings and exclamations both together, very hurried, as if the street were ready to yawn open and swallow all that pleasure before it could be expressed.

Behind them the high glass doors were kept on the swing. People couldn’t pass, men stood aside waiting patiently, and Lydia was absorbed in poking the end of her parasol between the stone flags. Mrs. MacWhirr talked rapidly.

“Thank you very much. He’s not coming home yet. Of course it’s very sad to have him away, but it’s such a comfort to know he keeps so well.” Mrs. MacWhirr drew breath. “The climate there agrees with him,” she added, beamingly, as if poor MacWhirr had been away touring in China for the sake of his health.

Neither was the chief engineer coming home yet. Mr. Rout knew too well the value of a good billet.

“Solomon says wonders will never cease,” cried Mrs. Rout joyously at the old lady in her armchair by the fire. Mr. Rout’s mother moved slightly, her withered hands lying in black half-mittens on her lap.

The eyes of the engineer’s wife fairly danced on the paper. “That captain of the ship he is in — a rather simple man, you remember, mother? — has done something rather clever, Solomon says.”

“Yes, my dear,” said the old woman meekly, sitting with bowed silvery head, and that air of inward stillness characteristic of very old people who seem lost in watching the last flickers of life. “I think I remember.”

Solomon Rout, Old Sol, Father Sol, the Chief, “Rout, good man” — Mr. Rout, the condescending and paternal friend of youth, had been the baby of her many children — all dead by this time. And she remembered him best as a boy of ten — long before he went away to serve his apprenticeship in some great engineering works in the North. She had seen so little of him since, she had gone through so many years, that she had now to retrace her steps very far back to recognize him plainly in the mist of time. Sometimes it seemed that her daughter-in-law was talking of some strange man.

Mrs. Rout junior was disappointed. “H’m. H’m.” She turned the page. “How provoking! He doesn’t say what it is. Says I couldn’t understand how much there was in it. Fancy! What could it be so very clever? What a wretched man not to tell us!”

She read on without further remark soberly, and at last sat looking into the fire. The chief wrote just a word or two of the typhoon; but something had moved him to express an increased longing for the companionship of the jolly woman. “If it hadn’t been that mother must be looked after, I would send you your passage-money to-day. You could set up a small house out here. I would have a chance to see you sometimes then. We are not growing younger. . . .”

“He’s well, mother,” sighed Mrs. Rout, rousing herself.

“He always was a strong healthy boy,” said the old woman, placidly.

But Mr. Jukes’ account was really animated and very full. His friend in the Western Ocean trade imparted it freely to the other officers of his liner. “A chap I know writes to me about an extraordinary affair that happened on board his ship in that typhoon — you know — that we read of in the papers two months ago. It’s the funniest thing! Just see for yourself what he says. I’ll show you his letter.”

There were phrases in it calculated to give the impression of light-hearted, indomitable resolution. Jukes had written them in good faith, for he felt thus when he wrote. He described with lurid effect the scenes in the ‘tween-deck. “. . . It struck me in a flash that those confounded Chinamen couldn’t tell we weren’t a desperate kind of robbers. ‘Tisn’t good to part the Chinaman from his money if he is the stronger party. We need have been desperate indeed to go thieving in such weather, but what could these beggars know of us? So, without thinking of it twice, I got the hands away in a jiffy. Our work was done — that the old man had set his heart on. We cleared out without staying to inquire how they felt. I am convinced that if they had not been so unmercifully shaken, and afraid — each individual one of them — to stand up, we

would have been torn to pieces. Oh! It was pretty complete, I can tell you; and you may run to and fro across the Pond to the end of time before you find yourself with such a job on your hands.”

After this he alluded professionally to the damage done to the ship, and went on thus:

“It was when the weather quieted down that the situation became confoundedly delicate. It wasn’t made any better by us having been lately transferred to the Siamese flag; though the skipper can’t see that it makes any difference — ‘as long as we are on board’ — he says. There are feelings that this man simply hasn’t got — and there’s an end of it. You might just as well try to make a bedpost understand. But apart from this it is an infernally lonely state for a ship to be going about the China seas with no proper consuls, not even a gunboat of her own anywhere, nor a body to go to in case of some trouble.

“My notion was to keep these Johnnies under hatches for another fifteen hours or so; as we weren’t much farther than that from Fu-chau. We would find there, most likely, some sort of a man-of-war, and once under her guns we were safe enough; for surely any skipper of a man-of-war — English, French or Dutch — would see white men through as far as row on board goes. We could get rid of them and their money afterwards by delivering them to their Mandarin or Taotai, or whatever they call these chaps in goggles you see being carried about in sedan-chairs through their stinking streets.

“The old man wouldn’t see it somehow. He wanted to keep the matter quiet. He got that notion into his head, and a steam windlass couldn’t drag it out of him. He wanted as little fuss made as possible, for the sake of the ship’s name and for the sake of the owners — ‘for the sake of all concerned,’ says he, looking at me very hard.

“It made me angry hot. Of course you couldn’t keep a thing like that quiet; but the chests had been secured in the usual manner and were safe enough for any earthly gale, while this had been an altogether fiendish business I couldn’t give you even an idea of.

“Meantime, I could hardly keep on my feet. None of us had a spell of any sort for nearly thirty hours, and there the old man sat rubbing his chin, rubbing the top of his head, and so bothered he didn’t even think of pulling his long boots off.

“‘I hope, sir,’ says I, ‘you won’t be letting them out on deck before we make ready for them in some shape or other.’ Not, mind you, that I felt very sanguine about controlling these beggars if they meant to take charge. A trouble with a cargo of Chinamen is no child’s play. I was dam’ tired, too. ‘I wish,’ said I, ‘you would let us throw the whole lot of these dollars down to them and leave them to fight it out amongst themselves, while we get a rest.’

“‘Now you talk wild, Jukes,’ says he, looking up in his slow way that makes you ache all over, somehow. ‘We must plan out something that would be fair to all parties.’

"I had no end of work on hand, as you may imagine, so I set the hands going, and then I thought I would turn in a bit. I hadn't been asleep in my bunk ten minutes when in rushes the steward and begins to pull at my leg.

"For God's sake, Mr. Jukes, come out! Come on deck quick, sir. Oh, do come out!"

"The fellow scared all the sense out of me. I didn't know what had happened: another hurricane — or what. Could hear no wind.

"The Captain's letting them out. Oh, he is letting them out! Jump on deck, sir, and save us. The chief engineer has just run below for his revolver."

"That's what I understood the fool to say. However, Father Rout swears he went in there only to get a clean pocket-handkerchief. Anyhow, I made one jump into my trousers and flew on deck aft. There was certainly a good deal of noise going on forward of the bridge. Four of the hands with the boss'n were at work abaft. I passed up to them some of the rifles all the ships on the China coast carry in the cabin, and led them on the bridge. On the way I ran against Old Sol, looking startled and sucking at an unlighted cigar.

"Come along," I shouted to him.

"We charged, the seven of us, up to the chart-room. All was over. There stood the old man with his sea-boots still drawn up to the hips and in shirt-sleeves — got warm thinking it out, I suppose. Bun Hin's dandy clerk at his elbow, as dirty as a sweep, was still green in the face. I could see directly I was in for something.

"What the devil are these monkey tricks, Mr. Jukes?" asks the old man, as angry as ever he could be. I tell you frankly it made me lose my tongue. 'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes,' says he, 'do take away these rifles from the men. Somebody's sure to get hurt before long if you don't. Damme, if this ship isn't worse than Bedlam! Look sharp now. I want you up here to help me and Bun Hin's Chinaman to count that money. You wouldn't mind lending a hand, too, Mr. Rout, now you are here. The more of us the better.'

"He had settled it all in his mind while I was having a snooze. Had we been an English ship, or only going to land our cargo of coolies in an English port, like Hong-Kong, for instance, there would have been no end of inquiries and bother, claims for damages and so on. But these Chinamen know their officials better than we do.

"The hatches had been taken off already, and they were all on deck after a night and a day down below. It made you feel queer to see so many gaunt, wild faces together. The beggars stared about at the sky, at the sea, at the ship, as though they had expected the whole thing to have been blown to pieces. And no wonder! They had had a doing that would have shaken the soul out of a white man. But then they say a Chinaman has no soul. He has, though, something about him that is deuced tough. There was a fellow (amongst others of the badly hurt) who had had his eye all but knocked out. It stood out of his head the size of half a hen's egg. This would have laid out a white man on his back for a month: and yet there was that chap elbowing here and there in the crowd and talking to the others as if nothing had been the matter. They made a great hubbub amongst themselves, and whenever the old man showed

his bald head on the foreshore of the bridge, they would all leave off jawing and look at him from below.

“It seems that after he had done his thinking he made that Bun Hin’s fellow go down and explain to them the only way they could get their money back. He told me afterwards that, all the coolies having worked in the same place and for the same length of time, he reckoned he would be doing the fair thing by them as near as possible if he shared all the cash we had picked up equally among the lot. You couldn’t tell one man’s dollars from another’s, he said, and if you asked each man how much money he brought on board he was afraid they would lie, and he would find himself a long way short. I think he was right there. As to giving up the money to any Chinese official he could scare up in Fu-chau, he said he might just as well put the lot in his own pocket at once for all the good it would be to them. I suppose they thought so, too.

“We finished the distribution before dark. It was rather a sight: the sea running high, the ship a wreck to look at, these Chinamen staggering up on the bridge one by one for their share, and the old man still booted, and in his shirt-sleeves, busy paying out at the chartroom door, perspiring like anything, and now and then coming down sharp on myself or Father Rout about one thing or another not quite to his mind. He took the share of those who were disabled himself to them on the No. 2 hatch. There were three dollars left over, and these went to the three most damaged coolies, one to each. We turned-to afterwards, and shovelled out on deck heaps of wet rags, all sorts of fragments of things without shape, and that you couldn’t give a name to, and let them settle the ownership themselves.

“This certainly is coming as near as can be to keeping the thing quiet for the benefit of all concerned. What’s your opinion, you pampered mail-boat swell? The old chief says that this was plainly the only thing that could be done. The skipper remarked to me the other day, ‘There are things you find nothing about in books.’ I think that he got out of it very well for such a stupid man.”

Heart of Darkness

This novella was first published in 1902, but appeared as a three-part series in Blackwood's Magazine in 1899. It is widely regarded as a significant work of English literature and has inspired writers and filmmakers across the world. The story concerns Charles Marlow, an Englishman who took a foreign assignment from a Belgian trading company as a ferry-boat captain in Africa. Heart of Darkness exposes the dark side of European colonization, exploring the three levels of darkness that the protagonist, Marlow, encounters: the darkness of the Congo wilderness, the darkness of the Europeans' cruel treatment of the natives, and the profound darkness within every human being for committing heinous acts of evil.

The 1902 first edition

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The famous Viet Nam war movie inspired by Conrad's novella
A page of the original manuscript

Chapter 1

The *Nellie*, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realize his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns — and even convictions. The Lawyer — the best of old fellows — had, because of his many years and many virtues, the only cushion on deck, and was lying on the only rug. The Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes, and was toying architecturally with the bones. Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. The Director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more somber every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.

Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in the august light of abiding memories. And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, “followed the sea” with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled — the great knights-errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the Golden Hind returning with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen’s Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the Erebus and Terror, bound on other conquests — and that never returned. It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith — the adventurers and the settlers; kings’ ships and the ships of men on ‘Change; captains, admirals, the dark “interlopers” of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned “generals” of East India fleets. Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman lighthouse, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway — a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

“And this also,” said Marlow suddenly, “has been one of the dark places of the earth.”

He was the only man of us who still “followed the sea.” The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them — the ship; and so is their country — the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance; for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as Destiny.

For the rest, after his hours of work, a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him the secret of a whole continent, and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing. The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even; and presently he said, very slow —

“I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago — the other day. . . . Light came out of this river since — you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker — may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine — what d’ye call ‘em? — trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries, — a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been too — used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here — the very end of the world, a sea the color of lead, a sky the color of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina — and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages, — precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay — cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death, — death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here. Oh yes — he did it. Did it very well, too, no doubt, and without thinking much about it either, except afterwards to brag of what he had gone through in his time, perhaps. They were men enough to face the darkness. And perhaps he was cheered by keeping his eye on a chance of promotion to the fleet at Ravenna by-and-by, if he had good friends in Rome and survived the awful climate. Or think of a decent young citizen in a toga — perhaps too much dice, you know — coming out here in the train of some prefect, or tax-gatherer, or trader even, to mend his fortunes. Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him, — all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There’s no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination — you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate.”

He paused.

“Mind,” he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower — ”Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency — the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force — nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind — as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea — something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . .”

He broke off. Flames glided in the river, small green flames, red flames, white flames, pursuing, overtaking, joining, crossing each other — then separating slowly or hastily. The traffic of the great city went on in the deepening night upon the sleepless river. We looked on, waiting patiently — there was nothing else to do till the end of the flood; but it was only after a long silence, when he said, in a hesitating voice, “I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit,” that we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences.

“I don’t want to bother you much with what happened to me personally,” he began, showing in this remark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear; “yet to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me — and into my thoughts. It was somber enough too — and pitiful — not extraordinary in any way — not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light.

“I had then, as you remember, just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas — a regular dose of the East — six years or so, and I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilize you. It was very fine for a time, but after a bit I did get tired of resting. Then I began to look for a ship — I should think the hardest work on earth. But the ships wouldn’t even look at me. And I got tired of that game too.

“Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration.

At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won't talk about that. But there was one yet — the biggest, the most blank, so to speak — that I had a hankering after.

"True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery — a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird — a silly little bird. Then I remembered there was a big concern, a Company for trade on that river. Dash it all! I thought to myself, they can't trade without using some kind of craft on that lot of fresh water — steamboats! Why shouldn't I try to get charge of one? I went on along Fleet Street, but could not shake off the idea. The snake had charmed me.

"You understand it was a Continental concern, that Trading society; but I have a lot of relations living on the Continent, because it's cheap and not so nasty as it looks, they say.

"I am sorry to own I began to worry them. This was already a fresh departure for me. I was not used to get things that way, you know. I always went my own road and on my own legs where I had a mind to go. I wouldn't have believed it of myself; but, then — you see — I felt somehow I must get there by hook or by crook. So I worried them. The men said 'My dear fellow,' and did nothing. Then — would you believe it? — I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work — to get a job. Heavens! Well, you see, the notion drove me. I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul. She wrote: 'It will be delightful. I am ready to do anything, anything for you. It is a glorious idea. I know the wife of a very high personage in the Administration, and also a man who has lots of influence with,' &c., &c. She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat, if such was my fancy.

"I got my appointment — of course; and I got it very quick. It appears the Company had received news that one of their captains had been killed in a scuffle with the natives. This was my chance, and it made me the more anxious to go. It was only months and months afterwards, when I made the attempt to recover what was left of the body, that I heard the original quarrel arose from a misunderstanding about some hens. Yes, two black hens. Fresleven — that was the fellow's name, a Dane — thought himself wronged somehow in the bargain, so he went ashore and started to hammer the chief of the village with a stick. Oh, it didn't surprise me in the least to hear this, and at the

same time to be told that Fresleven was the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs. No doubt he was; but he had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause, you know, and he probably felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect in some way. Therefore he whacked the old nigger mercilessly, while a big crowd of his people watched him, thunderstruck, till some man, — I was told the chief's son, — in desperation at hearing the old chap yell, made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man — and of course it went quite easy between the shoulder-blades. Then the whole population cleared into the forest, expecting all kinds of calamities to happen, while, on the other hand, the steamer Fresleven commanded left also in a bad panic, in charge of the engineer, I believe. Afterwards nobody seemed to trouble much about Fresleven's remains, till I got out and stepped into his shoes. I couldn't let it rest, though; but when an opportunity offered at last to meet my predecessor, the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones. They were all there. The supernatural being had not been touched after he fell. And the village was deserted, the huts gaped black, rotting, all askew within the fallen enclosures. A calamity had come to it, sure enough. The people had vanished. Mad terror had scattered them, men, women, and children, through the bush, and they had never returned. What became of the hens I don't know either. I should think the cause of progress got them, anyhow. However, through this glorious affair I got my appointment, before I had fairly begun to hope for it.

“I flew around like mad to get ready, and before forty-eight hours I was crossing the Channel to show myself to my employers, and sign the contract. In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a whited sepulcher. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade.

“A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar. I slipped through one of these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to. Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me — still knitting with downcast eyes — and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name, and looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all round the walls, on one end a large shining map, marked with all the colors of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red — good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the

center. And the river was there — fascinating — deadly — like a snake. Ough! A door opened, a white-haired secretarial head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. Bon voyage.

“In about forty-five seconds I found myself again in the waiting-room with the compassionate secretary, who, full of desolation and sympathy, made me sign some document. I believe I undertook amongst other things not to disclose any trade secrets. Well, I am not going to.

“I began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy — I don’t know — something not quite right; and I was glad to get out. In the outer room the two women knitted black wool feverishly. People were arriving, and the younger one was walking back and forth introducing them. The old one sat on her chair. Her flat cloth slippers were propped up on a foot-warmer, and a cat reposed on her lap. She wore a starched white affair on her head, had a wart on one cheek, and silver-rimmed spectacles hung on the tip of her nose. She glanced at me above the glasses. The swift and indifferent placidity of that look troubled me. Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being piloted over, and she threw at them the same quick glance of unconcerned wisdom. She seemed to know all about them and about me too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. Ave! Old knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant. Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again — not half, by a long way.

“There was yet a visit to the doctor. ‘A simple formality,’ assured me the secretary, with an air of taking an immense part in all my sorrows. Accordingly a young chap wearing his hat over the left eyebrow, some clerk I suppose, — there must have been clerks in the business, though the house was as still as a house in a city of the dead, — came from somewhere up-stairs, and led me forth. He was shabby and careless, with ink-stains on the sleeves of his jacket, and his cravat was large and billowy, under a chin shaped like the toe of an old boot. It was a little too early for the doctor, so I proposed a drink, and thereupon he developed a vein of joviality. As we sat over our vermouthees he glorified the Company’s business, and by-and-by I expressed casually my surprise at him not going out there. He became very cool and collected all at once. ‘I am not such a fool as I look, quoth Plato to his disciples,’ he said sententiously, emptied his glass with great resolution, and we rose.

“The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of something else the while. ‘Good, good for there,’ he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I

would let him measure my head. Rather surprised, I said Yes, when he produced a thing like calipers and got the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully. He was an unshaven little man in a threadbare coat like a gaberdine, with his feet in slippers, and I thought him a harmless fool. 'I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there,' he said. 'And when they come back, too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them,' he remarked; 'and, moreover, the changes take place inside, you know.' He smiled, as if at some quiet joke. 'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting too.' He gave me a searching glance, and made another note. 'Ever any madness in your family?' he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed. 'Is that question in the interests of science too?' 'It would be,' he said, without taking notice of my irritation, 'interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot, but . . . ' 'Are you an alienist?' I interrupted. 'Every doctor should be — a little,' answered that original, imperturbably. 'I have a little theory which you Messieurs who go out there must help me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my country shall reap from the possession of such a magnificent dependency. The mere wealth I leave to others. Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman coming under my observation. . . .' I hastened to assure him I was not in the least typical. 'If I were,' said I, 'I wouldn't be talking like this with you.' 'What you say is rather profound, and probably erroneous,' he said, with a laugh. 'Avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh? Good-by. Ah! Good-by. Adieu. In the tropics one must before everything keep calm.' . . . He lifted a warning forefinger. . . . 'Du calme, du calme. Adieu.'

The Belgian riverboat Conrad commanded on the upper Congo, 1889

"One thing more remained to do — say good-by to my excellent aunt. I found her triumphant. I had a cup of tea — the last decent cup of tea for many days — and in a room that most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing-room to look, we had a long quiet chat by the fireside. In the course of these confidences it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature — a piece of good fortune for the Company — a man you don't get hold of every day. Good heavens! and I was going to take charge of a two-penny-halfpenny river-steamboat with a penny whistle attached! It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital — you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.

"'You forget, dear Charlie, that the laborer is worthy of his hire,' she said, brightly. It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset.

Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

“After this I got embraced, told to wear flannel, be sure to write often, and so on — and I left. In the street — I don’t know why — a queer feeling came to me that I was an impostor. Odd thing that I, who used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours’ notice, with less thought than most men give to the crossing of a street, had a moment — I won’t say of hesitation, but of startled pause, before this commonplace affair. The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the center of a continent, I were about to set off for the center of the earth.

“I left in a French steamer, and she called in every blamed port they have out there, for, as far as I could see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-house officers. I watched the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you — smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, ‘Come and find out.’ This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there grayish-whitish specks showed up, clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps. Settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pin-heads on the untouched expanse of their background. We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-forsaken wilderness, with a tin shed and a flag-pole lost in it; landed more soldiers — to take care of the custom-house clerks, presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places — trading places — with names like Gran’ Bassam Little Popo, names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister backcloth. The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform somberness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks — these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would

turn up to scare it away. Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long eight-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the eight-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech — and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives — he called them enemies! — hidden out of sight somewhere.

“We gave her her letters (I heard the men in that lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate of three a day) and went on. We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.

“It was upward of thirty days before I saw the mouth of the big river. We anchored off the seat of the government. But my work would not begin till some two hundred miles farther on. So as soon as I could I made a start for a place thirty miles higher up.

“I had my passage on a little sea-going steamer. Her captain was a Swede, and knowing me for a seaman, invited me on the bridge. He was a young man, lean, fair, and morose, with lanky hair and a shuffling gait. As we left the miserable little wharf, he tossed his head contemptuously at the shore. ‘Been living there?’ he asked. I said, ‘Yes.’ ‘Fine lot these government chaps — are they not?’ he went on, speaking English with great precision and considerable bitterness. ‘It is funny what some people will do for a few francs a month. I wonder what becomes of that kind when it goes up country?’ I said to him I expected to see that soon. ‘So-o-o!’ he exclaimed. He shuffled athwart, keeping one eye ahead vigilantly. ‘Don’t be too sure,’ he continued. ‘The other day I took up a man who hanged himself on the road. He was a Swede, too.’ ‘Hanged himself! Why, in God’s name?’ I cried. He kept on looking out watchfully. ‘Who knows? The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps.’

“At last we opened a reach. A rocky cliff appeared, mounds of turned-up earth by the shore, houses on a hill, others, with iron roofs, amongst a waste of excavations, or hanging to the declivity. A continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about

like ants. A jetty projected into the river. A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare. 'There's your Company's station,' said the Swede, pointing to three wooden barrack-like structures on the rocky slope. 'I will send your things up. Four boxes did you say? So. Farewell.'

'I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails. To the left a clump of trees made a shady spot, where dark things seemed to stir feebly. I blinked, the path was steep. A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on.

'A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking. Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly of that ship of war I had seen firing into a continent. It was the same kind of ominous voice; but these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from over the sea. All their meager breasts panted together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages. Behind this raw matter one of the reclaimed, the product of the new forces at work, strolled despondently, carrying a rifle by its middle. He had a uniform jacket with one button off, and seeing a white man on the path, hoisted his weapon to his shoulder with alacrity. This was simple prudence, white men being so much alike at a distance that he could not tell who I might be. He was speedily reassured, and with a large, white, rascally grin, and a glance at his charge, seemed to take me into partnership in his exalted trust. After all, I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings.

'Instead of going up, I turned and descended to the left. My idea was to let that chain-gang get out of sight before I climbed the hill. You know I am not particularly tender; I've had to strike and to fend off. I've had to resist and to attack sometimes — that's only one way of resisting — without counting the exact cost, according to the demands of such sort of life as I had blundered into. I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men — men, I tell you. But

as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther. For a moment I stood appalled, as though by a warning. Finally I descended the hill, obliquely, towards the trees I had seen.

“I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn’t a quarry or a sandpit, anyhow. It was just a hole. It might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do. I don’t know. Then I nearly fell into a very narrow ravine, almost no more than a scar in the hillside. I discovered that a lot of imported drainage-pipes for the settlement had been tumbled in there. There wasn’t one that was not broken. It was a wanton smash-up. At last I got under the trees. My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within than it seemed to me I had stepped into a gloomy circle of some Inferno. The rapids were near, and an uninterrupted, uniform, headlong, rushing noise filled the mournful stillness of the grove, where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved, with a mysterious sound — as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible.

“Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.

“They were dying slowly — it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, — nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air — and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young — almost a boy — but you know with them it’s hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede’s ship’s biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held — there was no other movement and no other glance. He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck — Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge — an ornament — a charm — a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas.

“Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great

weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence. While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink. He lapped out of his hand, then sat up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him, and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breastbone.

“I didn’t want any more loitering in the shade, and I made haste towards the station. When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.

“I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company’s chief accountant, and that all the bookkeeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, ‘to get a breath of fresh air.’ The expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn’t have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser’s dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That’s backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and, later on, I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, ‘I’ve been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.’ This man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order.

“Everything else in the station was in a muddle, — heads, things, buildings. Strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed; a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire set into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory.

“I had to wait in the station for ten days — an eternity. I lived in a hut in the yard, but to be out of the chaos I would sometimes get into the accountant’s office. It was built of horizontal planks, and so badly put together that, as he bent over his high desk, he was barred from neck to heels with narrow strips of sunlight. There was no need to open the big shutter to see. It was hot there too; big flies buzzed fiendishly, and did not sting, but stabbed. I sat generally on the floor, while, of faultless appearance (and even slightly scented), perching on a high stool, he wrote, he wrote. Sometimes he stood up for exercise. When a truckle-bed with a sick man (some invalided agent from up-country) was put in there, he exhibited a gentle annoyance. ‘The groans of this sick person,’ he said, distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate.’

“One day he remarked, without lifting his head, ‘In the interior you will no doubt meet Mr. Kurtz.’ On my asking who Mr. Kurtz was, he said he was a first-class agent; and seeing my disappointment at this information, he added slowly, laying down his pen, ‘He is a very remarkable person.’ Further questions elicited from him that Mr. Kurtz was at present in charge of a trading post, a very important one, in the true ivory-country, at ‘the very bottom of there. Sends in as much ivory as all the others put together. . . .’ He began to write again. The sick man was too ill to groan. The flies buzzed in a great peace.

“Suddenly there was a growing murmur of voices and a great tramping of feet. A caravan had come in. A violent babble of uncouth sounds burst out on the other side of the planks. All the carriers were speaking together, and in the midst of the uproar the lamentable voice of the chief agent was heard ‘giving it up’ tearfully for the twentieth time that day. . . . He rose slowly. ‘What a frightful row,’ he said. He crossed the room gently to look at the sick man, and returning, said to me, ‘He does not hear.’ ‘What! Dead?’ I asked, startled. ‘No, not yet,’ he answered, with great composure. Then, alluding with a toss of the head to the tumult in the station-yard, ‘When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages — hate them to the death.’ He remained thoughtful for a moment. ‘When you see Mr. Kurtz,’ he went on, ‘tell him from me that everything here’ — he glanced at the desk — ‘is very satisfactory. I don’t like to write to him — with those messengers of ours you never know who may get hold of your letter — at that Central Station.’ He stared at me for a moment with his mild, bulging eyes. ‘Oh, he will go far, very far,’ he began again. ‘He will be a somebody in the Administration before long. They, above — the Council in Europe, you know — mean him to be.’

“He turned to his work. The noise outside had ceased, and presently in going out I stopped at the door. In the steady buzz of flies the homeward-bound agent was lying flushed and insensible; the other, bent over his books, was making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions; and fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the still tree-tops of the grove of death.

“Next day I left that station at last, with a caravan of sixty men, for a two-hundred-mile tramp.

“No use telling you much about that. Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat; and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut. The population had cleared out a long time ago. Well, if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to traveling on the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would get empty very soon. Only here the dwellings were gone too. Still I passed through several abandoned villages. There’s something pathetically childish in the ruins of grass walls. Day after day, with the stamp and shuffle of sixty pair of bare feet behind me, each pair under a 60-lb. load. Camp, cook, sleep, strike camp, march.

Now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side. A great silence around and above. Perhaps on some quiet night the tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swelling, a tremor vast, faint; a sound weird, appealing, suggestive, and wild — and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country. Once a white man in an unbuttoned uniform, camping on the path with an armed escort of lank Zanzibaris, very hospitable and festive — not to say drunk. Was looking after the upkeep of the road, he declared. Can't say I saw any road or any upkeep, unless the body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles farther on, may be considered as a permanent improvement. I had a white companion too, not a bad chap, but rather too fleshy and with the exasperating habit of fainting on the hot hillsides, miles away from the least bit of shade and water. Annoying, you know, to hold your own coat like a parasol over a man's head while he is coming-to. I couldn't help asking him once what he meant by coming there at all. 'To make money, of course. What do you think?' he said, scornfully. Then he got fever, and had to be carried in a hammock slung under a pole. As he weighed sixteen stone I had no end of rows with the carriers. They jibbed, ran away, sneaked off with their loads in the night — quite a mutiny. So, one evening, I made a speech in English with gestures, not one of which was lost to the sixty pairs of eyes before me, and the next morning I started the hammock off in front all right. An hour afterwards I came upon the whole concern wrecked in a bush — man, hammock, groans, blankets, horrors. The heavy pole had skinned his poor nose. He was very anxious for me to kill somebody, but there wasn't the shadow of a carrier near. I remembered the old doctor, — 'It would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot.' I felt I was becoming scientifically interesting. However, all that is to no purpose. On the fifteenth day I came in sight of the big river again, and hobbled into the Central Station. It was on a back water surrounded by scrub and forest, with a pretty border of smelly mud on one side, and on the three others inclosed by a crazy fence of rushes. A neglected gap was all the gate it had, and the first glance at the place was enough to let you see the flabby devil was running that show. White men with long staves in their hands appeared languidly from amongst the buildings, strolling up to take a look at me, and then retired out of sight somewhere. One of them, a stout, excitable chap with black mustaches, informed me with great volubility and many digressions, as soon as I told him who I was, that my steamer was at the bottom of the river. I was thunderstruck. What, how, why? Oh, it was 'all right.' The 'manager himself' was there. All quite correct. 'Everybody had behaved splendidly! splendidly!' — 'you must,' he said in agitation, 'go and see the general manager at once. He is waiting!'

"I did not see the real significance of that wreck at once. I fancy I see it now, but I am not sure — not at all. Certainly the affair was too stupid — when I think of it — to be altogether natural. Still. . . . But at the moment it presented itself simply as a confounded nuisance. The steamer was sunk. They had started two days before in a sudden hurry up the river with the manager on board, in charge of some volunteer

skipper, and before they had been out three hours they tore the bottom out of her on stones, and she sank near the south bank. I asked myself what I was to do there, now my boat was lost. As a matter of fact, I had plenty to do in fishing my command out of the river. I had to set about it the very next day. That, and the repairs when I brought the pieces to the station, took some months.

“My first interview with the manager was curious. He did not ask me to sit down after my twenty-mile walk that morning. He was commonplace in complexion, in features, in manners, and in voice. He was of middle size and of ordinary build. His eyes, of the usual blue, were perhaps remarkably cold, and he certainly could make his glance fall on one as trenchant and heavy as an ax. But even at these times the rest of his person seemed to disclaim the intention. Otherwise there was only an indefinable, faint expression of his lips, something stealthy — a smile — not a smile — I remember it, but I can’t explain. It was unconscious, this smile was, though just after he had said something it got intensified for an instant. It came at the end of his speeches like a seal applied on the words to make the meaning of the commonest phrase appear absolutely inscrutable. He was a common trader, from his youth up employed in these parts — nothing more. He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect. He inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust — just uneasiness — nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a . . . a . . . faculty can be. He had no genius for organizing, for initiative, or for order even. That was evident in such things as the deplorable state of the station. He had no learning, and no intelligence. His position had come to him — why? Perhaps because he was never ill . . . He had served three terms of three years out there . . . Because triumphant health in the general rout of constitutions is a kind of power in itself. When he went home on leave he rioted on a large scale — pompously. Jack ashore — with a difference — in externals only. This one could gather from his casual talk. He originated nothing, he could keep the routine going — that’s all. But he was great. He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him. Such a suspicion made one pause — for out there there were no external checks. Once when various tropical diseases had laid low almost every ‘agent’ in the station, he was heard to say, ‘Men who come out here should have no entrails.’ He sealed the utterance with that smile of his, as though it had been a door opening into a darkness he had in his keeping. You fancied you had seen things — but the seal was on. When annoyed at meal-times by the constant quarrels of the white men about precedence, he ordered an immense round table to be made, for which a special house had to be built. This was the station’s mess-room. Where he sat was the first place — the rest were nowhere. One felt this to be his unalterable conviction. He was neither civil nor uncivil. He was quiet. He allowed his ‘boy’ — an overfed young negro from the coast — to treat the white men, under his very eyes, with provoking insolence.

“He began to speak as soon as he saw me. I had been very long on the road. He could not wait. Had to start without me. The up-river stations had to be relieved.

There had been so many delays already that he did not know who was dead and who was alive, and how they got on — and so on, and so on. He paid no attention to my explanations, and, playing with a stick of sealing-wax, repeated several times that the situation was ‘very grave, very grave.’ There were rumors that a very important station was in jeopardy, and its chief, Mr. Kurtz, was ill. Hoped it was not true. Mr. Kurtz was . . . I felt weary and irritable. Hang Kurtz, I thought. I interrupted him by saying I had heard of Mr. Kurtz on the coast. ‘Ah! So they talk of him down there,’ he murmured to himself. Then he began again, assuring me Mr. Kurtz was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company; therefore I could understand his anxiety. He was, he said, ‘very, very uneasy.’ Certainly he fidgeted on his chair a good deal, exclaimed, ‘Ah, Mr. Kurtz!’ broke the stick of sealing-wax and seemed dumbfounded by the accident. Next thing he wanted to know ‘how long it would take to’ . . . I interrupted him again. Being hungry, you know, and kept on my feet too, I was getting savage. ‘How could I tell,’ I said. ‘I hadn’t even seen the wreck yet — some months, no doubt.’ All this talk seemed to me so futile. ‘Some months,’ he said. ‘Well, let us say three months before we can make a start. Yes. That ought to do the affair.’ I flung out of his hut (he lived all alone in a clay hut with a sort of veranda) muttering to myself my opinion of him. He was a chattering idiot. Afterwards I took it back when it was borne in upon me startingly with what extreme nicety he had estimated the time requisite for the ‘affair.’

“I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life. Still, one must look about sometimes; and then I saw this station, these men strolling aimlessly about in the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself sometimes what it all meant. They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word ‘ivory’ rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. By Jove! I’ve never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion.

“Oh, these months! Well, never mind. Various things happened. One evening a grass shed full of calico, cotton prints, beads, and I don’t know what else, burst into a blaze so suddenly that you would have thought the earth had opened to let an avenging fire consume all that trash. I was smoking my pipe quietly by my dismantled steamer, and saw them all cutting capers in the light, with their arms lifted high, when the stout man with mustaches came tearing down to the river, a tin pail in his hand, assured me that everybody was ‘behaving splendidly, splendidly,’ dipped about a quart of water and tore back again. I noticed there was a hole in the bottom of his pail.

“I strolled up. There was no hurry. You see the thing had gone off like a box of matches. It had been hopeless from the very first. The flame had leaped high, driven everybody back, lighted up everything — and collapsed. The shed was already a heap

of embers glowing fiercely. A nigger was being beaten near by. They said he had caused the fire in some way; be that as it may, he was screeching most horribly. I saw him, later on, for several days, sitting in a bit of shade looking very sick and trying to recover himself: afterwards he arose and went out — and the wilderness without a sound took him into its bosom again. As I approached the glow from the dark I found myself at the back of two men, talking. I heard the name of Kurtz pronounced, then the words, ‘take advantage of this unfortunate accident.’ One of the men was the manager. I wished him a good evening. ‘Did you ever see anything like it — eh? it is incredible,’ he said, and walked off. The other man remained. He was a first-class agent, young, gentlemanly, a bit reserved, with a forked little beard and a hooked nose. He was stand-offish with the other agents, and they on their side said he was the manager’s spy upon them. As to me, I had hardly ever spoken to him before. We got into talk, and by-and-by we strolled away from the hissing ruins. Then he asked me to his room, which was in the main building of the station. He struck a match, and I perceived that this young aristocrat had not only a silver-mounted dressing-case but also a whole candle all to himself. Just at that time the manager was the only man supposed to have any right to candles. Native mats covered the clay walls; a collection of spears, assegais, shields, knives was hung up in trophies. The business intrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks — so I had been informed; but there wasn’t a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year — waiting. It seems he could not make bricks without something, I don’t know what — straw maybe. Anyways, it could not be found there, and as it was not likely to be sent from Europe, it did not appear clear to me what he was waiting for. An act of special creation perhaps. However, they were all waiting — all the sixteen or twenty pilgrims of them — for something; and upon my word it did not seem an uncongenial occupation, from the way they took it, though the only thing that ever came to them was disease — as far as I could see. They beguiled the time by backbiting and intriguing against each other in a foolish kind of way. There was an air of plotting about that station, but nothing came of it, of course. It was as unreal as everything else — as the philanthropic pretense of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work. The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account, — but as to effectually lifting a little finger — oh, no. By heavens! there is something after all in the world allowing one man to steal a horse while another must not look at a halter. Steal a horse straight out. Very well. He has done it. Perhaps he can ride. But there is a way of looking at a halter that would provoke the most charitable of saints into a kick.

“I had no idea why he wanted to be sociable, but as we chatted in there it suddenly occurred to me the fellow was trying to get at something — in fact, pumping me. He alluded constantly to Europe, to the people I was supposed to know there — putting leading questions as to my acquaintances in the sepulchral city, and so on. His little eyes glittered like mica discs — with curiosity, — though he tried to keep up a bit of

superciliousness. At first I was astonished, but very soon I became awfully curious to see what he would find out from me. I couldn't possibly imagine what I had in me to make it worth his while. It was very pretty to see how he baffled himself, for in truth my body was full of chills, and my head had nothing in it but that wretched steamboat business. It was evident he took me for a perfectly shameless prevaricator. At last he got angry, and to conceal a movement of furious annoyance, he yawned. I rose. Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber — almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister.

“It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding a half-pint champagne bottle (medical comforts) with the candle stuck in it. To my question he said Mr. Kurtz had painted this — in this very station more than a year ago — while waiting for means to go to his trading-post. ‘Tell me, pray,’ said I, ‘who is this Mr. Kurtz?’

“‘The chief of the Inner Station,’ he answered in a short tone, looking away. ‘Much obliged,’ I said, laughing. ‘And you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Everyone knows that.’ He was silent for a while. ‘He is a prodigy,’ he said at last. ‘He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else. We want,’ he began to declaim suddenly, ‘for the guidance of the cause intrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose.’ ‘Who says that?’ I asked. ‘Lots of them,’ he replied. ‘Some even write that; and so he comes here, a special being, as you ought to know.’ ‘Why ought I to know?’ I interrupted, really surprised. He paid no attention. ‘Yes. To-day he is chief of the best station, next year he will be assistant-manager, two years more and . . . but I dare say you know what he will be in two years’ time. You are of the new gang — the gang of virtue. The same people who sent him specially also recommended you. Oh, don’t say no. I’ve my own eyes to trust.’ Light dawned upon me. My dear aunt’s influential acquaintances were producing an unexpected effect upon that young man. I nearly burst into a laugh. ‘Do you read the Company’s confidential correspondence?’ I asked. He hadn’t a word to say. It was great fun. ‘When Mr. Kurtz,’ I continued severely, ‘is General Manager, you won’t have the opportunity.’

“He blew the candle out suddenly, and we went outside. The moon had risen. Black figures strolled about listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight, the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. ‘What a row the brute makes!’ said the indefatigable man with the mustaches, appearing near us. ‘Serve him right. Transgression — punishment — bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That’s the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future. I was just telling the manager . . .’ He noticed my companion, and became crestfallen all at once. ‘Not in bed yet,’ he said, with a kind of servile heartiness; ‘it’s so natural. Ha! Danger — agitation.’ He vanished. I went on to the river-side, and the other followed me. I heard a scathing murmur at my ear, ‘Heap of muffs — go to.’ The pilgrims could be seen in knots gesticulating, discussing. Several had still their staves in their hands. I verily

believe they took these sticks to bed with them. Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart, — its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life. The hurt nigger moaned feebly somewhere near by, and then fetched a deep sigh that made me mend my pace away from there. I felt a hand introducing itself under my arm. 'My dear sir,' said the fellow, 'I don't want to be misunderstood, and especially by you, who will see Mr. Kurtz long before I can have that pleasure. I wouldn't like him to get a false idea of my disposition. . . .'

"I let him run on, this papier-mache Mephistopheles, and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe. He, don't you see, had been planning to be assistant-manager by-and-by under the present man, and I could see that the coming of that Kurtz had upset them both not a little. He talked precipitately, and I did not try to stop him. I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver — over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a somber gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself. I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from there, and I had heard Mr. Kurtz was in there. I had heard enough about it too — God knows! Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it — no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there. I believed it in the same way one of you might believe there are inhabitants in the planet Mars. I knew once a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea how they looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter something about 'walking on all-fours.' If you as much as smiled, he would — though a man of sixty — offer to fight you. I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies, — which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world — what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose. Well, I went near enough to it by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I became in an instant as much of a pretense as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims. This simply because I had a notion it somehow would be of

help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see — you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream — making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams. . . .”

He was silent for a while.

“. . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence, — that which makes its truth, its meaning — its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream — alone. . . .”

He paused again as if reflecting, then added — ”Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know. . . .”

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clew to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river.

“. . . Yes — I let him run on,” Marlow began again, “and think what he pleased about the powers that were behind me. I did! And there was nothing behind me! There was nothing but that wretched, old, mangled steamboat I was leaning against, while he talked fluently about ‘the necessity for every man to get on.’ ‘And when one comes out here, you conceive, it is not to gaze at the moon.’ Mr. Kurtz was a ‘universal genius,’ but even a genius would find it easier to work with ‘adequate tools — intelligent men.’ He did not make bricks — why, there was a physical impossibility in the way — as I was well aware; and if he did secretarial work for the manager, it was because ‘no sensible man rejects wantonly the confidence of his superiors.’ Did I see it? I saw it. What more did I want? What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work — to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted. There were cases of them down at the coast — cases — piled up — burst — split! You kicked a loose rivet at every second step in that station yard on the hillside. Rivets had rolled into the grove of death. You could fill your pockets with rivets for the trouble of stooping down — and there wasn’t one rivet to be found where it was wanted. We had plates that would do, but nothing to fasten them with. And every week the messenger, a lone negro, letter-bag on shoulder and staff in hand, left our station for the coast. And several times a week a coast caravan came in with trade goods, — ghastly glazed calico that made you shudder only to look at it, glass beads value about a penny a quart, confounded spotted cotton handkerchiefs. And no rivets. Three carriers could have brought all that was wanted to set that steamboat afloat.

“He was becoming confidential now, but I fancy my unresponsive attitude must have exasperated him at last, for he judged it necessary to inform me he feared neither

God nor devil, let alone any mere man. I said I could see that very well, but what I wanted was a certain quantity of rivets — and rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it. Now letters went to the coast every week. . . . ‘My dear sir,’ he cried, ‘I write from dictation.’ I demanded rivets. There was a way — for an intelligent man. He changed his manner; became very cold, and suddenly began to talk about a hippopotamus; wondered whether sleeping on board the steamer (I stuck to my salvage night and day) I wasn’t disturbed. There was an old hippo that had the bad habit of getting out on the bank and roaming at night over the station grounds. The pilgrims used to turn out in a body and empty every rifle they could lay hands on at him. Some even had sat up o’ nights for him. All this energy was wasted, though. ‘That animal has a charmed life,’ he said; ‘but you can say this only of brutes in this country. No man — you apprehend me? — no man here bears a charmed life.’ He stood there for a moment in the moonlight with his delicate hooked nose set a little askew, and his mica eyes glittering without a wink, then, with a curt Good night, he strode off. I could see he was disturbed and considerably puzzled, which made me feel more hopeful than I had been for days. It was a great comfort to turn from that chap to my influential friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steamboat. I clambered on board. She rang under my feet like an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter; she was nothing so solid in make, and rather less pretty in shape, but I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her. No influential friend would have served me better. She had given me a chance to come out a bit — to find out what I could do. No, I don’t like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don’t like work — no man does — but I like what is in the work, — the chance to find yourself. Your own reality — for yourself, not for others — what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means.

“I was not surprised to see somebody sitting aft, on the deck, with his legs dangling over the mud. You see I rather chummed with the few mechanics there were in that station, whom the other pilgrims naturally despised — on account of their imperfect manners, I suppose. This was the foreman — a boiler-maker by trade — a good worker. He was a lank, bony, yellow-faced man, with big intense eyes. His aspect was worried, and his head was as bald as the palm of my hand; but his hair in falling seemed to have stuck to his chin, and had prospered in the new locality, for his beard hung down to his waist. He was a widower with six young children (he had left them in charge of a sister of his to come out there), and the passion of his life was pigeon-flying. He was an enthusiast and a connoisseur. He would rave about pigeons. After work hours he used sometimes to come over from his hut for a talk about his children and his pigeons; at work, when he had to crawl in the mud under the bottom of the steamboat, he would tie up that beard of his in a kind of white serviette he brought for the purpose. It had loops to go over his ears. In the evening he could be seen squatted on the bank rinsing that wrapper in the creek with great care, then spreading it solemnly on a bush to dry.

“I slapped him on the back and shouted, ‘We shall have rivets!’ He scrambled to his feet exclaiming ‘No! Rivets!’ as though he couldn’t believe his ears. Then in a low voice, ‘You . . . eh?’ I don’t know why we behaved like lunatics. I put my finger to the side of my nose and nodded mysteriously. ‘Good for you!’ he cried, snapped his fingers above his head, lifting one foot. I tried a jig. We capered on the iron deck. A frightful clatter came out of that hulk, and the virgin forest on the other bank of the creek sent it back in a thundering roll upon the sleeping station. It must have made some of the pilgrims sit up in their hovels. A dark figure obscured the lighted doorway of the manager’s hut, vanished, then, a second or so after, the doorway itself vanished too. We stopped, and the silence driven away by the stamping of our feet flowed back again from the recesses of the land. The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons, motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence. And it moved not. A deadened burst of mighty splashes and snorts reached us from afar, as though an ichthyosaurus had been taking a bath of glitter in the great river. ‘After all,’ said the boiler-maker in a reasonable tone, ‘why shouldn’t we get the rivets?’ Why not, indeed! I did not know of any reason why we shouldn’t. ‘They’ll come in three weeks,’ I said confidently.

“But they didn’t. Instead of rivets there came an invasion, an infliction, a visitation. It came in sections during the next three weeks, each section headed by a donkey carrying a white man in new clothes and tan shoes, bowing from that elevation right and left to the impressed pilgrims. A quarrelsome band of footsore sulky niggers trod on the heels of the donkeys; a lot of tents, camp-stools, tin boxes, white cases, brown bales would be shot down in the courtyard, and the air of mystery would deepen a little over the muddle of the station. Five such installments came, with their absurd air of disorderly flight with the loot of innumerable outfit shops and provision stores, that, one would think, they were lugging, after a raid, into the wilderness for equitable division. It was an inextricable mess of things decent in themselves but that human folly made look like the spoils of thieving.

“This devoted band called itself the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, and I believe they were sworn to secrecy. Their talk, however, was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the world. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. Who paid the expenses of the noble enterprise I don’t know; but the uncle of our manager was leader of that lot.

“In exterior he resembled a butcher in a poor neighborhood, and his eyes had a look of sleepy cunning. He carried his fat paunch with ostentation on his short legs, and during the time his gang infested the station spoke to no one but his nephew. You

could see these two roaming about all day long with their heads close together in an everlasting confab.

“I had given up worrying myself about the rivets. One’s capacity for that kind of folly is more limited than you would suppose. I said Hang! — and let things slide. I had plenty of time for meditation, and now and then I would give some thought to Kurtz. I wasn’t very interested in him. No. Still, I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all, and how he would set about his work when there.”

Chapter 2

“One evening as I was lying flat on the deck of my steamboat, I heard voices approaching — and there were the nephew and the uncle strolling along the bank. I laid my head on my arm again, and had nearly lost myself in a doze, when somebody said in my ear, as it were: ‘I am as harmless as a little child, but I don’t like to be dictated to. Am I the manager — or am I not? I was ordered to send him there. It’s incredible.’ . . . I became aware that the two were standing on the shore alongside the forepart of the steamboat, just below my head. I did not move; it did not occur to me to move: I was sleepy. ‘It is unpleasant,’ grunted the uncle. ‘He has asked the Administration to be sent there,’ said the other, ‘with the idea of showing what he could do; and I was instructed accordingly. Look at the influence that man must have. Is it not frightful?’ They both agreed it was frightful, then made several bizarre remarks: ‘Make rain and fine weather — one man — the Council — by the nose’ — bits of absurd sentences that got the better of my drowsiness, so that I had pretty near the whole of my wits about me when the uncle said, ‘The climate may do away with this difficulty for you. Is he alone there?’ ‘Yes,’ answered the manager; ‘he sent his assistant down the river with a note to me in these terms: “Clear this poor devil out of the country, and don’t bother sending more of that sort. I had rather be alone than have the kind of men you can dispose of with me.” It was more than a year ago. Can you imagine such impudence!’ ‘Anything since then?’ asked the other, hoarsely. ‘Ivory,’ jerked the nephew; ‘lots of it — prime sort — lots — most annoying, from him.’ ‘And with that?’ questioned the heavy rumble. ‘Invoice,’ was the reply fired out, so to speak. Then silence. They had been talking about Kurtz.

“I was broad awake by this time, but, lying perfectly at ease, remained still, having no inducement to change my position. ‘How did that ivory come all this way?’ growled the elder man, who seemed very vexed. The other explained that it had come with a fleet of canoes in charge of an English half-caste clerk Kurtz had with him; that Kurtz had apparently intended to return himself, the station being by that time bare of goods and stores, but after coming three hundred miles, had suddenly decided to go back, which he started to do alone in a small dug-out with four paddlers, leaving the half-caste to continue down the river with the ivory. The two fellows there seemed astounded at anybody attempting such a thing. They were at a loss for an adequate motive. As to me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse: the dug-out, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home — perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I did not know

the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. His name, you understand, had not been pronounced once. He was 'that man.' The half-caste, who, as far as I could see, had conducted a difficult trip with great prudence and pluck, was invariably alluded to as 'that scoundrel.' The 'scoundrel' had reported that the 'man' had been very ill — had recovered imperfectly. . . . The two below me moved away then a few paces, and strolled back and forth at some little distance. I heard: 'Military post — doctor — two hundred miles — quite alone now — unavoidable delays — nine months — no news — strange rumors.' They approached again, just as the manager was saying, 'No one, as far as I know, unless a species of wandering trader — a pestilential fellow, snapping ivory from the natives.' Who was it they were talking about now? I gathered in snatches that this was some man supposed to be in Kurtz's district, and of whom the manager did not approve. 'We will not be free from unfair competition till one of these fellows is hanged for an example,' he said. 'Certainly,' grunted the other; 'get him hanged! Why not? Anything — anything can be done in this country. That's what I say; nobody here, you understand, here, can endanger your position. And why? You stand the climate — you outlast them all. The danger is in Europe; but there before I left I took care to — ' They moved off and whispered, then their voices rose again. 'The extraordinary series of delays is not my fault. I did my possible.' The fat man sighed, 'Very sad.' 'And the pestiferous absurdity of his talk,' continued the other; 'he bothered me enough when he was here. "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing." Conceive you — that ass! And he wants to be manager! No, it's — ' Here he got choked by excessive indignation, and I lifted my head the least bit. I was surprised to see how near they were — right under me. I could have spat upon their hats. They were looking on the ground, absorbed in thought. The manager was switching his leg with a slender twig; his sagacious relative lifted his head. 'You have been well since you came out this time?' he asked. The other gave a start. 'Who? I? Oh! Like a charm — like a charm. But the rest — oh, my goodness! All sick. They die so quick, too, that I haven't the time to send them out of the country — it's incredible!' 'H'm. Just so,' grunted the uncle. 'Ah! my boy, trust to this — I say, trust to this.' I saw him extend his short flipper of an arm for a gesture that took in the forest, the creek, the mud, the river, — seemed to beckon with a dishonoring flourish before the sunlit face of the land a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart. It was so startling that I leaped to my feet and looked back at the edge of the forest, as though I had expected an answer of some sort to that black display of confidence. You know the foolish notions that come to one sometimes. The high stillness confronted these two figures with its ominous patience, waiting for the passing away of a fantastic invasion.

"They swore aloud together — out of sheer fright, I believe — then pretending not to know anything of my existence, turned back to the station. The sun was low; and leaning forward side by side, they seemed to be tugging painfully uphill their two

ridiculous shadows of unequal length, that trailed behind them slowly over the tall grass without bending a single blade.

“In a few days the Eldorado Expedition went into the patient wilderness, that closed upon it as the sea closes over a diver. Long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals. They, no doubt, like the rest of us, found what they deserved. I did not inquire. I was then rather excited at the prospect of meeting Kurtz very soon. When I say very soon I mean it comparatively. It was just two months from the day we left the creek when we came to the bank below Kurtz’s station.

“Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once — somewhere — far away — in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one’s past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect. I got used to it afterwards; I did not see it any more; I had no time. I had to keep guessing at the channel; I had to discern, mostly by inspiration, the signs of hidden banks; I watched for sunken stones; I was learning to clap my teeth smartly before my heart flew out, when I shaved by a fluke some infernal sly old snag that would have ripped the life out of the tin-pot steamboat and drowned all the pilgrims; I had to keep a look-out for the signs of dead wood we could cut up in the night for next day’s steaming. When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality — the reality, I tell you — fades. The inner truth is hidden — luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tight-ropes for — what is it? half-a-crown a tumble — ”

“Try to be civil, Marlow,” growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.

“I beg your pardon. I forgot the heartache which makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does the price matter, if the trick be well done? You do your tricks very well. And I didn’t do badly either, since I managed not to sink that steamboat on my first trip. It’s a wonder to me yet. Imagine a blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road. I sweated and shivered over that business considerably, I can tell

you. After all, for a seaman, to scrape the bottom of the thing that's supposed to float all the time under his care is the unpardonable sin. No one may know of it, but you never forget the thump — eh? A blow on the very heart. You remember it, you dream of it, you wake up at night and think of it — years after — and go hot and cold all over. I don't pretend to say that steamboat floated all the time. More than once she had to wade for a bit, with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing. We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows — cannibals — in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them. And, after all, they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils. Phoo! I can sniff it now. I had the manager on board and three or four pilgrims with their staves — all complete. Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the skirts of the unknown, and the white men rushing out of a tumble-down hovel, with great gestures of joy and surprise and welcome, seemed very strange, — had the appearance of being held there captive by a spell. The word ivory would ring in the air for a while — and on we went again into the silence, along empty reaches, round the still bends, between the high walls of our winding way, reverberating in hollow claps the ponderous beat of the stern-wheel. Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very lost, and yet it was not altogether depressing, that feeling. After all, if you were small, the grimy beetle crawled on — which was just what you wanted it to do. Where the pilgrims imagined it crawled to I don't know. To some place where they expected to get something, I bet! For me it crawled toward Kurtz — exclusively; but when the steam-pipes started leaking we crawled very slow. The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell. The dawns were heralded by the descent of a chill stillness; the woodcutters slept, their fires burned low; the snapping of a twig would make you start. We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us — who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and

secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand, because we were too far and could not remember, because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign — and no memories.

“The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there — there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were — No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it — this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity — like yours — the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you — you so remote from the night of first ages — could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything — because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valor, rage — who can tell? — but truth — truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder — the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff — with his own inborn strength. Principles? Principles won’t do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags — rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row — is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced. Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe. Who’s that grunting? You wonder I didn’t go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no — I didn’t. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments, be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woollen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes — I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man. And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity — and he had filed teeth too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge. He was useful because he had been instructed; and what he knew was this — that should the water in that transparent thing disappear, the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst, and take a

terrible vengeance. So he sweated and fired up and watched the glass fearfully (with an impromptu charm, made of rags, tied to his arm, and a piece of polished bone, as big as a watch, stuck flatways through his lower lip), while the wooded banks slipped past us slowly, the short noise was left behind, the interminable miles of silence — and we crept on, towards Kurtz. But the snags were thick, the water was treacherous and shallow, the boiler seemed indeed to have a sulky devil in it, and thus neither that fireman nor I had any time to peer into our creepy thoughts.

“Some fifty miles below the Inner Station we came upon a hut of reeds, an inclined and melancholy pole, with the unrecognizable tatters of what had been a flag of some sort flying from it, and a neatly stacked woodpile. This was unexpected. We came to the bank, and on the stack of firewood found a flat piece of board with some faded pencil-writing on it. When deciphered it said: ‘Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously.’ There was a signature, but it was illegible — not Kurtz — a much longer word. ‘Hurry up.’ Where? Up the river? ‘Approach cautiously.’ We had not done so. But the warning could not have been meant for the place where it could be only found after approach. Something was wrong above. But what — and how much? That was the question. We commented adversely upon the imbecility of that telegraphic style. The bush around said nothing, and would not let us look very far, either. A torn curtain of red twill hung in the doorway of the hut, and flapped sadly in our faces. The dwelling was dismantled; but we could see a white man had lived there not very long ago. There remained a rude table — a plank on two posts; a heap of rubbish reposed in a dark corner, and by the door I picked up a book. It had lost its covers, and the pages had been thumbed into a state of extremely dirty softness; but the back had been lovingly stitched afresh with white cotton thread, which looked clean yet. It was an extraordinary find. Its title was, ‘An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship,’ by a man Tower, Towson — some such name — Master in his Majesty’s Navy. The matter looked dreary reading enough, with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures, and the copy was sixty years old. I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands. Within, Towson or Towser was inquiring earnestly into the breaking strain of ships’ chains and tackle, and other such matters. Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real. Such a book being there was wonderful enough; but still more astounding were the notes penciled in the margin, and plainly referring to the text. I couldn’t believe my eyes! They were in cipher! Yes, it looked like cipher. Fancy a man lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it — and making notes — in cipher at that! It was an extravagant mystery.

“I had been dimly aware for some time of a worrying noise, and when I lifted my eyes I saw the wood-pile was gone, and the manager, aided by all the pilgrims, was

shouting at me from the river-side. I slipped the book into my pocket. I assure you to leave off reading was like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship.

“I started the lame engine ahead. ‘It must be this miserable trader — this intruder,’ exclaimed the manager, looking back malevolently at the place we had left. ‘He must be English,’ I said. ‘It will not save him from getting into trouble if he is not careful,’ muttered the manager darkly. I observed with assumed innocence that no man was safe from trouble in this world.

“The current was more rapid now, the steamer seemed at her last gasp, the stern-wheel flopped languidly, and I caught myself listening on tiptoe for the next beat of the boat, for in sober truth I expected the wretched thing to give up every moment. It was like watching the last flickers of a life. But still we crawled. Sometimes I would pick out a tree a little way ahead to measure our progress towards Kurtz by, but I lost it invariably before we got abreast. To keep the eyes so long on one thing was too much for human patience. The manager displayed a beautiful resignation. I fretted and fumed and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would talk openly with Kurtz; but before I could come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored? What did it matter who was manager? One gets sometimes such a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling.

“Towards the evening of the second day we judged ourselves about eight miles from Kurtz’s station. I wanted to push on; but the manager looked grave, and told me the navigation up there was so dangerous that it would be advisable, the sun being very low already, to wait where we were till next morning. Moreover, he pointed out that if the warning to approach cautiously were to be followed, we must approach in daylight — not at dusk, or in the dark. This was sensible enough. Eight miles meant nearly three hours’ steaming for us, and I could also see suspicious ripples at the upper end of the reach. Nevertheless, I was annoyed beyond expression at the delay, and most unreasonably too, since one night more could not matter much after so many months. As we had plenty of wood, and caution was the word, I brought up in the middle of the stream. The reach was narrow, straight, with high sides like a railway cutting. The dusk came gliding into it long before the sun had set. The current ran smooth and swift, but a dumb immobility sat on the banks. The living trees, lashed together by the creepers and every living bush of the undergrowth, might have been changed into stone, even to the slenderest twig, to the lightest leaf. It was not sleep — it seemed unnatural, like a state of trance. Not the faintest sound of any kind could be heard. You looked on amazed, and began to suspect yourself of being deaf — then the night came suddenly, and struck you blind as well. About three in the morning some large fish leaped, and the loud splash made me jump as though a gun had been fired. When the sun rose there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night. It did not shift or drive; it was just there, standing all round you like something solid. At eight or

nine, perhaps, it lifted as a shutter lifts. We had a glimpse of the towering multitude of trees, of the immense matted jungle, with the blazing little ball of the sun hanging over it — all perfectly still — and then the white shutter came down again, smoothly, as if sliding in greased grooves. I ordered the chain, which we had begun to heave in, to be paid out again. Before it stopped running with a muffled rattle, a cry, a very loud cry, as of infinite desolation, soared slowly in the opaque air. It ceased. A complaining clamor, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir under my cap. I don't know how it struck the others: to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this tumultuous and mournful uproar arise. It culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking, which stopped short, leaving us stiffened in a variety of silly attitudes, and obstinately listening to the nearly as appalling and excessive silence. 'Good God! What is the meaning — ?' stammered at my elbow one of the pilgrims, — a little fat man, with sandy hair and red whiskers, who wore side-spring boots, and pink pyjamas tucked into his socks. Two others remained open-mouthed a whole minute, then dashed into the little cabin, to rush out incontinently and stand darting scared glances, with Winchesters at 'ready' in their hands. What we could see was just the steamer we were on, her outlines blurred as though she had been on the point of dissolving, and a misty strip of water, perhaps two feet broad, around her — and that was all. The rest of the world was nowhere, as far as our eyes and ears were concerned. Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind.

"I went forward, and ordered the chain to be hauled in short, so as to be ready to trip the anchor and move the steamboat at once if necessary. 'Will they attack?' whispered an awed voice. 'We will all be butchered in this fog,' murmured another. The faces twitched with the strain, the hands trembled slightly, the eyes forgot to wink. It was very curious to see the contrast of expressions of the white men and of the black fellows of our crew, who were as much strangers to that part of the river as we, though their homes were only eight hundred miles away. The whites, of course greatly discomposed, had besides a curious look of being painfully shocked by such an outrageous row. The others had an alert, naturally interested expression; but their faces were essentially quiet, even those of the one or two who grinned as they hauled at the chain. Several exchanged short, grunting phrases, which seemed to settle the matter to their satisfaction. Their headman, a young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near me. 'Aha!' I said, just for good fellowship's sake. 'Catch 'im,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth — 'catch 'im. Give 'im to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with them?' 'Eat 'im!' he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry: that they must have been growing increasingly hungry for at least this month past. They

had been engaged for six months (I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time — had no inherited experience to teach them as it were), and of course, as long as there was a piece of paper written over in accordance with some farcical law or other made down the river, it didn't enter anybody's head to trouble how they would live. Certainly they had brought with them some rotten hippo-meat, which couldn't have lasted very long, anyway, even if the pilgrims hadn't, in the midst of a shocking hullabaloo, thrown a considerable quantity of it overboard. It looked like a high-handed proceeding; but it was really a case of legitimate self-defense. You can't breathe dead hippo waking, sleeping, and eating, and at the same time keep your precarious grip on existence. Besides that, they had given them every week three pieces of brass wire, each about nine inches long; and the theory was they were to buy their provisions with that currency in river-side villages. You can see how that worked. There were either no villages, or the people were hostile, or the director, who like the rest of us fed out of tins, with an occasional old he-goat thrown in, didn't want to stop the steamer for some more or less recondite reason. So, unless they swallowed the wire itself, or made loops of it to snare the fishes with, I don't see what good their extravagant salary could be to them. I must say it was paid with a regularity worthy of a large and honorable trading company. For the rest, the only thing to eat — though it didn't look eatable in the least — I saw in their possession was a few lumps of some stuff like half-cooked dough, of a dirty lavender color, they kept wrapped in leaves, and now and then swallowed a piece of, but so small that it seemed done more for the looks of the thing than for any serious purpose of sustenance. Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us — they were thirty to five — and have a good tuck in for once, amazes me now when I think of it. They were big powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences, with courage, with strength, even yet, though their skins were no longer glossy and their muscles no longer hard. And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there. I looked at them with a swift quickening of interest — not because it occurred to me I might be eaten by them before very long, though I own to you that just then I perceived — in a new light, as it were — how unwholesome the pilgrims looked, and I hoped, yes, I positively hoped, that my aspect was not so — what shall I say? — so — unappetizing: a touch of fantastic vanity which fitted well with the dream-sensation that pervaded all my days at that time. Perhaps I had a little fever too. One can't live with one's finger everlastingly on one's pulse. I had often 'a little fever,' or a little touch of other things — the playful paw-strokes of the wilderness, the preliminary trifling before the more serious onslaught which came in due course. Yes; I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear — or some kind of primitive honor? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you

may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze. Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thoughts, its somber and brooding ferocity? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly. It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonor, and the perdition of one's soul — than this kind of prolonged hunger. Sad, but true. And these chaps too had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me — the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma, a mystery greater — when I thought of it — than the curious, inexplicable note of desperate grief in this savage clamor that had swept by us on the river-bank, behind the blind whiteness of the fog.

“Two pilgrims were quarreling in hurried whispers as to which bank. ‘Left.’ ‘No, no; how can you? Right, right, of course.’ ‘It is very serious,’ said the manager's voice behind me; ‘I would be desolated if anything should happen to Mr. Kurtz before we came up.’ I looked at him, and had not the slightest doubt he was sincere. He was just the kind of man who would wish to preserve appearances. That was his restraint. But when he muttered something about going on at once, I did not even take the trouble to answer him. I knew, and he knew, that it was impossible. Were we to let go our hold of the bottom, we would be absolutely in the air — in space. We wouldn't be able to tell where we were going to — whether up or down stream, or across — till we fetched against one bank or the other, — and then we wouldn't know at first which it was. Of course I made no move. I had no mind for a smash-up. You couldn't imagine a more deadly place for a shipwreck. Whether drowned at once or not, we were sure to perish speedily in one way or another. ‘I authorize you to take all the risks,’ he said, after a short silence. ‘I refuse to take any,’ I said shortly; which was just the answer he expected, though its tone might have surprised him. ‘Well, I must defer to your judgment. You are captain,’ he said, with marked civility. I turned my shoulder to him in sign of my appreciation, and looked into the fog. How long would it last? It was the most hopeless look-out. The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle. ‘Will they attack, do you think?’ asked the manager, in a confidential tone.

“I did not think they would attack, for several obvious reasons. The thick fog was one. If they left the bank in their canoes they would get lost in it, as we would be if we attempted to move. Still, I had also judged the jungle of both banks quite impenetrable — and yet eyes were in it, eyes that had seen us. The river-side bushes were certainly very thick; but the undergrowth behind was evidently penetrable. However, during the short lift I had seen no canoes anywhere in the reach — certainly not abreast of the steamer. But what made the idea of attack inconceivable to me was the nature of the noise — of the cries we had heard. They had not the fierce character boding of immediate hostile intention. Unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. The glimpse of the steamboat had

for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief. The danger, if any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose. Even extreme grief may ultimately vent itself in violence — but more generally takes the form of apathy. . . .

“You should have seen the pilgrims stare! They had no heart to grin, or even to revile me; but I believe they thought me gone mad — with fright, maybe. I delivered a regular lecture. My dear boys, it was no good bothering. Keep a look-out? Well, you may guess I watched the fog for the signs of lifting as a cat watches a mouse; but for anything else our eyes were of no more use to us than if we had been buried miles deep in a heap of cotton-wool. It felt like it too — choking, warm, stifling. Besides, all I said, though it sounded extravagant, was absolutely true to fact. What we afterwards alluded to as an attack was really an attempt at repulse. The action was very far from being aggressive — it was not even defensive, in the usual sense: it was undertaken under the stress of desperation, and in its essence was purely protective.

“It developed itself, I should say, two hours after the fog lifted, and its commencement was at a spot, roughly speaking, about a mile and a half below Kurtz’s station. We had just floundered and flopped round a bend, when I saw an islet, a mere grassy hummock of bright green, in the middle of the stream. It was the only thing of the kind; but as we opened the reach more, I perceived it was the head of a long sandbank, or rather of a chain of shallow patches stretching down the middle of the river. They were discolored, just awash, and the whole lot was seen just under the water, exactly as a man’s backbone is seen running down the middle of his back under the skin. Now, as far as I did see, I could go to the right or to the left of this. I didn’t know either channel, of course. The banks looked pretty well alike, the depth appeared the same; but as I had been informed the station was on the west side, I naturally headed for the western passage.

“No sooner had we fairly entered it than I became aware it was much narrower than I had supposed. To the left of us there was the long uninterrupted shoal, and to the right a high, steep bank heavily overgrown with bushes. Above the bush the trees stood in serried ranks. The twigs overhung the current thickly, and from distance to distance a large limb of some tree projected rigidly over the stream. It was then well on in the afternoon, the face of the forest was gloomy, and a broad strip of shadow had already fallen on the water. In this shadow we steamed up — very slowly, as you may imagine. I sheered her well inshore — the water being deepest near the bank, as the sounding-pole informed me.

“One of my hungry and forbearing friends was sounding in the bows just below me. This steamboat was exactly like a decked scow. On the deck there were two little teak-wood houses, with doors and windows. The boiler was in the fore-end, and the machinery right astern. Over the whole there was a light roof, supported on stanchions. The funnel projected through that roof, and in front of the funnel a small cabin built of light planks served for a pilot-house. It contained a couch, two camp-stools, a loaded Martini-Henry leaning in one corner, a tiny table, and the steering-wheel. It had a wide

door in front and a broad shutter at each side. All these were always thrown open, of course. I spent my days perched up there on the extreme fore-end of that roof, before the door. At night I slept, or tried to, on the couch. An athletic black belonging to some coast tribe, and educated by my poor predecessor, was the helmsman. He sported a pair of brass earrings, wore a blue cloth wrapper from the waist to the ankles, and thought all the world of himself. He was the most unstable kind of fool I had ever seen. He steered with no end of a swagger while you were by; but if he lost sight of you, he became instantly the prey of an abject funk, and would let that cripple of a steamboat get the upper hand of him in a minute.

“I was looking down at the sounding-pole, and feeling much annoyed to see at each try a little more of it stick out of that river, when I saw my poleman give up the business suddenly, and stretch himself flat on the deck, without even taking the trouble to haul his pole in. He kept hold on it though, and it trailed in the water. At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed. Then I had to look at the river mighty quick, because there was a snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about — thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet — perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! I stepped in quickly to close the shutter on the land side. That fool-helmsman, his hands on the spokes, was lifting his knees high, stamping his feet, champing his mouth, like a reined-in horse. Confound him! And we were staggering within ten feet of the bank. I had to lean right out to swing the heavy shutter, and I saw a face amongst the leaves on the level with my own, looking at me very fierce and steady; and then suddenly, as though a veil had been removed from my eyes, I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes, — the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze color. The twigs shook, swayed, and rustled, the arrows flew out of them, and then the shutter came to. ‘Steer her straight,’ I said to the helmsman. He held his head rigid, face forward; but his eyes rolled, he kept on lifting and setting down his feet gently, his mouth foamed a little. ‘Keep quiet!’ I said in a fury. I might just as well have ordered a tree not to sway in the wind. I darted out. Below me there was a great scuffle of feet on the iron deck; confused exclamations; a voice screamed, ‘Can you turn back?’ I caught shape of a V-shaped ripple on the water ahead. What? Another snag! A fusillade burst out under my feet. The pilgrims had opened with their Winchesters, and were simply squirting lead into that bush. A deuce of a lot of smoke came up and drove slowly forward. I swore at it. Now I couldn’t see the ripple or the snag either. I stood in the doorway, peering, and the arrows came in swarms. They might have been poisoned, but they looked as though they wouldn’t kill a cat. The bush began to howl. Our wood-cutters raised a warlike whoop; the report of a rifle just at my back deafened me. I glanced over my shoulder, and the pilot-house was yet full of noise and smoke when I made a dash at

the wheel. The fool-nigger had dropped everything, to throw the shutter open and let off that Martini-Henry. He stood before the wide opening, glaring, and I yelled at him to come back, while I straightened the sudden twist out of that steamboat. There was no room to turn even if I had wanted to, the snag was somewhere very near ahead in that confounded smoke, there was no time to lose, so I just crowded her into the bank — right into the bank, where I knew the water was deep.

“We tore slowly along the overhanging bushes in a whirl of broken twigs and flying leaves. The fusillade below stopped short, as I had foreseen it would when the squirts got empty. I threw my head back to a glinting whizz that traversed the pilot-house, in at one shutter-hole and out at the other. Looking past that mad helmsman, who was shaking the empty rifle and yelling at the shore, I saw vague forms of men running bent double, leaping, gliding, distinct, incomplete, evanescent. Something big appeared in the air before the shutter, the rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. The side of his head hit the wheel twice, and the end of what appeared a long cane clattered round and knocked over a little camp-stool. It looked as though after wrenching that thing from somebody ashore he had lost his balance in the effort. The thin smoke had blown away, we were clear of the snag, and looking ahead I could see that in another hundred yards or so I would be free to sheer off, away from the bank; but my feet felt so very warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. It was the shaft of a spear that, either thrown or lunged through the opening, had caught him in the side just below the ribs; the blade had gone in out of sight, after making a frightful gash; my shoes were full; a pool of blood lay very still, gleaming dark-red under the wheel; his eyes shone with an amazing luster. The fusillade burst out again. He looked at me anxiously, gripping the spear like something precious, with an air of being afraid I would try to take it away from him. I had to make an effort to free my eyes from his gaze and attend to the steering. With one hand I felt above my head for the line of the steam-whistle, and jerked out screech after screech hurriedly. The tumult of angry and warlike yells was checked instantly, and then from the depths of the woods went out such a tremulous and prolonged wail of mournful fear and utter despair as may be imagined to follow the flight of the last hope from the earth. There was a great commotion in the bush; the shower of arrows stopped, a few dropping shots rang out sharply — then silence, in which the languid beat of the stern-wheel came plainly to my ears. I put the helm hard a-starboard at the moment when the pilgrim in pink pyjamas, very hot and agitated, appeared in the doorway. ‘The manager sends me — ’ he began in an official tone, and stopped short. ‘Good God!’ he said, glaring at the wounded man.

“We two whites stood over him, and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us both. I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some question in an understandable language; but he died without uttering a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle. Only in the very last moment, as though in response

to some sign we could not see, to some whisper we could not hear, he frowned heavily, and that frown gave to his black death-mask an inconceivably somber, brooding, and menacing expression. The luster of inquiring glance faded swiftly into vacant glassiness. 'Can you steer?' I asked the agent eagerly. He looked very dubious; but I made a grab at his arm, and he understood at once I meant him to steer whether or no. To tell you the truth, I was morbidly anxious to change my shoes and socks. 'He is dead,' murmured the fellow, immensely impressed. 'No doubt about it,' said I, tugging like mad at the shoe-laces. 'And, by the way, I suppose Mr. Kurtz is dead as well by this time.'

"For the moment that was the dominant thought. There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had traveled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with. . . . I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to — a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn't say to myself, 'Now I will never see him,' or 'Now I will never shake him by the hand,' but, 'Now I will never hear him.' The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn't I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together? That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words — the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.

"The other shoe went flying unto the devil-god of that river. I thought, 'By Jove! it's all over. We are too late; he has vanished — the gift has vanished, by means of some spear, arrow, or club. I will never hear that chap speak after all,' — and my sorrow had a startling extravagance of emotion, even such as I had noticed in the howling sorrow of these savages in the bush. I couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life. . . . Why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody? Absurd? Well, absurd. Good Lord! mustn't a man ever — Here, give me some tobacco." . . .

There was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared, and Marlow's lean face appeared, worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention; and as he took vigorous draws at his pipe, it seemed to retreat and advance out of the night in the regular flicker of the tiny flame. The match went out.

"Absurd!" he cried. "This is the worst of trying to tell. . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal — you hear — normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be

— exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes. Now I think of it, it is amazing I did not shed tears. I am, upon the whole, proud of my fortitude. I was cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz. Of course I was wrong. The privilege was waiting for me. Oh yes, I heard more than enough. And I was right, too. A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And I heard — him — it — this voice — other voices — all of them were so little more than voices — and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices — even the girl herself — now — ”

He was silent for a long time.

“I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie,” he began suddenly. “Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it — completely. They — the women, I mean — are out of it — should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz saying, ‘My Intended.’ You would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it. And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz! They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this — ah specimen, was impressively bald. The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball — an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and — lo! — he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favorite. Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below the ground in the whole country. ‘Mostly fossil,’ the manager had remarked disparagingly. It was no more fossil than I am; but they call it fossil when it is dug up. It appears these niggers do bury the tusks sometimes — but evidently they couldn’t bury this parcel deep enough to save the gifted Mr. Kurtz from his fate. We filled the steamboat with it, and had to pile a lot on the deck. Thus he could see and enjoy as long as he could see, because the appreciation of this favor had remained with him to the last. You should have heard him say, ‘My ivory.’ Oh yes, I heard him. ‘My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my — ’ everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him — but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible — it was not good for one either — trying to imagine. He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land — I mean literally. You can’t understand. How could you? — with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbors ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums — how can you imagine what particular region of the

first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude — utter solitude without a policeman — by the way of silence, utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong — too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil: the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too much of a devil — I don't know which. Or you may be such a thunderingly exalted creature as to be altogether deaf and blind to anything but heavenly sights and sounds. Then the earth for you is only a standing place — and whether to be like this is your loss or your gain I won't pretend to say. But most of us are neither one nor the other. The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too, by Jove! — breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see? Your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in — your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. And that's difficult enough. Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain — I am trying to account to myself for — for — Mr. Kurtz — for the shade of Mr. Kurtz. This initiated wraith from the back of Nowhere honored me with its amazing confidence before it vanished altogether. This was because it could speak English to me. The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and — as he was good enough to say himself — his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by-and-by I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had intrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance. And he had written it too. I've seen it. I've read it. It was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung, I think. Seventeen pages of close writing he had found time for! But this must have been before his — let us say — nerves, went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which — as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times — were offered up to him — do you understand? — to Mr. Kurtz himself. But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings — we approach them with the might as of a deity,' and so on, and so on. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,' &c., &c. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence — of words — of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last

page, scrawled evidently much later, in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method. It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!' The curious part was that he had apparently forgotten all about that valuable postscriptum, because, later on, when he in a sense came to himself, he repeatedly entreated me to take good care of 'my pamphlet' (he called it), as it was sure to have in the future a good influence upon his career. I had full information about all these things, and, besides, as it turned out, I was to have the care of his memory. I've done enough for it to give me the indisputable right to lay it, if I choose, for an everlasting rest in the dust-bin of progress, amongst all the sweepings and, figuratively speaking, all the dead cats of civilization. But then, you see, I can't choose. He won't be forgotten. Whatever he was, he was not common. He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honor; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings: he had one devoted friend at least, and he had conquered one soul in the world that was neither rudimentary nor tainted with self-seeking. No; I can't forget him, though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully, — I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back — a help — an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me — I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory — like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

"Poor fool! If he had only left that shutter alone. He had no restraint, no restraint — just like Kurtz — a tree swayed by the wind. As soon as I had put on a dry pair of slippers, I dragged him out, after first jerking the spear out of his side, which operation I confess I performed with my eyes shut tight. His heels leaped together over the little door-step; his shoulders were pressed to my breast; I hugged him from behind desperately. Oh! he was heavy, heavy; heavier than any man on earth, I should imagine. Then without more ado I tipped him overboard. The current snatched him as though he had been a wisp of grass, and I saw the body roll over twice before I lost sight of it for ever. All the pilgrims and the manager were then congregated on the awning-deck about the pilot-house, chattering at each other like a flock of excited magpies, and there was a scandalized murmur at my heartless promptitude. What they wanted to keep that body hanging about for I can't guess. Embalm it, maybe. But I had also heard another, and a very ominous, murmur on the deck below. My friends the wood-cutters were likewise scandalized, and with a better show of reason — though I admit that the reason itself was quite inadmissible. Oh, quite! I had made up my mind that if my late helmsman was to be eaten, the fishes alone should have

him. He had been a very second-rate helmsman while alive, but now he was dead he might have become a first-class temptation, and possibly cause some startling trouble. Besides, I was anxious to take the wheel, the man in pink pyjamas showing himself a hopeless duffer at the business.

“This I did directly the simple funeral was over. We were going half-speed, keeping right in the middle of the stream, and I listened to the talk about me. They had given up Kurtz, they had given up the station; Kurtz was dead, and the station had been burnt — and so on — and so on. The red-haired pilgrim was beside himself with the thought that at least this poor Kurtz had been properly revenged. ‘Say! We must have made a glorious slaughter of them in the bush. Eh? What do you think? Say?’ He positively danced, the bloodthirsty little gingery beggar. And he had nearly fainted when he saw the wounded man! I could not help saying, ‘You made a glorious lot of smoke, anyhow.’ I had seen, from the way the tops of the bushes rustled and flew, that almost all the shots had gone too high. You can’t hit anything unless you take aim and fire from the shoulder; but these chaps fired from the hip with their eyes shut. The retreat, I maintained — and I was right — was caused by the screeching of the steam-whistle. Upon this they forgot Kurtz, and began to howl at me with indignant protests.

“The manager stood by the wheel murmuring confidentially about the necessity of getting well away down the river before dark at all events, when I saw in the distance a clearing on the river-side and the outlines of some sort of building. ‘What’s this?’ I asked. He clapped his hands in wonder. ‘The station!’ he cried. I edged in at once, still going half-speed.

“Through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from undergrowth. A long decaying building on the summit was half buried in the high grass; the large holes in the peaked roof gaped black from afar; the jungle and the woods made a background. There was no inclosure or fence of any kind; but there had been one apparently, for near the house half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls. The rails, or whatever there had been between, had disappeared. Of course the forest surrounded all that. The river-bank was clear, and on the water-side I saw a white man under a hat like a cart-wheel beckoning persistently with his whole arm. Examining the edge of the forest above and below, I was almost certain I could see movements — human forms gliding here and there. I steamed past prudently, then stopped the engines and let her drift down. The man on the shore began to shout, urging us to land. ‘We have been attacked,’ screamed the manager. ‘I know — I know. It’s all right,’ yelled back the other, as cheerful as you please. ‘Come along. It’s all right. I am glad.’

“His aspect reminded me of something I had seen — something funny I had seen somewhere. As I maneuvered to get alongside, I was asking myself, ‘What does this fellow look like?’ Suddenly I got it. He looked like a harlequin. His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown holland probably, but it was covered with patches

all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow, — patches on the back, patches on front, patches on elbows, on knees; colored binding round his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers; and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal, because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done. A beardless, boyish face, very fair, no features to speak of, nose peeling, little blue eyes, smiles and frowns chasing each other over that open countenance like sunshine and shadow on a windswept plain. ‘Look out, captain!’ he cried; ‘there’s a snag lodged in here last night.’ What! Another snag? I confess I swore shamefully. I had nearly holed my cripple, to finish off that charming trip. The harlequin on the bank turned his little pug nose up to me. ‘You English?’ he asked, all smiles. ‘Are you?’ I shouted from the wheel. The smiles vanished, and he shook his head as if sorry for my disappointment. Then he brightened up. ‘Never mind!’ he cried encouragingly. ‘Are we in time?’ I asked. ‘He is up there,’ he replied, with a toss of the head up the hill, and becoming gloomy all of a sudden. His face was like the autumn sky, overcast one moment and bright the next.

“When the manager, escorted by the pilgrims, all of them armed to the teeth, had gone to the house, this chap came on board. ‘I say, I don’t like this. These natives are in the bush,’ I said. He assured me earnestly it was all right. ‘They are simple people,’ he added; ‘well, I am glad you came. It took me all my time to keep them off.’ ‘But you said it was all right,’ I cried. ‘Oh, they meant no harm,’ he said; and as I stared he corrected himself, ‘Not exactly.’ Then vivaciously, ‘My faith, your pilot-house wants a clean up!’ In the next breath he advised me to keep enough steam on the boiler to blow the whistle in case of any trouble. ‘One good screech will do more for you than all your rifles. They are simple people,’ he repeated. He rattled away at such a rate he quite overwhelmed me. He seemed to be trying to make up for lots of silence, and actually hinted, laughing, that such was the case. ‘Don’t you talk with Mr. Kurtz?’ I said. ‘You don’t talk with that man — you listen to him,’ he exclaimed with severe exaltation. ‘But now — ’ He waved his arm, and in the twinkling of an eye was in the uttermost depths of despondency. In a moment he came up again with a jump, possessed himself of both my hands, shook them continuously, while he gabbled: ‘Brother sailor . . . honor . . . pleasure . . . delight . . . introduce myself . . . Russian . . . son of an arch-priest . . . Government of Tambov . . . What? Tobacco! English tobacco; the excellent English tobacco! Now, that’s brotherly. Smoke? Where’s a sailor that does not smoke?’

“The pipe soothed him, and gradually I made out he had run away from school, had gone to sea in a Russian ship; ran away again; served some time in English ships; was now reconciled with the arch-priest. He made a point of that. ‘But when one is young one must see things, gather experience, ideas; enlarge the mind.’ ‘Here!’ I interrupted. ‘You can never tell! Here I have met Mr. Kurtz,’ he said, youthfully solemn and reproachful. I held my tongue after that. It appears he had persuaded a Dutch trading-house on the coast to fit him out with stores and goods, and had started for the interior with a light heart, and no more idea of what would happen to him than a baby. He had been wandering about that river for nearly two years alone, cut off

from everybody and everything. 'I am not so young as I look. I am twenty-five,' he said. 'At first old Van Shuyten would tell me to go to the devil,' he narrated with keen enjoyment; 'but I stuck to him, and talked and talked, till at last he got afraid I would talk the hind-leg off his favorite dog, so he gave me some cheap things and a few guns, and told me he hoped he would never see my face again. Good old Dutchman, Van Shuyten. I've sent him one small lot of ivory a year ago, so that he can't call me a little thief when I get back. I hope he got it. And for the rest I don't care. I had some wood stacked for you. That was my old house. Did you see?'

"I gave him Towson's book. He made as though he would kiss me, but restrained himself. 'The only book I had left, and I thought I had lost it,' he said, looking at it ecstatically. 'So many accidents happen to a man going about alone, you know. Canoes get upset sometimes — and sometimes you've got to clear out so quick when the people get angry.' He thumbed the pages. 'You made notes in Russian?' I asked. He nodded. 'I thought they were written in cipher,' I said. He laughed, then became serious. 'I had lots of trouble to keep these people off,' he said. 'Did they want to kill you?' I asked. 'Oh no!' he cried, and checked himself. 'Why did they attack us?' I pursued. He hesitated, then said shamefacedly, 'They don't want him to go.' 'Don't they?' I said, curiously. He nodded a nod full of mystery and wisdom. 'I tell you,' he cried, 'this man has enlarged my mind.' He opened his arms wide, staring at me with his little blue eyes that were perfectly round."

Chapter 3

“I looked at him, lost in astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain — why he did not instantly disappear. ‘I went a little farther,’ he said, ‘then still a little farther — till I had gone so far that I don’t know how I’ll ever get back. Never mind. Plenty time. I can manage. You take Kurtz away quick — quick — I tell you.’ The glamour of youth enveloped his particolored rags, his destitution, his loneliness, the essential desolation of his futile wanderings. For months — for years — his life hadn’t been worth a day’s purchase; and there he was gallantly, thoughtlessly alive, to all appearance indestructible solely by the virtue of his few years and of his unreflecting audacity. I was seduced into something like admiration — like envy. Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk, and with a maximum of privation. If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. It seemed to have consumed all thought of self so completely, that, even while he was talking to you, you forgot that it was he — the man before your eyes — who had gone through these things. I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. He had not meditated over it. It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism. I must say that to me it appeared about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far.

“They had come together unavoidably, like two ships becalmed near each other, and lay rubbing sides at last. I suppose Kurtz wanted an audience, because on a certain occasion, when encamped in the forest, they had talked all night, or more probably Kurtz had talked. ‘We talked of everything,’ he said, quite transported at the recollection. ‘I forgot there was such a thing as sleep. The night did not seem to last an hour. Everything! Everything! . . . Of love too.’ ‘Ah, he talked to you of love!’ I said, much amused. ‘It isn’t what you think,’ he cried, almost passionately. ‘It was in general. He made me see things — things.’

“He threw his arms up. We were on deck at the time, and the headman of my woodcutters, lounging near by, turned upon him his heavy and glittering eyes. I looked around, and I don’t know why, but I assure you that never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and

so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness. 'And, ever since, you have been with him, of course?' I said.

"On the contrary. It appears their intercourse had been very much broken by various causes. He had, as he informed me proudly, managed to nurse Kurtz through two illnesses (he alluded to it as you would to some risky feat), but as a rule Kurtz wandered alone, far in the depths of the forest. 'Very often coming to this station, I had to wait days and days before he would turn up,' he said. 'Ah, it was worth waiting for! — sometimes.' 'What was he doing? exploring or what?' I asked. 'Oh yes, of course,' he had discovered lots of villages, a lake too — he did not know exactly in what direction; it was dangerous to inquire too much — but mostly his expeditions had been for ivory. 'But he had no goods to trade with by that time,' I objected. 'There's a good lot of cartridges left even yet,' he answered, looking away. 'To speak plainly, he raided the country,' I said. He nodded. 'Not alone, surely!' He muttered something about the villages round that lake. 'Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, did he?' I suggested. He fidgeted a little. 'They adored him,' he said. The tone of these words was so extraordinary that I looked at him searchingly. It was curious to see his mingled eagerness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz. The man filled his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions. 'What can you expect?' he burst out; 'he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know — and they had never seen anything like it — and very terrible. He could be very terrible. You can't judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man. No, no, no! Now — just to give you an idea — I don't mind telling you, he wanted to shoot me too one day — but I don't judge him.' 'Shoot you!' I cried. 'What for?' 'Well, I had a small lot of ivory the chief of that village near my house gave me. You see I used to shoot game for them. Well, he wanted it, and wouldn't hear reason. He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country, because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased. And it was true too. I gave him the ivory. What did I care! But I didn't clear out. No, no. I couldn't leave him. I had to be careful, of course, till we got friendly again for a time. He had his second illness then. Afterwards I had to keep out of the way; but I didn't mind. He was living for the most part in those villages on the lake. When he came down to the river, sometimes he would take to me, and sometimes it was better for me to be careful. This man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away. When I had a chance I begged him to try and leave while there was time; I offered to go back with him. And he would say yes, and then he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt; disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people — forget himself — you know.' 'Why! he's mad,' I said. He protested indignantly. Mr. Kurtz couldn't be mad. If I had heard him talk, only two days ago, I wouldn't dare hint at such a thing. . . . I had taken up my binoculars while we talked and was looking at the shore, sweeping the limit of the forest at each side and at the back of the house. The consciousness of there being people in that bush, so silent, so quiet — as silent and quiet as the ruined house on the hill — made me uneasy. There was no sign on

the face of nature of this amazing tale that was not so much told as suggested to me in desolate exclamations, completed by shrugs, in interrupted phrases, in hints ending in deep sighs. The woods were unmoved, like a mask — heavy, like the closed door of a prison — they looked with their air of hidden knowledge, of patient expectation, of unapproachable silence. The Russian was explaining to me that it was only lately that Mr. Kurtz had come down to the river, bringing along with him all the fighting men of that lake tribe. He had been absent for several months — getting himself adored, I suppose — and had come down unexpectedly, with the intention to all appearance of making a raid either across the river or down stream. Evidently the appetite for more ivory had got the better of the — what shall I say? — less material aspirations. However he had got much worse suddenly. ‘I heard he was lying helpless, and so I came up — took my chance,’ said the Russian. ‘Oh, he is bad, very bad.’ I directed my glass to the house. There were no signs of life, but there was the ruined roof, the long mud wall peeping above the grass, with three little square window-holes, no two of the same size; all this brought within reach of my hand, as it were. And then I made a brusque movement, and one of the remaining posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field of my glass. You remember I told you I had been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing — food for thought and also for the vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole. They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way. I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise. I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen — and there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids, — a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and, with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth, was smiling too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber.

“I am not disclosing any trade secrets. In fact the manager said afterwards that Mr. Kurtz’s methods had ruined the district. I have no opinion on that point, but I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being there. They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him — some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can’t say. I think the knowledge came to him at last — only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had

no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude — and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. . . . I put down the glass, and the head that had appeared near enough to be spoken to seemed at once to have leaped away from me into inaccessible distance.

“The admirer of Mr. Kurtz was a bit crestfallen. In a hurried, indistinct voice he began to assure me he had not dared to take these — say, symbols — down. He was not afraid of the natives; they would not stir till Mr. Kurtz gave the word. His ascendancy was extraordinary. The camps of these people surrounded the place, and the chiefs came every day to see him. They would crawl. . . . ‘I don’t want to know anything of the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz,’ I shouted. Curious, this feeling that came over me that such details would be more intolerable than those heads drying on the stakes under Mr. Kurtz’s windows. After all, that was only a savage sight, while I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist — obviously — in the sunshine. The young man looked at me with surprise. I suppose it did not occur to him Mr. Kurtz was no idol of mine. He forgot I hadn’t heard any of these splendid monologues on, what was it? on love, justice, conduct of life — or what not. If it had come to crawling before Mr. Kurtz, he crawled as much as the veriest savage of them all. I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers — and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks. ‘You don’t know how such a life tries a man like Kurtz,’ cried Kurtz’s last disciple. ‘Well, and you?’ I said. ‘I! I! I am a simple man. I have no great thoughts. I want nothing from anybody. How can you compare me to . . .?’ His feelings were too much for speech, and suddenly he broke down. ‘I don’t understand,’ he groaned. ‘I’ve been doing my best to keep him alive, and that’s enough. I had no hand in all this. I have no abilities. There hasn’t been a drop of medicine or a mouthful of invalid food for months here. He was shamefully abandoned. A man like this, with such ideas. Shamefully! Shamefully! I — I — haven’t slept for the last ten nights. . . .’

“His voice lost itself in the calm of the evening. The long shadows of the forest had slipped down hill while we talked, had gone far beyond the ruined hovel, beyond the symbolic row of stakes. All this was in the gloom, while we down there were yet in the sunshine, and the stretch of the river abreast of the clearing glittered in a still and dazzling splendor, with a murky and over-shadowed bend above and below. Not a living soul was seen on the shore. The bushes did not rustle.

“Suddenly round the corner of the house a group of men appeared, as though they had come up from the ground. They waded waist-deep in the grass, in a compact body, bearing an improvised stretcher in their midst. Instantly, in the emptiness of the landscape, a cry arose whose shrillness pierced the still air like a sharp arrow flying straight to the very heart of the land; and, as if by enchantment, streams of human beings — of naked human beings — with spears in their hands, with bows, with shields,

with wild glances and savage movements, were poured into the clearing by the dark-faced and pensive forest. The bushes shook, the grass swayed for a time, and then everything stood still in attentive immobility.

“‘Now, if he does not say the right thing to them we are all done for,’ said the Russian at my elbow. The knot of men with the stretcher had stopped too, half-way to the steamer, as if petrified. I saw the man on the stretcher sit up, lank and with an uplifted arm, above the shoulders of the bearers. ‘Let us hope that the man who can talk so well of love in general will find some particular reason to spare us this time,’ I said. I resented bitterly the absurd danger of our situation, as if to be at the mercy of that atrocious phantom had been a dishonoring necessity. I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. Kurtz — Kurtz — that means short in German — don’t it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life — and death. He looked at least seven feet long. His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide — it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting. He fell back suddenly. The stretcher shook as the bearers staggered forward again, and almost at the same time I noticed that the crowd of savages was vanishing without any perceptible movement of retreat, as if the forest that had ejected these beings so suddenly had drawn them in again as the breath is drawn in a long aspiration.

“Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms — two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine — the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter. The manager bent over him murmuring as he walked beside his head. They laid him down in one of the little cabins — just a room for a bed-place and a camp-stool or two, you know. We had brought his belated correspondence, and a lot of torn envelopes and open letters littered his bed. His hand roamed feebly amongst these papers. I was struck by the fire of his eyes and the composed languor of his expression. It was not so much the exhaustion of disease. He did not seem in pain. This shadow looked satiated and calm, as though for the moment it had had its fill of all the emotions.

“He rustled one of the letters, and looking straight in my face said, ‘I am glad.’ Somebody had been writing to him about me. These special recommendations were turning up again. The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. However, he had enough strength in him — factitious no doubt — to very nearly make an end of us, as you shall hear directly.

“The manager appeared silently in the doorway; I stepped out at once and he drew the curtain after me. The Russian, eyed curiously by the pilgrims, was staring at the shore. I followed the direction of his glance.

“Dark human shapes could be made out in the distance, flitting indistinctly against the gloomy border of the forest, and near the river two bronze figures, leaning on tall spears, stood in the sunlight under fantastic headdresses of spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose. And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

“She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.

“She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water’s edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.

“She turned away slowly, walked on, following the bank, and passed into the bushes to the left. Once only her eyes gleamed back at us in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared.

“‘If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would have tried to shoot her,’ said the man of patches, nervously. ‘I had been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house. She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. I wasn’t decent. At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don’t understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for

me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief. I don't understand. . . . No — it's too much for me. Ah, well, it's all over now.'

"At this moment I heard Kurtz's deep voice behind the curtain, 'Save me! — save the ivory, you mean. Don't tell me. Save me! Why, I've had to save you. You are interrupting my plans now. Sick! Sick! Not so sick as you would like to believe. Never mind. I'll carry my ideas out yet — I will return. I'll show you what can be done. You with your little peddling notions — you are interfering with me. I will return. I . . .'

"The manager came out. He did me the honor to take me under the arm and lead me aside. 'He is very low, very low,' he said. He considered it necessary to sigh, but neglected to be consistently sorrowful. 'We have done all we could for him — haven't we? But there is no disguising the fact, Mr. Kurtz has done more harm than good to the Company. He did not see the time was not ripe for vigorous action. Cautiously, cautiously — that's my principle. We must be cautious yet. The district is closed to us for a time. Deplorable! Upon the whole, the trade will suffer. I don't deny there is a remarkable quantity of ivory — mostly fossil. We must save it, at all events — but look how precarious the position is — and why? Because the method is unsound.' 'Do you,' said I, looking at the shore, 'call it "unsound method"?' 'Without doubt,' he exclaimed, hotly. 'Don't you?' . . . 'No method at all,' I murmured after a while. 'Exactly,' he exulted. 'I anticipated this. Shows a complete want of judgment. It is my duty to point it out in the proper quarter.' 'Oh,' said I, 'that fellow — what's his name? — the brickmaker, will make a readable report for you.' He appeared confounded for a moment. It seemed to me I had never breathed an atmosphere so vile, and I turned mentally to Kurtz for relief — positively for relief. 'Nevertheless I think Mr. Kurtz is a remarkable man,' I said with emphasis. He started, dropped on me a cold heavy glance, said very quietly, 'He was,' and turned his back on me. My hour of favor was over; I found myself lumped along with Kurtz as a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe: I was unsound! Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares.

"I had turned to the wilderness really, not to Mr. Kurtz, who, I was ready to admit, was as good as buried. And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets. I felt an intolerable weight oppressing my breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night. . . . The Russian tapped me on the shoulder. I heard him mumbling and stammering something about 'brother seaman — couldn't conceal — knowledge of matters that would affect Mr. Kurtz's reputation.' I waited. For him evidently Mr. Kurtz was not in his grave; I suspect that for him Mr. Kurtz was one of the immortals. 'Well!' said I at last, 'speak out. As it happens, I am Mr. Kurtz's friend — in a way.'

"He stated with a good deal of formality that had we not been 'of the same profession,' he would have kept the matter to himself without regard to consequences. 'He suspected there was an active ill-will towards him on the part of these white men that — ' 'You are right,' I said, remembering a certain conversation I had overheard. 'The

manager thinks you ought to be hanged.’ He showed a concern at this intelligence which amused me at first. ‘I had better get out of the way quietly,’ he said, earnestly. ‘I can do no more for Kurtz now, and they would soon find some excuse. What’s to stop them? There’s a military post three hundred miles from here.’ ‘Well, upon my word,’ said I, ‘perhaps you had better go if you have any friends amongst the savages near by.’ ‘Plenty,’ he said. ‘They are simple people — and I want nothing, you know.’ He stood biting his lips, then: ‘I don’t want any harm to happen to these whites here, but of course I was thinking of Mr. Kurtz’s reputation — but you are a brother seaman and — ’ ‘All right,’ said I, after a time. ‘Mr. Kurtz’s reputation is safe with me.’ I did not know how truly I spoke.

“He informed me, lowering his voice, that it was Kurtz who had ordered the attack to be made on the steamer. ‘He hated sometimes the idea of being taken away — and then again. . . . But I don’t understand these matters. I am a simple man. He thought it would scare you away — that you would give it up, thinking him dead. I could not stop him. Oh, I had an awful time of it this last month.’ ‘Very well,’ I said. ‘He is all right now.’ ‘Ye-e-es,’ he muttered, not very convinced apparently. ‘Thanks,’ said I; ‘I shall keep my eyes open.’ ‘But quiet — eh?’ he urged, anxiously. ‘It would be awful for his reputation if anybody here — ’ I promised a complete discretion with great gravity. ‘I have a canoe and three black fellows waiting not very far. I am off. Could you give me a few Martini-Henry cartridges?’ I could, and did, with proper secrecy. He helped himself, with a wink at me, to a handful of my tobacco. ‘Between sailors — you know — good English tobacco.’ At the door of the pilot-house he turned round — ’ I say, haven’t you a pair of shoes you could spare?’ He raised one leg. ‘Look.’ The soles were tied with knotted strings sandal-wise under his bare feet. I rooted out an old pair, at which he looked with admiration before tucking it under his left arm. One of his pockets (bright red) was bulging with cartridges, from the other (dark blue) peeped ‘Towson’s Inquiry,’ &c., &c. He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness. ‘Ah! I’ll never, never meet such a man again. You ought to have heard him recite poetry — his own too it was, he told me. Poetry!’ He rolled his eyes at the recollection of these delights. ‘Oh, he enlarged my mind!’ ‘Goodby,’ said I. He shook hands and vanished in the night. Sometimes I ask myself whether I had ever really seen him — whether it was possible to meet such a phenomenon! . . .

“When I woke up shortly after midnight his warning came to my mind with its hint of danger that seemed, in the starred darkness, real enough to make me get up for the purpose of having a look round. On the hill a big fire burned, illuminating fitfully a crooked corner of the station-house. One of the agents with a picket of a few of our blacks, armed for the purpose, was keeping guard over the ivory; but deep within the forest, red gleams that wavered, that seemed to sink and rise from the ground amongst confused columnar shapes of intense blackness, showed the exact position of the camp where Mr. Kurtz’s adorers were keeping their uneasy vigil. The monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration. A steady droning sound of many men chanting each to himself some weird incantation came out

from the black, flat wall of the woods as the humming of bees comes out of a hive, and had a strange narcotic effect upon my half-awake senses. I believe I dozed off leaning over the rail, till an abrupt burst of yells, an overwhelming outbreak of a pent-up and mysterious frenzy, woke me up in a bewildered wonder. It was cut short all at once, and the low droning went on with an effect of audible and soothing silence. I glanced casually into the little cabin. A light was burning within, but Mr. Kurtz was not there.

“I think I would have raised an outcry if I had believed my eyes. But I didn’t believe them at first — the thing seemed so impossible. The fact is I was completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was — how shall I define it? — the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second, and then the usual sense of commonplace, deadly danger, the possibility of a sudden onslaught and massacre, or something of the kind, which I saw impending, was positively welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so much, that I did not raise an alarm.

“There was an agent buttoned up inside an ulster and sleeping on a chair on deck within three feet of me. The yells had not awakened him; he snored very slightly; I left him to his slumbers and leaped ashore. I did not betray Mr. Kurtz — it was ordered I should never betray him — it was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice. I was anxious to deal with this shadow by myself alone, — and to this day I don’t know why I was so jealous of sharing with anyone the peculiar blackness of that experience.

“As soon as I got on the bank I saw a trail — a broad trail through the grass. I remember the exultation with which I said to myself, ‘He can’t walk — he is crawling on all-fours — I’ve got him.’ The grass was wet with dew. I strode rapidly with clenched fists. I fancy I had some vague notion of falling upon him and giving him a drubbing. I don’t know. I had some imbecile thoughts. The knitting old woman with the cat obtruded herself upon my memory as a most improper person to be sitting at the other end of such an affair. I saw a row of pilgrims squirting lead in the air out of Winchesters held to the hip. I thought I would never get back to the steamer, and imagined myself living alone and unarmed in the woods to an advanced age. Such silly things — you know. And I remember I confounded the beat of the drum with the beating of my heart, and was pleased at its calm regularity.

“I kept to the track though — then stopped to listen. The night was very clear: a dark blue space, sparkling with dew and starlight, in which black things stood very still. I thought I could see a kind of motion ahead of me. I was strangely cocksure of everything that night. I actually left the track and ran in a wide semicircle (I verily believe chuckling to myself) so as to get in front of that stir, of that motion I had seen — if indeed I had seen anything. I was circumventing Kurtz as though it had been a boyish game.

“I came upon him, and, if he had not heard me coming, I would have fallen over him too, but he got up in time. He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapor exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me; while at my back the fires loomed between the trees, and the murmur of many voices issued from the forest. I had cut him off cleverly; but when actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses, I saw the danger in its right proportion. It was by no means over yet. Suppose he began to shout? Though he could hardly stand, there was still plenty of vigor in his voice. ‘Go away — hide yourself,’ he said, in that profound tone. It was very awful. I glanced back. We were within thirty yards from the nearest fire. A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns — antelope horns, I think — on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man, no doubt: it looked fiend-like enough. ‘Do you know what you are doing?’ I whispered. ‘Perfectly,’ he answered, raising his voice for that single word: it sounded to me far off and yet loud, like a hail through a speaking-trumpet. ‘If he makes a row we are lost,’ I thought to myself. This clearly was not a case for fisticuffs, even apart from the very natural aversion I had to beat that Shadow — this wandering and tormented thing. ‘You will be lost,’ I said — ‘utterly lost.’ One gets sometimes such a flash of inspiration, you know. I did say the right thing, though indeed he could not have been more irretrievably lost than he was at this very moment, when the foundations of our intimacy were being laid — to endure — to endure — even to the end — even beyond.

“‘I had immense plans,’ he muttered irresolutely. ‘Yes,’ said I; ‘but if you try to shout I’ll smash your head with — ’ There was not a stick or a stone near. ‘I will throttle you for good,’ I corrected myself. ‘I was on the threshold of great things,’ he pleaded, in a voice of longing, with a wistfulness of tone that made my blood run cold. ‘And now for this stupid scoundrel — ’ ‘Your success in Europe is assured in any case,’ I affirmed, steadily. I did not want to have the throttling of him, you understand — and indeed it would have been very little use for any practical purpose. I tried to break the spell — the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness — that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations. And, don’t you see, the terror of the position was not in being knocked on the head — though I had a very lively sense of that danger too — but in this, that I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him — himself his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. I’ve been telling you what we said — repeating the phrases we pronounced, — but what’s the good? They were common everyday words, — the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life.

But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man. And I wasn't arguing with a lunatic either. Believe me or not, his intelligence was perfectly clear — concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity, yet clear; and therein was my only chance — barring, of course, the killing him there and then, which wasn't so good, on account of unavoidable noise. But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had — for my sins, I suppose — to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it, — I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. I kept my head pretty well; but when I had him at last stretched on the couch, I wiped my forehead, while my legs shook under me as though I had carried half a ton on my back down that hill. And yet I had only supported him, his bony arm clasped round my neck — and he was not much heavier than a child.

“When next day we left at noon, the crowd, of whose presence behind the curtain of trees I had been acutely conscious all the time, flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies. I steamed up a bit, then swung down-stream, and two thousand eyes followed the evolutions of the splashing, thumping, fierce river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail and breathing black smoke into the air. In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the fierce river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a mangy skin with a pendent tail — something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the response of some satanic litany.

“We had carried Kurtz into the pilot-house: there was more air there. Lying on the couch, he stared through the open shutter. There was an eddy in the mass of human bodies, and the woman with helmeted head and tawny cheeks rushed out to the very brink of the stream. She put out her hands, shouted something, and all that wild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterance.

“‘Do you understand this?’ I asked.

“He kept on looking out past me with fiery, longing eyes, with a mingled expression of wistfulness and hate. He made no answer, but I saw a smile, a smile of indefinable meaning, appear on his colorless lips that a moment after twitched convulsively. ‘Do I not?’ he said slowly, gasping, as if the words had been torn out of him by a supernatural power.

“I pulled the string of the whistle, and I did this because I saw the pilgrims on deck getting out their rifles with an air of anticipating a jolly lark. At the sudden screech

there was a movement of abject terror through that wedged mass of bodies. 'Don't! Don't you frighten them away,' cried someone on deck disconsolately. I pulled the string time after time. They broke and ran, they leaped, they crouched, they swerved, they dodged the flying terror of the sound. The three red chaps had fallen flat, face down on the shore, as though they had been shot dead. Only the barbarous and superb woman did not so much as flinch, and stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the somber and glittering river.

"And then that imbecile crowd down on the deck started their little fun, and I could see nothing more for smoke.

"The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down towards the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress; and Kurtz's life was running swiftly too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time. The manager was very placid, he had no vital anxieties now, he took us both in with a comprehensive and satisfied glance: the 'affair' had come off as well as could be wished. I saw the time approaching when I would be left alone of the party of 'unsound method.' The pilgrims looked upon me with disfavor. I was, so to speak, numbered with the dead. It is strange how I accepted this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares forced upon me in the tenebrous land invaded by these mean and greedy phantoms.

"Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart. Oh, he struggled! he struggled! The wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy images now — images of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously round his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression. My Intended, my station, my career, my ideas — these were the subjects for the occasional utterances of elevated sentiments. The shade of the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow sham, whose fate it was to be buried presently in the mold of primeval earth. But both the diabolic love and the unearthly hate of the mysteries it had penetrated fought for the possession of that soul satiated with primitive emotions, avid of lying fame, of sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power.

"Sometimes he was contemptibly childish. He desired to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things. 'You show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,' he would say. 'Of course you must take care of the motives — right motives — always.' The long reaches that were like one and the same reach, monotonous bends that were exactly alike, slipped past the steamer with their multitude of secular trees looking patiently after this grimy fragment of another world, the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings. I looked ahead — piloting. 'Close the shutter,' said Kurtz suddenly one day; 'I can't bear to look at this.' I did so. There was a silence. 'Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!' he cried at the invisible wilderness.

"We broke down — as I had expected — and had to lie up for repairs at the head of an island. This delay was the first thing that shook Kurtz's confidence. One morning

he gave me a packet of papers and a photograph, — the lot tied together with a shoe-string. ‘Keep this for me,’ he said. ‘This noxious fool’ (meaning the manager) ‘is capable of prying into my boxes when I am not looking.’ In the afternoon I saw him. He was lying on his back with closed eyes, and I withdrew quietly, but I heard him mutter, ‘Live rightly, die, die . . .’ I listened. There was nothing more. Was he rehearsing some speech in his sleep, or was it a fragment of a phrase from some newspaper article? He had been writing for the papers and meant to do so again, ‘for the furthering of my ideas. It’s a duty.’

“His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines. But I had not much time to give him, because I was helping the engine-driver to take to pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting-rod, and in other such matters. I lived in an infernal mess of rust, filings, nuts, bolts, spanners, hammers, ratchet-drills — things I abominate, because I don’t get on with them. I tended the little forge we fortunately had aboard; I toiled wearily in a wretched scrap-heap — unless I had the shakes too bad to stand.

“One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, ‘I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.’ The light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, ‘Oh, nonsense!’ and stood over him as if transfixed.

“Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn’t touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror — of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, — he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath —

“‘The horror! The horror!’

“I blew the candle out and left the cabin. The pilgrims were dining in the mess-room, and I took my place opposite the manager, who lifted his eyes to give me a questioning glance, which I successfully ignored. He leaned back, serene, with that peculiar smile of his sealing the unexpressed depths of his meanness. A continuous shower of small flies streamed upon the lamp, upon the cloth, upon our hands and faces. Suddenly the manager’s boy put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of scathing contempt —

“‘Mistah Kurtz — he dead.’

“All the pilgrims rushed out to see. I remained, and went on with my dinner. I believe I was considered brutally callous. However, I did not eat much. There was a lamp in there — light, don’t you know — and outside it was so beastly, beastly dark. I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there? But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole.

“And then they very nearly buried me.

“However, as you see, I did not go to join Kurtz there and then. I did not. I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more. Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is — that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself — that comes too late — a crop of unextinguishable regrets. I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable grayness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamor, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid skepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be. I was within a hair’s-breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up — he had judged. ‘The horror!’ He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candor, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth — the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it is not my own extremity I remember best — a vision of grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things — even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps I like to think my summing-up would not have been a word of careless contempt. Better his cry — much better. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond, when a long time after I heard once more, not his own voice, but the echo of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal.

“No, they did not bury me, though there is a period of time which I remember mistily, with a shuddering wonder, like a passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire. I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretense, because I felt so

sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend. I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance. I dare say I was not very well at that time. I tottered about the streets — there were various affairs to settle — grinning bitterly at perfectly respectable persons. I admit my behavior was inexcusable, but then my temperature was seldom normal in these days. My dear aunt's endeavors to 'nurse up my strength' seemed altogether beside the mark. It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing. I kept the bundle of papers given me by Kurtz, not knowing exactly what to do with it. His mother had died lately, watched over, as I was told, by his Intended. A clean-shaved man, with an official manner and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, called on me one day and made inquiries, at first circuitous, afterwards suavely pressing, about what he was pleased to denominate certain 'documents.' I was not surprised, because I had had two rows with the manager on the subject out there. I had refused to give up the smallest scrap out of that package, and I took the same attitude with the spectacled man. He became darkly menacing at last, and with much heat argued that the Company had the right to every bit of information about its 'territories.' And, said he, 'Mr. Kurtz's knowledge of unexplored regions must have been necessarily extensive and peculiar — owing to his great abilities and to the deplorable circumstances in which he had been placed: therefore' — I assured him Mr. Kurtz's knowledge, however extensive, did not bear upon the problems of commerce or administration. He invoked then the name of science. 'It would be an incalculable loss if,' &c., &c. I offered him the report on the 'Suppression of Savage Customs,' with the postscriptum torn off. He took it up eagerly, but ended by sniffing at it with an air of contempt. 'This is not what we had a right to expect,' he remarked. 'Expect nothing else,' I said. 'There are only private letters.' He withdrew upon some threat of legal proceedings, and I saw him no more; but another fellow, calling himself Kurtz's cousin, appeared two days later, and was anxious to hear all the details about his dear relative's last moments. Incidentally he gave me to understand that Kurtz had been essentially a great musician. 'There was the making of an immense success,' said the man, who was an organist, I believe, with lank gray hair flowing over a greasy coat-collar. I had no reason to doubt his statement; and to this day I am unable to say what was Kurtz's profession, whether he ever had any — which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for the papers, or else for a journalist who could paint — but even the cousin (who took snuff during the interview) could not tell me what he had been — exactly. He was a universal genius — on that point I agreed with the old chap, who thereupon blew his nose noisily into a large cotton handkerchief and withdrew in senile agitation, bearing off some family letters and memoranda without importance. Ultimately a journalist anxious to know something of the fate of his 'dear colleague' turned up. This visitor informed me Kurtz's proper sphere ought to have

been politics 'on the popular side.' He had furry straight eyebrows, bristly hair cropped short, an eye-glass on a broad ribbon, and, becoming expansive, confessed his opinion that Kurtz really couldn't write a bit — 'but heavens! how that man could talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith — don't you see? — he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything — anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party.' 'What party?' I asked. 'Any party,' answered the other. 'He was an — an — extremist.' Did I not think so? I assented. Did I know, he asked, with a sudden flash of curiosity, 'what it was that had induced him to go out there?' 'Yes,' said I, and forthwith handed him the famous Report for publication, if he thought fit. He glanced through it hurriedly, mumbling all the time, judged 'it would do,' and took himself off with this plunder.

"Thus I was left at last with a slim packet of letters and the girl's portrait. She struck me as beautiful — I mean she had a beautiful expression. I know that the sunlight can be made to lie too, yet one felt that no manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features. She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself. I concluded I would go and give her back her portrait and those letters myself. Curiosity? Yes; and also some other feeling perhaps. All that had been Kurtz's had passed out of my hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only his memory and his Intended — and I wanted to give that up too to the past, in a way, — to surrender personally all that remained of him with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate. I don't defend myself. I had no clear perception of what it was I really wanted. Perhaps it was an impulse of unconscious loyalty, or the fulfillment of one of these ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence. I don't know. I can't tell. But I went.

"I thought his memory was like the other memories of the dead that accumulate in every man's life, — a vague impress on the brain of shadows that had fallen on it in their swift and final passage; but before the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery, I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived — a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter the house with me — the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshipers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart — the heart of a conquering darkness. It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush which, it seemed to me, I would have to keep back alone for the salvation of another soul. And the memory of what I had heard him say afar there, with the horned shapes stirring at my back, in the glow of fires, within the patient woods, those broken phrases came back to me, were heard again in their ominous and terrifying simplicity. I remembered his abject pleading, his

abject threats, the colossal scale of his vile desires, the meanness, the torment, the tempestuous anguish of his soul. And later on I seemed to see his collected languid manner, when he said one day, 'This lot of ivory now is really mine. The Company did not pay for it. I collected it myself at a very great personal risk. I am afraid they will try to claim it as theirs though. H'm. It is a difficult case. What do you think I ought to do — resist? Eh? I want no more than justice.' . . . He wanted no more than justice — no more than justice. I rang the bell before a mahogany door on the first floor, and while I waited he seemed to stare at me out of the glassy panel — stare with that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe. I seemed to hear the whispered cry, 'The horror! The horror!'

"The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner, with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a somber and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened — closed. I rose.

"She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. It was more than a year since his death, more than a year since the news came; she seemed as though she would remember and mourn for ever. She took both my hands in hers and murmured, 'I had heard you were coming.' I noticed she was not very young — I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. She carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, 'I — I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves. But while we were still shaking hands, such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And, by Jove! the impression was so powerful that for me too he seemed to have died only yesterday — nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time — his death and her sorrow — I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together — I heard them together. She had said, with a deep catch of the breath, 'I have survived;' while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing-up whisper of his eternal condemnation. I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold. She motioned me to a chair. We sat down. I laid the packet gently on the little table, and she put her hand over it. . . . 'You knew him well,' she murmured, after a moment of mourning silence.

"'Intimacy grows quick out there,' I said. 'I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.'

“‘And you admired him,’ she said. ‘It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?’

“‘He was a remarkable man,’ I said, unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze, that seemed to watch for more words on my lips, I went on, ‘It was impossible not to — ’

“‘Love him,’ she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. ‘How true! how true! But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.’

“‘You knew him best,’ I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love.

“‘You were his friend,’ she went on. ‘His friend,’ she repeated, a little louder. ‘You must have been, if he had given you this, and sent you to me. I feel I can speak to you — and oh! I must speak. I want you — you who have heard his last words — to know I have been worthy of him. . . . It is not pride. . . . Yes! I am proud to know I understood him better than anyone on earth — he told me so himself. And since his mother died I have had no one — no one — to — to — ’

“I listened. The darkness deepened. I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle. I rather suspect he wanted me to take care of another batch of his papers which, after his death, I saw the manager examining under the lamp. And the girl talked, easing her pain in the certitude of my sympathy; she talked as thirsty men drink. I had heard that her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people. He wasn’t rich enough or something. And indeed I don’t know whether he had not been a pauper all his life. He had given me some reason to infer that it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there.

“‘. . . Who was not his friend who had heard him speak once?’ she was saying. ‘He drew men towards him by what was best in them.’ She looked at me with intensity. ‘It is the gift of the great,’ she went on, and the sound of her low voice seemed to have the accompaniment of all the other sounds, full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow, I had ever heard — the ripple of the river, the sighing of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of wild crowds, the faint ring of incomprehensible words cried from afar, the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness. ‘But you have heard him! You know!’ she cried.

“‘Yes, I know,’ I said with something like despair in my heart, but bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her — from which I could not even defend myself.

“‘What a loss to me — to us!’ — she corrected herself with beautiful generosity; then added in a murmur, ‘To the world.’ By the last gleams of twilight I could see the glitter of her eyes, full of tears — of tears that would not fall.

“‘I have been very happy — very fortunate — very proud,’ she went on. ‘Too fortunate. Too happy for a little while. And now I am unhappy for — for life.’

“She stood up; her fair hair seemed to catch all the remaining light in a glimmer of gold. I rose too.

“‘And of all this,’ she went on, mournfully, ‘of all his promise, and of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains — nothing but a memory. You and I — ’

“‘We shall always remember him,’ I said, hastily.

“‘No!’ she cried. ‘It is impossible that all this should be lost — that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing — but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them too — I could not perhaps understand, — but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words, at least, have not died.’

“‘His words will remain,’ I said.

“‘And his example,’ she whispered to herself. ‘Men looked up to him, — his goodness shone in every act. His example — ’

“‘True,’ I said; ‘his example too. Yes, his example. I forgot that.’

“‘But I do not. I cannot — I cannot believe — not yet. I cannot believe that I shall never see him again, that nobody will see him again, never, never, never.’

“She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them black and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window. Never see him! I saw him clearly enough then. I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live, and I shall see her too, a tragic and familiar Shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness. She said suddenly very low, ‘He died as he lived.’

“‘His end,’ said I, with dull anger stirring in me, ‘was in every way worthy of his life.’

“‘And I was not with him,’ she murmured. My anger subsided before a feeling of infinite pity.

“‘Everything that could be done — ’ I mumbled.

“‘Ah, but I believed in him more than anyone on earth — more than his own mother, more than — himself. He needed me! Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance.’

“‘I felt like a chill grip on my chest. ‘Don’t,’ I said, in a muffled voice.

“‘Forgive me. I — I — have mourned so long in silence — in silence. . . . You were with him — to the last? I think of his loneliness. Nobody near to understand him as I would have understood. Perhaps no one to hear. . . .’

“‘To the very end,’ I said, shakily. ‘I heard his very last words. . . .’

I stopped in a fright.

“‘Repeat them,’ she said in a heart-broken tone. ‘I want — I want — something — something — to — to live with.’

“I was on the point of crying at her, ‘Don’t you hear them?’ The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. ‘The horror! The horror!’

“‘His last word — to live with,’ she murmured. ‘Don’t you understand I loved him — I loved him — I loved him!’

“I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.

“‘The last word he pronounced was — your name.’

“I heard a light sigh, and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. ‘I knew it — I was sure!’ . . . She knew. She was sure. I heard her weeping; she had hidden her face in her hands. It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn’t he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn’t. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark — too dark altogether. . . .”

Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha. Nobody moved for a time. “We have lost the first of the ebb,” said the Director, suddenly. I raised my head. The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky — seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.

Romance

By Joseph Conrad and F. M. Hueffer
Conrad with his wife at their Ashford home

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Elsie and Jessie

“C’est toi qui dors dans Vombre, O sacré Souvenir.”

If we could have remembrance now

And see, as in the days to come

We shall, what’s venturous in these hours:

The swift, intangible romance of fields at home,

The gleams of sun, the showers,

Our workaday contentments, or our powers

To fare still forward through the uncharted haze

Of present days. . . .

For, looking back when years shall flow

Upon this olden day that’s now,

We’ll see, romantic in dimm’d hours,

These memories of ours.

Part 1 — The Quarry and the Beach

Chapter 1

To yesterday and to to-day I say my polite “vaya usted con Dios.” What are these days to me? But that far-off day of my romance, when from between the blue and white bales in Don Ramon’s darkened storeroom, at Kingston, I saw the door open before the figure of an old man with the tired, long, white face, that day I am not likely to forget. I remember the chilly smell of the typical West Indian store, the indescribable smell of damp gloom, of locos, of pimento, of olive oil, of new sugar, of new rum; the glassy double sheen of Ramon’s great spectacles, the piercing eyes in the mahogany face, while the tap, tap, tap of a cane on the flags went on behind the inner door; the click of the latch; the stream of light. The door, petulantly thrust inwards, struck against some barrels. I remember the rattling of the bolts on that door, and the tall figure that appeared there, snuffbox in hand. In that land of white clothes, that precise, ancient, Castilian in black was something to remember. The black cane that had made the tap, tap, tap dangled by a silken cord from the hand whose delicate blue-veined, wrinkled wrist ran back into a foam of lawn ruffles. The other hand paused in the act of conveying a pinch of snuff to the nostrils of the hooked nose that had, on the skin stretched tight over the bridge, the polish of old ivory; the elbow pressing the black cocked-hat against the side; the legs, one bent, the other bowing a little back — this was the attitude of Seraphina’s father.

Having imperiously thrust the door of the inner room open, he remained immovable, with no intention of entering, and called in a harsh, aged voice: “Señor Ramon! Señor Ramon!” and then twice: “Sera-phina — Seraphina!” turning his head back.

Then for the first time I saw Seraphina, looking over her father’s shoulder. I remember her face on that day; her eyes were gray — the gray of black, not of blue. For a moment they looked me straight in the face, reflectively, unconcerned, and then travelled to the spectacles of old Ramon.

This glance — remember I was young on that day — had been enough to set me wondering what they were thinking of me; what they could have seen of me.

“But there he is — your Señor Ramon,” she said to her father, as if she were chiding him for a petulance in calling; “your sight is not very good, my poor little father — there he is, your Ramon.”

The warm reflection of the light behind her, gilding the curve of her face from ear to chin, lost itself in the shadows of black lace falling from dark hair that was not quite black. She spoke as if the words clung to her lips; as if she had to put them forth delicately for fear of damaging the frail things. She raised her long hand to a white

flower that clung above her ear like the pen of a clerk, and disappeared. Ramon hurried with a stiffness of immense respect towards the ancient grandee. The door swung to.

I remained alone. The blue bales and the white, and the great red oil jars loomed in the dim light filtering through the jalousies out of the blinding sunlight of Jamaica. A moment after, the door opened once more and a young man came out to me; tall, slim, with very bright, very large black eyes aglow in an absolute pallor of face. That was Carlos Riego.

Well, that is my yesterday of romance, for the many things that have passed between those times and now have become dim or have gone out of my mind. And my day before yesterday was the day on which I, at twenty-two, stood looking at myself in the tall glass, the day on which I left my home in Kent and went, as chance willed it, out to sea with Carlos Riego.

That day my cousin Rooksby had become engaged to my sister Veronica, and I had a fit of jealous misery. I was rawboned, with fair hair, I had a good skin, tanned by the weather, good teeth, and brown eyes. I had not had a very happy life, and I had lived shut in on myself, thinking of the wide world beyond my reach, that seemed to hold out infinite possibilities of romance, of adventure, of love, perhaps, and stores of gold. In the family my mother counted; my father did not. She was the daughter of a Scottish earl who had ruined himself again and again. He had been an inventor, a projector, and my mother had been a poor beauty, brought up on the farm we still lived on — the last rag of land that had remained to her father. Then she had married a good man in his way; a good enough catch; moderately well off, very amiable, easily influenced, a dilettante, and a bit of a dreamer, too. He had taken her into the swim of the Regency, and his purse had not held out. So my mother, asserting herself, had insisted upon a return to our farm, which had been her dowry. The alternative would have been a shabby, ignominious life at Calais, in the shadow of Brummel and such.

My father used to sit all day by the fire, inscribing "ideas" every now and then in a pocket-book. I think he was writing an epic poem, and I think he was happy in an ineffectual way. He had thin red hair, untidy for want of a valet, a shining, delicate, hooked nose, narrow-lidded blue eyes, and a face with the colour and texture of a white-heart cherry. He used to spend his days in a hooded chair. My mother managed everything, leading an out-of-door life which gave her face the colour of a wrinkled pippin. It was the face of a Roman mother, tight-lipped, brown-eyed, and fierce. You may understand the kind of woman she was from the hands she employed on the farm. They were smugglers and night-malefactors to a man — and she liked that. The decent, slow-witted, gently devious type of rustic could not live under her. The neighbours round declared that the Lady Mary Kemp's farm was a hotbed of disorder. I expect it was, too; three of our men were hung up at Canterbury on one day — for horse-stealing and arson... Anyhow, that was my mother. As for me, I was under her, and, since I had my aspirations, I had a rather bitter childhood. And I had others to contrast myself with. First there was Rooksby: a pleasant, well-spoken, amiable young squire of the immediate neighbourhood; young Sir Ralph, a man popular with all sorts,

and in love with my sister Veronica from early days. Veronica was very beautiful, and very gentle, and very kind; tall, slim, with sloping white shoulders and long white arms, hair the colour of amber, and startled blue eyes — a good mate for Rooksby. Rooksby had foreign relations, too. The uncle from whom he inherited the Priory had married a Riego, a Castilian, during the Peninsular war. He had been a prisoner at the time — he had died in Spain, I think. When Ralph made the grand tour, he had made the acquaintance of his Spanish relations; he used to talk about them, the Riegos, and Veronica used to talk of what he said of them until they came to stand for Romance, the romance of the outer world, to me. One day, a little before Ralph and Veronica became engaged, these Spaniards descended out of the blue. It was Romance suddenly dangled right before my eyes. It was Romance; you have no idea what it meant to me to talk to Carlos Riego.

Rooksby was kind enough. He had me over to the Priory, where I made the acquaintance of the two maiden ladies, his second cousins, who kept house for him. Yes, Ralph was kind; but I rather hated him for it, and was a little glad when he, too, had to suffer some of the pangs of jealousy — jealousy of Carlos Riego.

Carlos was dark, and of a grace to set Ralph as much in the shade as Ralph himself set me; and Carlos had seen a deal more of the world than Ralph. He had a foreign sense of humour that made him forever ready to sacrifice his personal dignity. It made Veronica laugh, and even drew a grim smile from my mother; but it gave Ralph bad moments. How he came into these parts was a little of a mystery. When Ralph was displeased with this Spanish connection he used to swear that Carlos had cut a throat or taken a purse. At other times he used to say that it was a political matter. In fine, Carlos had the hospitality of the Priory, and the title of Count when he chose to use it. He brought with him a short, pousy, bearded companion, half friend, half servant, who said he had served in Napoleon's Spanish contingent, and had a way of striking his breast with a wooden hand (his arm had suffered in a cavalry charge), and exclaiming, "I, Tomas Castro! . . ." He was an Andalusian.

For myself, the first shock of his strangeness over-come, I adored Carlos, and Veronica liked him, and laughed at him, till one day he said good-by and rode off along the London road, followed by his Tomas Castro. I had an intense longing to go with him out into the great world that brooded all round our foothills.

You are to remember that I knew nothing whatever of that great world. I had never been further away from our farm than just to Canterbury school, to Hythe market, to Romney market. Our farm nestled down under the steep, brown downs, just beside the Roman road to Canterbury; Stone Street — the Street — we called it. Ralph's land was just on the other side of the Street, and the shepherds on the downs used to see of nights a dead-and-gone Rooksby, Sir Peter that was, ride upon it past the quarry with his head under his arm. I don't think I believed in him, but I believed in the smugglers who shared the highway with that horrible ghost. It is impossible for any one nowadays-to conceive the effect these smugglers had upon life thereabouts and then. They were the power to which everything else deferred. They used to overrun

the country in great bands, and brooked no interference with their business. Not long before they had defeated regular troops in a pitched battle on the Marsh, and on the very day I went away I remember we couldn't do our carting because the smugglers had given us notice they would need our horses in the evening. They were a power in the land where there was violence enough without them, God knows! Our position on that Street put us in the midst of it all. At dusk we shut our doors, pulled down our blinds, sat round the fire, and knew pretty well what was going on outside. There would be long whistles in the dark, and when we found men lurking in our barns we feigned not to see them — it was safer so. The smugglers — the Free Traders, they called themselves — were as well organized for helping malefactors out of the country as for running goods in; so it came about that we used to have comers and forgers, murderers and French spies — all sorts of malefactors — hiding in our straw throughout the day, wait-for the whistle to blow from the Street at dusk. I, born with my century, was familiar with these things; but my mother forbade my meddling with them. I expect she knew enough herself — all the resident gentry did. But Ralph — though he was to some extent of the new school, and used to boast that, if applied to, he “would grant a warrant against any Free Trader” — never did, as a matter of fact, or not for many years.

Carlos, then, Rooksby's Spanish kinsman, had come and gone, and I envied him his going, with his air of mystery, to some far-off lawless adventures — perhaps over there in Spain, where there were war and rebellion. Shortly afterwards Rooksby proposed for the hand of Veronica and was accepted — by my mother. Veronica went about looking happy. That upset me, too. It seemed unjust that she should go out into the great world — to Bath, to Brighton, should see the Prince Regent and the great fights on Hounslow Heath — whilst I was to remain forever a farmer's boy. That afternoon I was upstairs, looking at the reflection of myself in the tall glass, wondering miserably why I seemed to be such an oaf.

The voice of Rooksby hailed me suddenly from downstairs. “Hey, John — John Kemp; come down, I say!”

I started away from the glass as if I had been taken in an act of folly. Rooksby was flicking his leg with his switch in the doorway, at the bottom of the narrow flight of stairs.

He wanted to talk to me, he said, and I followed him out through the yard on to the soft road that climbs the hill to westward. The evening was falling slowly and mournfully; it was dark already in the folds of the sombre downs.

We passed the corner of the orchard. “I know what you've got to tell me,” I said. “You're going to marry Veronica. Well, you've no need of my blessing. Some people have all the luck. Here am I . . . look at me!”

Ralph walked with his head bent down.

“Confound it,” I said, “I shall run away to sea! I tell you, I'm rotting, rotting! There! I say, Ralph, give me Carlos' direction...” I caught hold of his arm. “I'll go after him. He'd show me a little life. He said he would.”

Ralph remained lost in a kind of gloomy abstraction, while I went on worrying him for Carlos' address.

"Carlos is the only soul I know outside five miles from here. Besides, he's friends in the Indies. That's where I want to go, and he could give me a cast. You remember what Tomas Castro said. . . ."

Rooksby came to a sudden halt, and began furiously to switch his corded legs.

"Curse Carlos, and his Castro, too. They'll have me in jail betwixt them. They're both in my red barn, if you want their direction. . . ."

He hurried on suddenly up the hill, leaving me gazing upwards at him. When I caught him up he was swearing — as one did in those days — and stamping his foot in the middle of the road.

"I tell you," he said violently, "it's the most accursed business! That Castro, with his Cuba, is nothing but a blasted buccaneer... and Carlos is no better. They go to Liverpool for a passage to Jamaica, and see what comes of it!"

It seems that on Liverpool docks, in the owl-light, they fell in with an elderly hunk just returned from West Indies, who asks the time at the door of a shipping agent. Castro pulls out a watch, and the old fellow jumps on it, vows it's his own, taken from him years before by some picaroons on his outward voyage. Out from the agent's comes another, and swears that Castro is one of the self-same crew. He himself purported to be the master of the very ship. Afterwards — in the solitary dusk among the ropes and bales — there had evidently been some play with knives, and it ended with a flight to London, and then down to Rooksby's red barn, with the runners in full cry after them.

"Think of it," Rooksby said, "and me a justice, and... oh, it drives me wild, this hole-and-corner work! There's a filthy muddle with the Free Traders — a whistle to blow after dark at the quarry. To-night of all nights, and me a justice... and as good as a married man!"

I looked at him wonderingly in the dusk; his high coat collar almost hid his face, and his hat was pressed down over his eyes. The thing seemed incredible to me. Here was an adventure, and I was shocked to see that Rooksby was in a pitiable state about it.

"But, Ralph," I said, "I would help Carlos."

"Oh, you," he said fretfully. "You want to run your head into a noose; that's what it comes to. Why, I may have to flee the country. There's the red-breasts poking their noses into every cottage on the Ashford road." He strode on again. A wisp of mist came stealing down the hill. "I can't give my cousin up. He could be smuggled out, right enough. But then I should have to get across salt water, too, for at least a year. Why — — —"

He seemed ready to tear his hair, and then I put in my say. He needed a little persuasion, though, in spite of Veronica.

I should have to meet Carlos Riego and Castro in a little fir-wood above the quarry, in half an hour's time. All I had to do was to whistle three bars of "Lillibulero," as a signal. A connection had been already arranged with the Free Traders on the road

beside the quarry, and they were coming down that night, as we knew well enough, both of us. They were coming in force from Canterbury way down to the Marsh. It had cost Ralph a pretty penny; but, once in the hands of the smugglers, his cousin and Castro would be safe enough from the runners; it would have needed a troop of horse to take them. The difficulty was that of late the smugglers themselves had become demoralized. There were ugly rumours of it; and there was a danger that Castro and Carlos, if not looked after, might end their days in some marsh-dyke. It was desirable that someone well known in our parts should see them to the seashore. A boat, there, was to take them out into the bay, where an outward-bound West Indiaman would pick them up. But for Ralph's fear for his neck, which had increased in value since its devotion to Veronica, he would have squired his cousin. As it was, he fluttered round the idea of letting me take his place. Finally he settled it; and I embarked on a long adventure.

Chapter 2

Between moonrise and sunset I was stumbling through the bracken of the little copse that was like a tuft of hair on the brow of the great white quarry. It was quite dark, in among the trees. I made the circuit of the copse, whistling softly my three bars of “Lillibulero.” Then I plunged into it. The bracken underfoot rustled and rustled. I came to a halt. A little bar of light lay on the horizon in front of me, almost colourless. It was crossed again and again by the small fir-trunks that were little more than wands. A woodpigeon rose with a sudden crash of sound, flapping away against the branches. My pulse was dancing with delight — my heart, too. It was like a game of hide-and-seek, and yet it was life at last. Everything grew silent again and I began to think I had missed my time. Down below in the plain, a great way off, a dog was barking continuously. I moved forward a few paces and whistled. The glow of adventure began to die away. There was nothing at all — a little mystery of light on the tree-trunks.

I moved forward again, getting back towards the road. Against the glimmer of dead light I thought I caught the outlines of a man’s hat down among the tossing lines of the bracken. I whispered loudly:

“Carlos! Carlos!”

There was a moment of hoarse whispering; a sudden gruff sound. A shaft of blazing yellow light darted from the level of the ground into my dazed eyes. A man sprang at me and thrust something cold and knobby into my neckcloth. The light continued to blaze into my eyes; it moved upwards and shone on a red waistcoat dashed with gilt buttons. I was being arrested... “In the King’s name...” It was a most sudden catastrophe. A hand was clutching my windpipe.

“Don’t you so much as squeak, Mr. Castro,” a voice whispered in my ear.

The lantern light suddenly died out, and I heard whispers.

“Get him out on to the road... I’ll tackle the other . . . Darbies. . . . Mind his knife.”

I was like a confounded rabbit in their hands. One of them had his fist on my collar and jerked me out upon the hard road. We rolled down the embankment, but he was on the top. It seemed an abominable episode, a piece of bad faith on the part of fate. I ought to have been exempt from these sordid haps, but the man’s hot leathery hand on my throat was like a foretaste of the other collar. And I was horribly afraid — horribly — of the sort of mysterious potency of the laws that these men represented, and I could think of nothing to do.

We stood in a little slanting cutting in the shadow. A watery light before the moon’s rising slanted downwards from the hilltop along the opposite bank. We stood in utter silence.

“If you stir a hair,” my captor said coolly, “I’ll squeeze the blood out of your throat, like a rotten orange.”

He had the calmness of one dealing with an everyday incident; yet the incident was — it should have been — tremendous. We stood waiting silently for an eternity, as one waits for a hare to break covert before the beaters. From down the long hill came a small sound of horses’ hoofs — a sound like the beating of the heart, intermittent — a muffled thud on turf, and a faint clink of iron. It seemed to die away unheard by the runner beside me. Presently there was a crackling of the short pine branches, a rustle, and a hoarse whisper said from above:

“Other’s cleared, Thorns. Got that one safe?”

“All serene.”

The man from above dropped down into the road, a clumsy, cloaked figure. He turned his lanthorn upon me, in a painful yellow glare.

“What! ‘Tis the young ‘un,” he grunted, after a moment. “Read the warrant, Thorns.”

My captor began to fumble in his pocket, pulled out a paper, and bent down into the light. Suddenly he paused and looked up at me.

“This ain’t — — — Mr. Lilly white, I don’t believe this ain’t a Jack Spaniard.”

The clinks of bits and stirrup-irons came down in a waft again.

“That be hanged for a tale, Thorns,” the man with the lanthorn said sharply. “If this here ain’t Riego — or the other — I’ll . . .”

I began to come out of my stupor.

“My name’s John Kemp,” I said.

The other grunted. “Hurry up, Thorns.”

“But, Mr. Lillywhite,” Thorns reasoned, “he don’t speak like a Dago. Split me if he do! And we ain’t in a friendly country either, you know that. We can’t afford to rile the gentry!”

I plucked up courage.

“You’ll get your heads broke,” I said, “if you wait much longer. Hark to that!”

The approaching horses had turned off the turf on to the hard road; the steps of first one and then another sounded out down the silent hill. I knew it was the Free Traders from that; for except between banks they kept to the soft roadsides as if it were an article of faith. The noise of hoofs became that of an army.

The runners began to consult. The shadow called Thorns was for bolting across country; but Lilly white was not built for speed. Besides he did not know the lie of the land, and believed the Free Traders were mere bogeys.

“They’ll never touch us,” Lillywhite grumbled. “We’ve a warrant... King’s name...” He was flashing his lanthorn aimlessly up the hill.

“Besides,” he began again, “we’ve got this gallus bird. If he’s not a Spaniard, he knows all about them. I heard him. Kemp he may be, but he spoke Spanish up there... and we’ve got something for our trouble. He’ll swing, I’ll lay you a — — — ”

From far above us came a shout, then a confused noise of voices. The moon began to get up; above the cutting the clouds had a fringe of sudden silver. A horseman, cloaked and muffled to the ears, trotted warily towards us.

“What’s up?” he hailed from a matter of ten yards. “What are you showing that glim for? Anything wrong below?”

The runners kept silence; we heard the click of a pistol lock.

“In the King’s name,” Lillywhite shouted, “get off that nag and lend a hand! We’ve a prisoner.”

The horseman gave an incredulous whistle, and then began to shout, his voice winding mournfully uphill, “Hallo! Hallo — o — o.” An echo stole back, “Hallo! Hallo — o — o”; then a number of voices. The horse stood, drooping its head, and the man turned in his saddle. “Runners,” he shouted, “Bow Street runners! Come along, come along, boys! We’ll roast ‘em... Runners! Runners!”

The sound of heavy horses at a jolting trot came to our ears.

“We’re in for it,” Lillywhite grunted. “D — — — n this county of Kent.”

Thorns never loosed his hold of my collar. At the steep of the hill the men and horses came into sight against the white sky, a confused crowd of ominous things.

“Turn that lanthorn off’n me,” the horseman said. “Don’t you see you frighten my horse? Now, boys, get round them. . . .”

The great horses formed an irregular half-circle round us; men descended clumsily, like sacks of corn. The lanthorn was seized and flashed upon us; there was a confused hubbub. I caught my own name.

“Yes, I’m Kemp... John Kemp,” I called. “I’m true blue.”

“Blue be hanged!” a voice shouted back. “What be you a-doing with runners?”

The riot went on — forty or fifty voices. The runners were seized; several hands caught at me. It was impossible to make myself heard; a fist struck me on the cheek.

“Gibbet ‘em,” somebody shrieked; “they hung my nephew! Gibbet ‘em all the three. Young Kemp’s mother’s a bad ‘un. An informer he is. Up with ‘em!”

I was pulled down on my knees, then thrust forward, and then left to myself while they rushed to bonnet Lillywhite. I stumbled against a great, quiet farm horse.

A continuous scuffling went on; an imperious voice cried: “Hold your tongues, you fools! Hold your tongues!...” Someone else called: “Hear to Jack Rangley. Hear to him!”

There was a silence. I saw a hand light a torch at the lanthorn, and the crowd of faces, the muddle of limbs, the horses’ heads, and the quiet trees above, flickered into sight.

“Don’t let them hang me, Jack Rangley,” I sobbed. “You know I’m no spy. Don’t let ‘em hang me, Jack.”

He rode his horse up to me, and caught me by the collar.

“Hold your tongue,” he said roughly. He began to make a set speech, anathematizing runners. He moved to tie our feet, and hang us by our finger-nails over the quarry edge.

A hubbub of assent and dissent went up; then the crowd became unanimous. Rangley slipped from his horse.

“Blindfold ‘em, lads,” he cried, and turned me sharply round.

“Don’t struggle,” he whispered in my ear; his silk handkerchief came cool across my eyelids. I felt hands fumbling with a knot at the back of my head. “You’re all right,” he said again. The hubbub of voices ceased suddenly. “Now, lads, bring ‘em along.”

A voice I knew said their watchword, “Snuff and enough,” loudly, and then, “What’s agate?”

Someone else answered, “It’s Rooksby, it’s Sir Ralph.”

The voice interrupted sharply, “No names, now. I don’t want hanging.” The hand left my arm; there was a pause in the motion of the procession. I caught a moment’s sound of whispering. Then a new voice cried, “Strip the runners to the shirt. Strip ‘em. That’s it.” I heard some groans and a cry, “You won’t murder us.” Then a nasal drawl, “We will sure — ly.” Someone else, Rangsley, I think, called, “Bring ‘em along — this way now.”

After a period of turmoil we seemed to come out of the crowd upon a very rough, descending path; Rangsley had called out, “Now, then, the rest of you be off; we’ve got enough here”; and the hoofs of heavy horses sounded again. Then we came to a halt, and Rangsley called sharply from close to me:

“Now, you runners — and you, John Kemp — here you be on the brink of eternity, above the old quarry. There’s a sheer drop of a hundred feet. We’ll tie your legs and hang you by your fingers. If you hang long enough, you’ll have time to say your prayers. Look alive, lads!”

The voice of one of the runners began to shout, “You’ll swing for this — you — — — ”

As for me I was in a dream. “Jack,” I said, “Jack, you won’t — — ”

“Oh, that’s all right,” the voice said in a whisper. “Mum, now! It’s all right.”

It withdrew itself a little from my ear and called, “Now then, ready with them. When I say three...”

I heard groans and curses, and began to shout for help. My voice came back in an echo, despairingly. Suddenly I was dragged backward, and the bandage pulled from my eyes,

“Come along,” Rangsley said, leading me gently enough to the road, which was five steps behind. “It’s all a joke,” he snarled. “A pretty bad one for those catchpolls. Hear ‘em groan. The drop’s not two feet.”

We made a few paces down the road; the pitiful voices of the runners crying for help came plainly to my ears.

“You — they — aren’t murdering them?” I asked.

“No, no,” he answered. “Can’t afford to. Wish we could; but they’d make it too hot for us.”

We began to descend the hill. From the quarry a voice shrieked:

“Help — help — for the love of God — I can’t. . . .”

There was a grunt and the sound of a fall; then a precisely similar sequence of sounds.

“That’ll teach ‘em,” Rangsley said ferociously. “Come along — they’ve only rolled down a bank. They weren’t over the quarry. It’s all right. I swear it is.”

And, as a matter of fact, that was the smugglers’ ferocious idea of humour. They would hang any undesirable man, like these runners, whom it would make too great a stir to murder outright, over the edge of a low bank, and swear to him that he was clawing the brink of Shakespeare’s Cliff or any other hundred-foot drop. The wretched creatures suffered all the tortures of death before they let go, and, as a rule, they never returned to our parts.

Chapter 3

The spirit of the age has changed; everything has changed so utterly that one can hardly believe in the existence of one's earlier self. But I can still remember how, at that moment, I made the acquaintance of my heart — a thing that bounded and leapt within my chest, a little sickeningly. The other details I forget.

Jack Rangsley was a tall, big-boned, thin man, with something sinister in the lines of his horseman's cloak, and something reckless in the way he set his spurred heel on the ground. He was the son of an old Marsh squire. Old Rangsley had been head of the last of the Owlerys — the aristocracy of export smugglers — and Jack had sunk a little in becoming the head of the Old Bourne Tap importers. But he was hard enough, tyrannical enough, and had nerve enough to keep Free-trading alive in our parts until long after it had become an anachronism. He ended his days on the gallows, of course, but that was long afterwards.

"I'd give a dollar to know what's going on in those runners' heads," Rangsley said, pointing back with his crop. He laughed gayly. The great white face of the quarry rose up pale in the moonlight; the dusky red fires of the limekilns glowed at the base, sending up a blood-red dust of sullen smoke. "I'll swear they think they've dropped straight into hell.

"You'll have to cut the country, John," he added suddenly, "they'll have got your name uncommon pat. I did my best for you." He had had me tied up like that before the runners' eyes in order to take their suspicions off me. He had made a pretence to murder me with the same idea. But he didn't believe they were taken in. "There'll be warrants out before morning, if they ain't too shaken. But what were you doing in the business? The two Spaniards were lying in the fern looking on when you come blundering your clumsy nose in. If it hadn't been for Rooksby you might have — — Hullo, there!" he broke off.

An answer came from the black shadow of a clump of roadside elms. I made out the forms of three or four horses standing with their heads together.

"Come along," Rangsley said; "up with you. We'll talk as we go."

Someone helped me into a saddle; my legs trembled in the stirrups as if I had ridden a thousand miles on end already. I imagine I must have fallen into a stupor; for I have only a vague impression of somebody's exculpating himself to me. As a matter of fact, Ralph, after having egged me on, in the intention of staying at home, had had qualms of conscience, and had come to the quarry. It was he who had cried the watchword, "Snuff and enough," and who had held the whispered consultation. Carlos and Castro had waited in their hiding-place, having been spectators of the arrival of the runners

and of my capture. I gathered this long afterwards. At that moment I was conscious only of the motion of the horse beneath me, of intense weariness, and of the voice of Ralph, who was lamenting his own cowardice.

"If it had come at any other time!" he kept on repeating. "But now, with Veronica to think of! — — — You take me, Johnny, don't you?"

My companions rode silently. After we had passed the houses of a little village a heavy mist fell upon us, white, damp, and clogging. Ralph reined his horse beside mine.

"I'm sorry," he began again, "I'm miserably sorry I got you into this scrape. I swear I wouldn't have had it happen, not for a thousand pounds — not for ten."

"It doesn't matter," I said cheerfully.

"Ah, but," Rooksby said, "you'll have to leave the country for a time. Until I can arrange. I will. You can trust me."

"Oh, he'll have to leave the country, for sure," Rangsley said jovially, "if he wants to live it down. There's five-and-forty warrants out against me — but they dursent serve 'em. But he's not me."

"It's a miserable business," Ralph said. He had an air of the profoundest dejection. In the misty light he looked like a man mortally wounded, riding from a battle-field.

"Let him come with us," the musical voice of Carlos came through the mist in front of us. "He shall see the world a little."

"For God's sake hold your tongue!" Ralph answered him. "There's mischief enough. He shall go to France."

"Oh, let the young blade rip about the world for a year or two, squire," Rangsley's voice said from behind us.

In the end Ralph let me go with Carlos — actually across the sea, and to the West Indies. I begged and implored him; it seemed that now there was a chance for me to find my world of romance. And Ralph, who, though one of the most law-respecting of men, was not for the moment one of the most valorous, was wild to wash his hands of the whole business. He did his best for me; he borrowed a goodly number of guineas from Rangsley, who travelled with a bag of them at his saddle-bow, ready to pay his men their seven shillings a head for the run.

Ralph remembered, too — or I remembered for him — that he had estates and an agent in Jamaica, and he turned into the big inn at the junction of the London road to write a letter to his agent bidding him house me and employ me as an improver. For fear of compromising him we waited in the shadow of trees a furlong or two down the road. He came at a trot, gave me the letter, drew me aside, and began upbraiding himself again. The others rode onwards.

"Oh, it's all right," I said. "It's fine — it's fine. I'd have given fifty guineas for this chance this morning — and, Ralph, I say, you may tell Veronica why I'm going, but keep a shut mouth to my mother. Let her think I've run away — eh? Don't spoil your chance."

He was in such a state of repentance and flutter that he could not let me take a decent farewell. The sound of the others' horses had long died away down the hill when he began to tell me what he ought to have done.

"I knew it at once after I'd let you go. I ought to have kept you out of it. You came near being murdered. And to think of it — you, her brother — to be — — —"

"Oh, it's all right," I said gayly, "it's all right. You've to stand by Veronica. I've no one to my back. Good-night, good-by."

I pulled my horse's head round and galloped down the hill. The main body had halted before setting out over the shingle to the shore. Rangsley was waiting to conduct us into the town, where we should find a man to take us three fugitives out to the expected ship. We rode clattering aggressively through the silence of the long, narrow main street. Every now and then Carlos Riego coughed lamentably, but Tomas Castro rode in gloomy silence. There was a light here and there in a window, but not a soul stirring abroad. On the blind of an inn the shadow of a bearded man held the shadow of a rummer to its mouth.

"That'll be my uncle," Rangsley said. "He'll be the man to do your errand." He called to one of the men behind. "Here, Joe Pilcher, do you go into the White Hart and drag my Uncle Tom out. Bring 'un up to me — to the nest."

Three doors further on we came to a halt, and got down from our horses.

Rangsley knocked on a shutter-panel, two hard knocks with the crop and three with the naked fist. Then a lock clicked, heavy bars rumbled, and a chain rattled. Rangsley pushed me through the doorway. A side door opened, and I saw into a lighted room filled with wreaths of smoke. A paunchy man in a bob wig, with a blue coat and Windsor buttons, holding a churchwarden pipe in his right hand and a pewter quart in his left, came towards us.

"Hullo, captain," he said, "you'll be too late with the lights, won't you?" He had a deprecatory air.

"Your watch is fast, Mr. Mayor," Rangsley answered surlily; "the tide won't serve for half an hour yet."

"Cht, cht," the other wheezed. "No offence. We respect you. But still, when one has a stake, one likes to know."

"My stake's all I have, and my neck," Rangsley said impatiently; "what's yours? A matter of fifty pun ten?... Why don't you make them bring they lanthorns?"

A couple of dark lanthorns were passed to Rangsley, who half-uncovered one, and lit the way up steep wooden stairs. We climbed up to a tiny cock-loft, of which the side towards the sea was all glazed.

"Now you sit there, on the floor," Rangsley commanded; "can't leave you below; the runners will be coming to the mayor for new warrants to-morrow, and he'd not like to have spent the night in your company."

He threw a casement open. The moon was hidden from us by clouds, but, a long way off, over the distant sea, there was an irregular patch of silver light, against which the

chimneys of the opposite houses were silhouetted. The church clock began muffledly to chime the quarters behind us; then the hour struck — ten strokes.

Rangsley set one of his lanthorns on the window and twisted the top. He sent beams of yellow light shooting out to seawards. His hands quivered, and he was mumbling to himself under the influence of ungovernable excitement. His stakes were very large, and all depended on the flicker of those lanthorns out towards the men on the luggers that were hidden in the black expanse of the sea. Then he waited, and against the light of the window I could see him mopping his forehead with the sleeve of his coat; my heart began to beat softly and insistently — out of sympathy.

Suddenly, from the deep shadow of the cloud above the sea, a yellow light flashed silently cut — very small, very distant, very short-lived. Rangsley heaved a deep sigh and slapped me heavily on the shoulder.

“All serene, my buck,” he said; “now let’s see after you. I’ve half an hour. What’s the ship?”

I was at a loss, but Carlos said out of the darkness, “The ship the Thames. My friend Señor Ortiz, of the Minories, said you would know.”

“Oh, I know, I know,” Rangsley said softly; and, indeed, he did know all that was to be known about smuggling out of the southern counties of people who could no longer inhabit them. The trade was a survival of the days of Jacobite plots. “And it’s a hanging job, too. But it’s no affair of mine.” He stopped and reflected for an instant.

I could feel Carlos’ eyes upon us, looking out of the thick darkness. A slight rustling came from the corner that hid Castro.

“She passes down channel to-night, then?” Rangsley said. “With this wind you’ll want to be well out in the Bay at a quarter after eleven.”

An abnormal scuffling, intermingled with snatches of jovial remonstrance, made itself heard from the bottom of the ladder. A voice called up through the hatch, “Here’s your uncle, Squahre Jack,” and a husky murmur corroborated.

“Be you drunk again, you old sinner?” Rangsley asked. “Listen to me... Here’s three men to be set aboard the Thames at a quarter after eleven.”

A grunt came in reply.

Rangsley repeated slowly.

The grunt answered again.

“Here’s three men to be set aboard the Thames at a quarter after eleven. . . .” Rangsley said again.

“Here’s... a-cop... three men to be set aboard Thames at quarter after eleven,” a voice hiccupped back to us.

“Well, see you do it,” Rangsley said. “He’s as drunk as a king,” he commented to us; “but when you’ve said a thing three times, he remembers — hark to him.”

The drunken voice from below kept up a constant babble of, “Three men to be set aboard Thames... three men to be set . . .”

“He’ll not stop saying that till he has you safe aboard,” Rangsley said. He showed a glimmer of light down the ladder — Carlos and Castro descended. I caught sight

below me of the silver head and the deep red ears of the drunken uncle of Rangsley. He had been one of the most redoubtable of the family, a man of immense strength and cunning, but a confirmed habit of consuming a pint and a half of gin a night had made him disinclined for the more arduous tasks of the trade. He limited his energies to working the underground passage, to the success of which his fox-like cunning, and intimate knowledge of the passing shipping, were indispensable. I was preparing to follow the others down the ladder when Rangsley touched my arm.

“I don’t like your company,” he said close behind my ear. “I know who they are. There were bills out for them this morning. I’d blow them, and take the reward, but for you and Squahre Rooksby. They’re handy with their knives, too, I fancy. You mind me, and look to yourself with them. There’s something unnatural.”

His words had a certain effect upon me, and his manner perhaps more. A thing that was “unnatural” to Jack Rangsley — the man of darkness, who lived forever as if in the shadow of the gallows — was a thing to be avoided. He was for me nearly as romantic a figure as Carlos himself, but for his forbidding darkness, and he was a person of immense power. The silent flittings of lights that I had just seen, the answering signals from the luggers far out to sea, the enforced sleep of the towns and countryside whilst his plans were working out at night, had impressed me with a sense of awe. And his words sank into my spirit, and made me afraid for my future.

We followed the others downwards into a ground-floor room that was fitted up as a barber’s shop. A rushlight was burning on a table. Rangsley took hold of a piece of wainscotting, part of the frame of a panel; he pulled it towards him, and, at the same moment, a glazed show-case full of razors and brushes swung noiselessly forward with an effect of the supernatural. A small opening, just big enough to take a man’s body, revealed itself. We passed through it and up a sort of tunnel. The door at the other end, which was formed of panels, had a manger and straw crib attached to it on the outside, and let us into a horse’s stall. We found ourselves in the stable of the inn.

“We don’t use this passage for ourselves,” Rangsley said. “Only the most looked up to need to — the justices and such like. But gallus birds like you and your company, it’s best for us not to be seen in company with. Follow my uncle now. Good-night.”

We went into the yard, under the pillars of the town hall, across the silent street, through a narrow passage, and down to the sea. Old Rangsley reeled ahead of us swiftly, muttering, “Three men to be set aboard the Thames... quarter past eleven. Three men to be set aboard...” and in a few minutes we stood upon the shingle beside the idle sea, that was nearly at the full.

Chapter 4

It was, I suppose, what I demanded of Fate — to be gently wafted into the position of a hero of romance, without rough hands at my throat. It is what we all ask, I suppose; and we get it sometimes in ten-minute snatches. I didn't know where I was going. It was enough for me to sail in and out of the patches of shadow that fell from the moon right above our heads.

We embarked, and, as we drew further out, the land turned to a shadow, spotted here and there with little lights. Behind us a cock crowed. The shingle crashed at intervals beneath the feet of a large body of men. I remembered the smugglers; but it was as if I had remembered them only to forget them forever. Old Rangsley, who steered with the sheet in his hand, kept up an unintelligible babble. Carlos and Castro talked under their breaths. Along the gunwale there was a constant ripple and gurgle. Suddenly old Rangsley began to sing; his voice was hoarse and drunken.

“When Harol’ war in va — a — ded,
An’ fallin’, lost his crownd,
An’ Normun Willium wa — a — ded.”

The water murmured without a pause, as if it had a million tiny facts to communicate in very little time. And then old Rangsley hove to, to wait for the ship, and sat half asleep, lurching over the tiller. He was a very, unreliable scoundrel. The boat leaked like a sieve. The wind freshened, and we three began to ask ourselves how it was going to end. There were no lights upon the sea.

At last, well out, a blue gleam caught our eyes; but by this time old Rangsley was helpless, and it fell to me to manage the boat. Carlos was of no use — he knew it, and, without saying a word, busied himself in bailing the water out. But Castro, I was surprised to notice, knew more than I did about a boat, and, maimed as he was, made himself useful.

“To me it looks as if we should drown,” Carlos said at one point, very quietly. “I am sorry for you, Juan.”

“And for yourself, too,” I answered, feeling very hopeless, and with a dogged grimness.

“Just now, my young cousin, I feel as if I should not mind dying under the water,” he remarked with a sigh, but without ceasing to bail for a moment.

“Ah, you are sorry to be leaving home, and your friends, and Spain, and your fine adventures,” I answered.

The blue flare showed a very little nearer. There was nothing to be done but talk and wait.

“No; England,” he answered in a tone full of meaning — “things in England — people there. One person at least.”

To me his words and his smile seemed to imply a bitter irony; but they were said very earnestly.

Castro had hauled the helpless form of old Rangsley forward. I caught him muttering savagely:

“I could kill that old man!”

He did not want to be drowned; neither assuredly did I. But it was not fear so much as a feeling of dreariness and disappointment that had come over me, the sudden feeling that I was going not to adventure, but to death; that here was not romance, but an end — a disenchanting surprise that it should soon be all over.

We kept a grim silence. Further out in the bay, we were caught in a heavy squall. Sitting by the tiller, I got as much out of her as I knew how. We would go as far as we could before the run was over. Carlos bailed unceasingly, and without a word of complaint, sticking to his self-appointed task as if in very truth he were careless of life. A feeling came over me that this, indeed, was the elevated and the romantic. Perhaps he was tired of his life; perhaps he really regretted what he left behind him in England, or somewhere else — some association, some woman. But he, at least, if we went down together, would go gallantly, and without complaint, at the end of a life with associations, movements, having lived and regretted. I should disappear in-gloriously on the very threshold.

Castro, standing up unsteadily, growled, “We may do it yet! See, señor!”

The blue gleam was much larger — it flared smokily up towards the sky. I made out ghastly parallelograms of a ship’s sails high above us, and at last many faces peering unseeingly over the rail in our direction. We all shouted together.

I may say that it was thanks to me that we reached the ship. Our boat went down under us whilst I was tying a rope under Carlos’ arms. He was standing up with the baler still in his hand. On board, the women passengers were screaming, and as I clung desperately to the rope that was thrown me, it struck me oddly that I had never before heard so many women’s voices at the same time. Afterwards, when I stood on the deck, they began laughing at old Rangsley, who held forth in a thunderous voice, punctuated by hiccoughs:

“They carried I aboard — a cop — their lugger and sinks I in the cold, co — old sea.”

It mortified me excessively that I should be tacked to his tail and exhibited to a number of people, and I had a sudden conviction of my small importance. I had expected something altogether different — an audience sympathetically interested in my desire for a passage to the West Indies; instead of which people laughed while I spoke in panting jerks, and the water dripped out of my clothes. After I had made it clear that I wanted to go with Carlos, and could pay for my passage, I was handed down into the steerage, where a tallow candle burnt in a thick, blue atmosphere. I was

stripped and filled with some fiery liquid, and fell asleep. Old Rangsley was sent ashore with the pilot.

It was a new and strange life to me, opening there suddenly enough. The Thames was one of the usual West Indiamen; but to me even the very ropes and spars, the sea, and the unbroken dome of the sky, had a rich strangeness. Time passed lazily and gliding. I made more fully the acquaintance of my companions, but seemed to know them no better. I lived with Carlos in the cabin — Castro in the half-deck; but we were all three pretty constantly together, and they being the only Spaniards on board, we were more or less isolated from the other passengers.

Looking at my companions at times, I had vague misgivings. It was as if these two had fascinated me to the verge of some danger. Sometimes Castro, looking up, uttered vague ejaculations. Carlos pushed his hat back and sighed. They had preoccupations, cares, interests in which they let me have no part.

Castro struck me as absolutely ruffianly. His head was knotted in a red, white-spotted handkerchief; his grizzled beard was tangled; he wore a black and rusty cloak, ragged at the edges, and his feet were often bare; at his side would lie his wooden right hand. As a rule, the place of his forearm was taken by a long, thin, steel blade, that he was forever sharpening.

Carlos talked with me, telling me about his former life and his adventures. The other passengers he discountenanced by a certain coldness of manner that made me ashamed of talking to them. I respected him so; he was so wonderful to me then. Castro I detested; but I accepted their relationship without in the least understanding how Carlos, with his fine grain, his high soul — I gave him credit for a high soul — could put up with the squalid ferocity with which I credited Castro. It seemed to hang in the air round the grotesque ragged-ness of the saturnine brown man.

Carlos had made Spain too hot to hold him in those tortuous intrigues of the Army of the Faith and Bourbon troops and Italian legions. From what I could understand, he must have played fast and loose in an insolent manner. And there was some woman offended. There was a gayness and gallantry in that part of it. He had known the very spirit of romance, and now he was sailing gallantly out to take up his inheritance from an uncle who was a great noble, owning the greater part of one of the Intendencias of Cuba.

“He is a very old man, I hear,” Carlos said — ”a little doting, and having need of me.”

There were all the elements of romance about Carlos’ story — except the actual discomforts of the ship in which we were sailing. He himself had never been in Cuba or seen his uncle; but he had, as I have indicated, ruined himself in one way or another in Spain, and it had come as a God-send to him when his uncle had sent Tomas Castro to bring him to Cuba, to the town of Rio Medio.

“The town belongs to my uncle. He is very rich; a Grand d’Espagne . . . everything; but he is now very old, and has left Havana to die in his palace in his own town. He has an only daughter, a Dona Seraphina, and I suppose that if I find favour in his eyes

I shall marry her, and inherit my uncle's great riches; I am the only one that is left of the family to inherit." He waved his hand and smiled a little. "Vaya; a little of that great wealth would be welcome. If I had had a few pence more there would have been none of this worry, and I should not have been on this dirty ship in these rags." He looked down good-humouredly at his clothes.

"But," I said, "how do you come to be in a scrape at all?"

He laughed a little proudly.

"In a scrape?" he said. "I... I am in none. It is Tomas Castro there." He laughed affectionately. "He is as faithful as he is ugly," he said; "but I fear he has been a villain, too... What do I know? Over there in my uncle's town, there are some villains — you know what I mean, one must not speak too loudly on this ship. There is a man called O'Brien, who mismanages my uncle's affairs. What do I know? The good Tomas has been in some villainy that is no affair of mine. He is a good friend and a faithful dependent of my family's. He certainly had that man's watch — the man we met by evil chance at Liverpool, a man who came from Jamaica. He had bought it — of a bad man, perhaps, I do not ask. It was Castro your police wished to take. But I, bon Dieu, do you think I would take watches?"

I certainly did not think he had taken a watch; but I did not relinquish the idea that he, in a glamorous, romantic way, had been a pirate. Rooksby had certainly hinted as much in his irritation.

He lost none of his romantic charm in my eyes. The fact that he was sailing in uncomfortable circumstances detracted little; nor did his clothes, which, at the worst, were better than any I had ever had. And he wore them with an air and a grace. He had probably been in worse circumstances when campaigning with the Army of the Faith in Spain. And there was certainly the uncle with the romantic title and the great inheritance, and the cousin — the Miss Seraphina, whom he would probably marry. I imagined him an aristocratic scapegrace, a corsair — it was the Byronic period then — sailing out to marry a sort of shimmering princess with hair like Veronica's, bright golden, and a face like that of a certain keeper's daughter. Carlos, however, knew nothing about his cousin; he cared little more, as far as I could tell. "What can she be to me since I have seen your...?" he said once, and then stopped, looking at me with a certain tender irony. He insisted, though, that his aged uncle was in need of him. As for Castro — he and his rags came out of a life of sturt and strife, and I hoped he might die by treachery. He had undoubtedly been sent by the uncle across the seas to find Carlos and bring him out of Europe; there was something romantic in that mission. He was now a dependent of the Riego family, but there were unfathomable depths in that tubby little man's past. That he had gone to Russia at the tail of the Grande Armée, one could not help believing. He had been most likely in the grand army of sutlers and camp-followers. He could talk convincingly of the cold, and of the snows and his escape. And from his allusions one could get glimpses of what he had been before and afterwards — apparently everything that was questionable in a secularly

disturbed Europe; no doubt somewhat of a bandit; a guerrillero in the sixes and sevens; with the Army of the Faith near the French border, later on.

There had been room and to spare for that sort of pike, in the muddy waters, during the first years of the century. But the waters were clearing, and now the good Castro had been dodging the gallows in the Antilles or in Mexico. In his heroic moods he would swear that his arm had been cut off at Somo Sierra; swear it with a great deal of asseveration, making one see the Polish lancers charging the gunners, being cut down, and his own sword arm falling suddenly.

Carlos, however, used to declare with affectionate cynicism that the arm had been broken by the cudgel of a Polish peasant while Castro was trying to filch a pig from a stable... "I cut his throat out, though," Castro would grumble darkly; "so, like that, and it matters very little — it is even an improvement. See, I put on my blade. See, I transfix you that fly there... See how astonished he was. He did never expect that." He had actually impaled a crawling cockroach. He spent his days cooking extraordinary messes, crouching for hours over a little charcoal brazier that he lit surreptitiously in the back of his bunk, making substitutes for eternal gaspachos.

All these things, if they deepened the romance of Carlos' career, enhanced, also, the mystery. I asked him one day, "But why do you go to Jamaica at all if you are bound for Cuba?"

He looked at me, smiling a little mournfully.

"Ah, Juan mio," he said, "Spain is not like your England, unchanging and stable. The party who reign to-day do not love me, and they are masters in Cuba as in Spain. But in his province my uncle rules alone. There I shall be safe." He was condescending to roll some cigarettes for Tomas, whose wooden hand incommoded him, and he tossed a fragment of tobacco to the wind with a laugh. "In Jamaica there is a merchant, a Señor Ramon; I have letters to him, and he shall find me a conveyance to Rio Medio, my uncle's town. He is an *quiliado*."

He laughed again. "It is not easy to enter that place, Juanino."

There was certainly some mystery about that town of his uncle's. One night I overheard him say to Castro:

"Tell me, O my Tomas, would it be safe to take this caballero, my cousin, to Rio Medio?"

Castro paused, and then murmured gruffly:

"Señor, unless that Irishman is consulted beforehand, or the English lord would undertake to join with the picaroons, it is very assuredly not safe."

Carlos made a little exclamation of mild astonishment.

"Pero? Is it so bad as that in my uncle's own town?"

Tomas muttered something that I did not catch, and then:

"If the English caballero committed indiscretions, or quarrelled — and all these people quarrel, why, God knows — that Irish devil could hang many persons, even myself, or take vengeance on your worship."

Carlos was silent as if in a reverie. At last he said:

“But if affairs are like this, it would be well to have one more with us. The caballero, my cousin, is very strong and of great courage.”

Castro grunted, “Oh, of a courage! But as the proverb says, ‘If you set an Englishman by a hornets’ nest they shall not remain long within.’”

After that I avoided any allusion to Cuba, because the thing, think as I would about it, would not grow clear. It was plain that something illegal was going on there, or how could “that Irish devil,” whoever he was, have power to hang Tomas and be revenged on Carlos? It did not affect my love for Carlos, though, in the weariness of this mystery, the passage seemed to drag a little. And it was obvious enough that Carlos was unwilling or unable to tell anything about what pre-, occupied him.

I had noticed an intimacy spring up between the ship’s second mate and Tomas, who was, it seemed to me, forever engaged in long confabulations in the man’s cabin, and, as much to make talk as for any other reason, I asked Carlos if he had noticed his dependent’s familiarity. It was noticeable because Castro held aloof from every other soul on board. Carlos answered me with one of his nervous and angry smiles.

“Ah, Juan mine, do not ask too many questions! I wish you could come with me all the way, but I cannot tell you all I know. I do not even myself know all. It seems that the man is going to leave the ship in Jamaica, and has letters for that Señor Ramon, the merchant, even as I have. Vaya; more I cannot tell you.”

This struck me as curious, and a little of the whole mystery seemed from that time to attach to the second mate, who before had been no more to me than a long, sallow Nova Scotian, with a disagreeable intonation and rather offensive manners. I began to watch him, desultorily, and was rather startled by something more than a suspicion that he himself was watching me. On one occasion in particular I seemed to observe this. The second mate was lankily stalking the deck, his hands in his pockets. As he paused in his walk to spit into the sea beside me, Carlos said:

“And you, my Juan, what will you do in this Jamaica?”

The sense that we were approaching land was already all over the ship. The second mate leered at me enigmatically, and moved slowly away. I said that I was going to the Horton Estates, Rooksby’s, to learn planting under a Mr. Macdonald, the agent. Carlos shrugged his shoulders. I suppose I had spoken with some animation.

“Ah,” he said, with his air of great wisdom and varied experience, of disillusionment, “it will be much the same as it has been at your home — after the first days. Hard work and a great sameness.” He began to cough violently.

I said bitterly enough, “Yes. It will be always the same with me. I shall never see life. You’ve seen all that there is to see, so I suppose you do not mind settling down with an old uncle in a palace.”

He answered suddenly, with a certain darkness of manner, “That is as God wills. Who knows? Perhaps life, even in my uncle’s palace, will not be so safe.”

The second mate was bearing down on us again.

I said jocularly, “Why, when I get very tired of life at Horton Pen, I shall come to see you in your uncle’s town.”

Carlos had another of his fits of coughing.

"After all, we are kinsmen. I dare say you would give me a bed," I went on.

The second mate was quite close to us then.

Carlos looked at me with an expression of affection that a little shamed my lightness of tone:

"I love you much more than a kinsman, Juan," he said. "I wish you could come with me. I try to arrange it. Later, perhaps, I may be dead. I am very ill."

He was undoubtedly ill. Campaigning in Spain, exposure in England in a rainy time, and then the ducking when we came on board, had done him no good. He looked moodily at the sea.

"I wish you could come. I will try — — —"

The mate had paused, and was listening quite unaffectedly, behind Carlos' back.

A moment after Carlos half turned and regarded him with a haughty stare.

He whistled and walked away.

Carlos muttered something that I did not catch about "spies of that pestilent Irishman." Then:

"I will not selfishly take you into any more dangers," he said. "But life on a sugar plantation is not fit for you."

I felt glad and flattered that a personage so romantic should deem me a fit companion for himself. He went forward as if with some purpose.

Some days afterwards the second mate sent for me to his cabin. He had been on the sick list, and he was lying in his bunk, stripped to the waist, one arm and one leg touching the floor. He raised himself slowly when I came in, and spat. He had in a pronounced degree the Nova Scotian peculiarities and accent, and after he had shaved, his face shone like polished leather.

"Hallo!" he said. "See heeyur, young Kemp, does your neck just itch to be stretched?"

I looked at him with mouth and eyes agape.

He spat again, and waved a claw towards the forward bulkhead.

"They'll do it for yeh," he said. "You're such a green goose, it makes me sick a bit. You hev'n't reckoned out the chances, not quite. It's a kind of dead reckoning yeh hev'n't had call to make. Eh?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, bewildered.

He looked at me, grinning, half naked, with amused contempt, for quite a long time, and at last offered sardonically to open my eyes for me.

I said nothing.

"Do you know what will happen to you," he asked, "ef yeh don't get quit of that Carlos of yours?"

I was surprised into muttering that I didn't know.

"I can tell yeh," he continued. "Yeh will get hanged."

By that time I was too amazed to get angry. I simply suspected the Blue Nose of being drunk. But he glared at me so soberly that next moment I felt frightened.

“Hanged by the neck,” he repeated; and then added, “Young fellow, you scoot. Take a fool’s advice, and scoot. That Castro is a blame fool, anyhow. Yeh want men for that job. Men, I tell you.” He slapped his bony breast.

I had no idea that he could look so ferocious. His eyes fascinated me, and he opened his cavernous mouth as if to swallow me. His lantern jaws snapped without a sound. He seemed to change his mind.

“I am done with yeh,” he said, with a sort of sinister restraint. He rose to his feet, and, turning his back to me, began to shave, squinting into a broken looking-glass.

I had not the slightest inkling of his meaning. I only knew that going out of his berth was like escaping from the dark lair of a beast into a sunlit world. There is no denying that his words, and still more his manner, had awakened in me a sense of insecurity that had no precise object, for it was manifestly absurd and impossible to suspect my friend Carlos. Moreover, hanging was a danger so recondite, and an eventuality so extravagant, as to make the whole thing ridiculous. And yet I remembered how unhappy I felt, how inexplicably unhappy. Presently the reason was made clear. I was homesick. I gave no further thought to the second mate. I looked at the harbour we were entering, and thought of the home I had left so eagerly. After all, I was no more than a boy, and even younger in mind than in body.

Queer-looking boats crawled between the shores like tiny water beetles. One headed out towards us, then another. I did not want them to reach us. It was as if I did not wish my solitude to be disturbed, and I was not pleased with the idea of going ashore. A great ship, floating high on the water, black and girt with the two broad yellow streaks of her double tier of guns, glided out slowly from beyond a cluster of shipping in the bay. She passed without a hail, going out under her topsails with a flag at the fore. Her lofty spars overtopped our masts immensely, and I saw the men in her rigging looking down on our decks. The only sounds that came out of her were the piping of boatswain’s calls and the tramping of feet. Imagining her to be going home, I felt a great desire to be on board. Ultimately, as it turned out, I went home in that very ship, but then it was too late. I was another man by that time, with much queer knowledge and other desires. Whilst I was looking and longing I heard Carlos’ voice behind me asking one of our sailors what ship it was.

“Don’t you know a flagship when you see it?” a voice grumbled surlily. “Admiral Rowley’s,” it continued. Then it rumbled out some remarks about “pirates, vermin, coast of Cuba.”

Carlos came to the side, and looked after the man-of-war in the distance.

“You could help us,” I heard him mutter.

Chapter 5

There was a lad called Barnes, a steerage passenger of about my own age, a raw, red-headed Northumbrian yokel, going out as a recruit to one of the West Indian regiments. He was a serious, strenuous youth, and I had talked a little with him at odd moments. In my great loneliness I went to say good-by to him after I had definitely parted with Carlos.

I had been in our cabin. A great bustle of shore-going, of leave-taking had sprung up all over the ship. Carlos and Castro had entered with a tall, immobile, gold-spectacled Spaniard, dressed all in white, and with a certain air of noticing and attentive deference, bowing a little as he entered the cabin in earnest conference with Tomas Castro. Carlos had preceded them with a certain nonchalance, and the Spaniard — it was the Señor Ramon, the merchant I had heard of — regarded him as if with interested curiosity. With Tomas he seemed already familiar. He stood in the doorway, against the strong light, bowing a little.

With a certain courtesy, touched with indifference, Carlos made him acquainted with me. Ramon turned his searching, quietly analytic gaze upon me.

“But is the caballero going over, too?” he asked.

Carlos said, “No. I think not, now.”

And at that moment the second mate, shouldering his way through a white-clothed crowd of shore people, made up behind Señor Ramon. He held a letter in his hand.

“I am going over,” he said, in his high nasal voice, and with a certain ferocity.

Ramon looked round apprehensively.

Carlos said, “The señor, my cousin, wishes for a Mr. Macdonald. You know him, señor?”

Ramon made a dry gesture of perfect acquaintance. “I think I have seen him just now,” he said. “I will make inquiries.”

All three of them had followed him, and became lost in the crowd. It was then, not knowing whether I should ever see Carlos again, and with a desperate, unhappy feeling of loneliness, that I had sought out Barnes in the dim immensity of the steerage.

In the square of wan light that came down the scuttle he was cording his hair-trunk — unemotional and very matter-of-fact. He began to talk in an everyday voice about his plans. An uncle was going to meet him, and to house him for a day or two before he went to the barracks.

“Mebbe we’ll meet again,” he said. “I’ll be here many years, I think.”

He shouldered his trunk and climbed unromantically up the ladder. He said he would look for Macdonald for me.

It was absurd to suppose that the strange ravings of the second mate had had an effect on me. "Hanged! Pirates!" Was Carlos really a pirate, or Castro, his humble friend? It was vile of me to suspect Carlos. A couple of men, meeting by the scuttle, began to talk loudly, every word coming plainly to my ears in the stillness of my misery, and the large deserted steerage. One of them, new from home, was asking questions. Another answered:

"Oh, I lost half a seroon the last voyage — the old thing."

"Haven't they routed out the scoundrels yet?" the other asked.

The first man lowered his voice. I caught only that "the admiral was an old fool — no good for this job. He's found out the name of the place the pirates come from — Rio Medio. That's the place, only he can't get in at it with his three-deckers. You saw his flagship?"

Rio Medio was the name of the town to which Carlos was going — which his uncle owned. They moved away from above.

What was I to believe? What could this mean? But the second mate's, "Scoot, young man," seemed to come to my ears like the blast of a trumpet. I became suddenly intensely anxious to find Macdonald — to see no more of Carlos.

From above came suddenly a gruff voice in Spanish. "Señor, it would be a great folly."

Tomas Castro was descending the ladder gingerly. He was coming to fetch his bundle. I went hastily into the distance of the vast, dim cavern of spare room that served for the steerage.

"I want him very much," Carlos said. "I like him. He would be of help to us."

"It's as your worship wills," Castro said gruffly. They were both at the bottom of the ladder. "But an Englishman there would work great mischief. And this youth — —"

"I will take him, Tomas," Carlos said, laying a hand on his arm.

"Those others will think he is a spy. I know them," Castro muttered. "They will hang him, or work some devil's mischief. You do not know that Irish judge — the canaille, the friend of priests."

"He is very brave. He will not fear," Carlos said.

I came suddenly forward. "I will not go with you," I said, before I had reached them even.

Castro started back as if he had been stung, and caught at the wooden hand that sheathed his steel blade.

"Ah, it is you, Señor," he said, with an air of relief and dislike. Carlos, softly and very affectionately, began inviting me to go to his uncle's town. His uncle, he was sure, would welcome me. Jamaica and a planter's life were not fit for me.

I had not then spoken very loudly, or had not made my meaning very clear. I felt a great desire to find Macdonald, and a simple life that I could understand.

"I am not going with you," I said, very loudly this time.

He stopped at once. Through the scuttle of the half-deck we heard a hubbub of voices, of people exchanging greetings, of Christian names called out joyously. A tumultuous shuffling of feet went on continuously over our heads. The ship was crowded with people from the shore. Perhaps Macdonald was amongst them, even looking for me.

“Ah, amigo mio, but you must now,” said Carlos gently — “you must — — —” And, looking me straight in the face with a still, penetrating glance of his big, romantic eyes, “It is a good life,” he whispered seductively, “and I like you, John Kemp. You are young—very young yet. But I love you very much for your own sake, and for the sake of one I shall never see again.”

He fascinated me. He was all eyes in the dusk, standing in a languid pose just clear of the shaft of light that fell through the scuttle in a square patch.

I lowered my voice, too. “What life?” I asked.

“Life in my uncle’s palace,” he said, so sweetly and persuasively that the suggestiveness of it caused a thrill in me.

His uncle could nominate me to posts of honour fit for a caballero.

I seemed to wake up. “Your uncle the pirate!” I cried, and was amazed at my own words.

Tomas Castro sprang up, and placed his rough, hot hand over my lips.

“Be quiet, John Kemp, you fool!” he hissed with sudden energy.

He had spruced himself, but I seemed to see the rags still nutter about him. He had combed out his beard, but I could not forget the knots that had been in it.

“I told your worship how foolish and wrong-headed these English are,” he said sardonically to Carlos. And then to me, “If the senor speaks loudly again, I shall kill him.”

He was evidently very frightened of something.

Carlos, silent as an apparition at the foot of the ladder, put a finger to his lips and glanced upwards.

Castro writhed his whole body, and I stepped backwards. “I know what Rio Medio is,” I said, not very loudly. “It is a nest of pirates.”

Castro crept towards me again on the points of his toes. “Señor Don Juan Kemp, child of the devil,” he hissed, looking very much frightened, “you must die!”

I smiled. He was trembling all over. I could hear the talking and laughing that went on under the break of the poop. Two women were kissing, with little cries, near the hatchway. I could hear them distinctly.

Tomas Castro dropped his ragged cloak with a grandiose gesture.

“By my hand!” he added with difficulty.

He was really very much alarmed. Carlos was gazing up the hatch. I was ready to laugh at the idea of dying by Tomas Castro’s hand while, within five feet of me, people were laughing and kissing. I should have laughed had I not suddenly felt his hand on my throat. I kicked his shins hard, and fell backwards over a chest. He went back a step or two, flourished his arm, beat his chest, and turned furiously upon Carlos.

“He will get us murdered,” he said. “Do you think we are safe here? If these people here heard that name they wouldn’t wait to ask who your worship is. They would tear us to pieces in an instant. I tell you — moi, Tomas Castro — he will ruin us, this white fool — — —”

Carlos began to cough, shaken speechless as if by an invisible devil. Castro’s eyes ran furtively all round him, then he looked at me. He made an extraordinary swift motion with his right hand, and I saw that he was facing me with a long steel blade displayed. Carlos continued to cough. The thing seemed odd, laughable still. Castro began to parade round me: it was as if he were a cock performing its saltatory rites before attacking. There was the same tenseness of muscle. He stepped with extraordinary care on the points of his toes, and came to a stop about four feet from me. I began to wonder what Rooksby would have thought of this sort of thing, to wonder why Castro himself found it necessary to crouch for such a long time. Up above, the hum of many people, still laughing, still talking, faded a little out of mind. I understood, horribly, how possible it would be to die within those few feet of them. Castro’s eyes were dusky yellow, the pupils a great deal inflated, the lines of his mouth very hard and drawn immensely tight. It seemed extraordinary that he should put so much emotion into such a very easy killing. I had my back against the bulkhead, it felt very hard against my shoulder-blades. I had no dread, only a sort of shrinking from the actual contact of the point, as one shrinks from being tickled. I opened my mouth. I was going to shriek a last, despairing call, to the light and laughter of meetings above when Carlos, still shaken, with one white hand pressed very hard upon his chest, started forward and gripped his hand round Castro’s steel. He began to whisper in the other’s hairy ear. I caught:

“You are a fool. He will not make us to be molested, he is my kinsman.”

Castro made a reluctant gesture towards Barnes’ chest that lay between us.

“We could cram him into that,” he said.

“Oh, bloodthirsty fool,” Carlos answered, recovering his breath; “is it always necessary to wash your hands in blood? Are we not in enough danger? Up — up! Go see if the boat is yet there. We must go quickly; up — up — — —” He waved his hand towards the scuttle.

“But still,” Castro said. He was reluctantly fitting his wooden hand upon the blue steel. He sent a baleful yellow glare into my eyes, and stooped to pick up his ragged cloak.

“Up — mount!” Carlos commanded.

Castro muttered, “Vamos,” and began clumsily to climb the ladder, like a bale of rags being hauled from above. Carlos placed his foot on the steps, preparing to follow him. He turned his head round towards me, his hand extended, a smile upon his lips.

“Juan,” he said, “let us not quarrel. You are very young; you cannot understand these things; you cannot weigh them; you have a foolish idea in your head. I wished you to come with us because I love you, Juan. Do you think I wish you evil? You are true and brave, and our families are united.” He sighed suddenly.

"I do not want to quarrel!" I said. "I don't."

I did not want to quarrel; I wanted more to cry. I was very lonely, and he was going away. Romance was going out of my life.

He added musically, "You even do not understand. There is someone else who speaks for you to me, always — someone else. But one day you will. I shall come back for you — one day." He looked at me and smiled. It stirred unknown depths of emotion in me. I would have gone with him, then, had he asked me. "One day," he repeated, with an extraordinary cadence of tone.

His hand was grasping mine; it thrilled me like a woman's; he stood shaking it very gently.

"One day," he said, "I shall repay what I owe you. I wished you with me, because I go into some danger. I wanted you. Good-by. Hasta mas ver."

He leaned over and kissed me lightly on the cheek, then climbed away. I felt that the light of Romance was going out of my life. As we reached the top of the ladder, somebody began to call harshly, startlingly. I heard my own name and the words, "mahn ye were speerin' after."

The light was obscured, the voice began clamouring insistently.

"John Kemp, Johnnie Kemp, noo. Here's the mahn ye were speerin' after. Here's Macdonald."

It was the voice of Barnes, and the voice of the every day. I discovered that I had been tremendously upset. The pulses in my temples were throbbing, and I wanted to shut my eyes — to sleep! I was tired; Romance had departed. Barnes and the Macdonald he had found for me represented all the laborious insects of the world; all the ants who are forever hauling immensely heavy and immensely unimportant burdens up weary hillocks, down steep places, getting nowhere and doing nothing.

Nevertheless I hurried up, stumbling at the hatchway against a man who was looking down. He said nothing at all, and I was dazed by the light. Barnes remarked hurriedly, "This 'll be your Mr. Macdonald"; and, turning his back on me, forgot my existence. I felt more alone than ever. The man in front of me held his head low, as if he wished to butt me.

I began breathlessly to tell him I had a letter from "my — my — Rooksby — brother-in-law — Ralph Rooks-by" — I was panting as if I had run a long way. He said nothing at all. I fumbled for the letter in an inner pocket of my waistcoat, and felt very shy. Macdonald maintained a portentous silence; his enormous body was enveloped rather than clothed in a great volume of ill-fitting white stuff; he held in his hand a great umbrella with a vivid green lining. His face was very pale, and had the leaden transparency of a boiled artichoke; it was fringed by a red beard streaked with gray, as brown flood-water is with foam. I noticed at last that the reason for his presenting his forehead to me was an incredible squint — a squint that gave the idea that he was performing some tortuous and defiant feat with the muscles of his neck.

He maintained an air of distrustful inscrutability. The hand which took my letter was very large, very white, and looked as if it would feel horribly flabby. With the other

he put on his nose a pair of enormous mother-of-pearl-framed spectacles — things exactly like those of a cobra's — and began to read. He had said precisely nothing at all. It was for him and what he represented that I had thrown over Carlos and what he represented. I felt that I deserved to be received with acclamation. I was not. He read the letter very deliberately, swaying, umbrella and all, with the slow movement of a dozing elephant. Once he crossed his eyes at me, meditatively, above the mother-of-pearl rims. He was so slow, so deliberate, that I own I began to wonder whether Carlos and Castro were still on board. It seemed to be at least half an hour before Macdonald cleared his throat, with a sound resembling the coughing of a defective pump, and a mere trickle of a voice asked:

“Hwhat evidence have ye of identitee?”

I hadn't any at all, and began to finger my buttonholes as shamefaced as a pauper before a Board. The certitude dawned upon me suddenly that Carlos, even if he would consent to swear to me, would prejudice my chances.

I cannot help thinking that I came very near to being cast adrift upon the streets of Kingston. To my asseverations Macdonald returned nothing but a series of minute “humphs.” I don't know what overcame his scruples; he had shown no signs of yielding, but suddenly turning on his heel made a motion with one of his flabby white hands. I understood it to mean that I was to follow him aft.

The decks were covered with a jabbering turmoil of negroes with muscular arms and brawny shoulders. All their shining black faces seem to be momentarily gashed open to show rows of white teeth, and were spotted with inlaid eyeballs. The sounds coming from them were a bewildering noise. They were hauling baggage about aimlessly. A large soft bundle of bedding nearly took me off my legs. There wasn't room for emotion. Macdonald laid about him with the handle of the umbrella a few inches from the deck; but the passage that he made for himself closed behind him.

Suddenly, in the pushing and hurrying, I came upon a little clear space beside a pile of boxes. Stooping over them was the angular figure of Nichols, the second mate. He looked up at me, screwing his yellow eyes together.

“Going ashore,” he asked, “long of that Puffing Billy?”

“What business is it of yours?” I mumbled sulkily.

Sudden and intense threatening came into his yellow eyes:

“Don't you ever come to you know where,” he said; “I don't want no spies on what I do. There's a man there'll crack your little backbone if he catches you. Don't yeh come now. Never.”

Part 2 — The Girl With the Lizard

Chapter 1

“Rio Medio?” Señor Ramon said to me nearly two years afterwards. “The caballero is pleased to give me credit for a very great knowledge. What should I know of that town? There are doubtless good men there and very wicked, as in other towns. Who knows? Your worship must ask the boats’ crews that the admiral has sent to burn the town. They will be back very soon now.”

He looked at me, inscrutably and attentively, through his gold spectacles.

It was on the arcade before his store in Spanish Town. Long sunblinds flapped slightly. Before the next door a large sign proclaimed “Office of the Buchatoro Journal” It was, as I have said, after two years — years which, as Carlos had predicted, I had found to be of hard work, and long, hot sameness. I had come down from Horton Pen to Spanish Town, expecting a letter from Veronica, and, the stage not being in, had dropped in to chat with Ramon over a consignment of Yankee notions, which he was prepared to sell at an extravagantly cheap price. It was just at the time when Admiral Rowley was understood to be going to make an energetic attempt upon the pirates who still infested the Gulf of Mexico and nearly ruined the Jamaica trade of those days. Naturally enough, we had talked of the mysterious town in which the pirates were supposed to have their headquarters.

“I know no more than others,” Ramon said, “save, señor, that I lose much more because my dealings are much greater. But I do not even know whether those who take my goods are pirates, as you English say, or Mexican privateers, as the Havana authorities say. I do not very much care. Basta, what I know is that every week some ship with a letter of marque steals one of my consignments, and I lose many hundreds of dollars.”

Ramon was, indeed, one of the most frequented merchants in Jamaica; he had stores in both Kingston and Spanish Town; his cargoes came from all the seas. All the planters and all the official class in the island had dealings with him.

“It was most natural that the hidalgo, your respected cousin, should consult me if he wished to go to any town in Cuba. Whom else should he go to? You yourself, señor, or the excellent Mr. Topnambo, if you desired to know what ships in a month’s time are likely to be sailing for Havana, for New Orleans, or any Gulf port, you would ask me. What more natural? It is my business, my trade, to know these things. In that way I make my bread. But as for Rio Medio, I do not know the place.” He had a touch of irony in his composed voice. “But it is very certain,” he went on, “that if your Government had not recognized the belligerent rights of the rebellious colony of Mexico, there would be now no letters of marque, no accursed Mexican privateers, and

I and everyone else in the island should not now be losing thousands of dollars every year.”

That was the eternal grievance of every Spaniard in the island — and of not a few of the English and Scotch planters. Spain was still in the throes of losing the Mexican colonies when Great Britain had acknowledged the existence of a state of war and a Mexican Government. Mexican letters of marque had immediately filled the Gulf. No kind of shipping was safe from them, and Spain was quite honestly powerless to prevent their swarming on the coast of Cuba — the Ever Faithful Island, itself.

“What can Spain do,” said Ramon bitterly, “when even your Admiral Rowley, with his great ships, cannot rid the sea of them?” He lowered his voice. “I tell you, young señor, that England will lose this Island of Jamaica over this business. You yourself are a Separationist, are you not?... No? You live with Separationists. How could I tell? Many people say you are.”

His words gave me a distinctly disagreeable sensation. I hadn’t any idea of being a Separationist; I was loyal enough. But I understood suddenly, and for the first time, how very much like one I might look.

“I myself am nothing,” Ramon went on impassively; “I am content that the island should remain English. It will never again be Spanish, nor do I wish that it should. But our little, waspish friend there” — he lifted one thin, brown hand to the sign of the Buckatoro Journal — “his paper is doing much mischief. I think the admiral or the governor will commit him to jail. He is going to run away and take his paper to Kingston; I myself have bought his office furniture.”

I looked at him and wondered, for all his impassivity, what he knew — what, in the depths of his inscrutable Spanish brain, his dark eyes concealed.

He bowed to me a little. “There will come a very great trouble,” he said.

Jamaica was in those days — and remained for many years after — in the throes of a question. The question was, of course, that of the abolition of slavery. The planters as a rule were immensely rich and overbearing. They said, “If the Home Government tries to abolish our slavery system, we will abolish the Home Government, and go to the United States for protection.” That was treason, of course; but there was so much of it that the governor, the Duke of Manchester, had to close his ears and pretend not to hear. The planters had another grievance — the pirates in the Gulf of Mexico. There was one in particular, a certain El Demonio or Diablero, who practically sealed the Florida passage; it was hardly possible to get a cargo underwritten, and the planters’ pockets felt it a good deal. Practically, El Demonio had, during the last two years, gutted a ship once a week, as if he wanted to help the Kingston Separationist papers. The planters said, “If the Home Government wishes to meddle with our internal affairs, our slaves, let it first clear our seas... Let it hang El Demonio. . . .”

The Government had sent out one of Nelson’s old captains, Admiral Rowley, a good fighting man; but when it came to clearing the Gulf of Mexico, he was about as useless as a prize-fighter trying to clear a stable of rats. I don’t suppose El Demonio really did more than a tithe of the mischief attributed to him, but in the peculiar

circumstances he found himself elevated to the rank of an important factor in colonial politics. The Ministerialist papers used to kill him once a month; the Separationists made him capture one of old Rowley's sloops five times a year. They both lied, of course. But obviously Rowley and his frigates weren't much use against a pirate whom they could not catch at sea, and who lived at the bottom of a bottle-necked creek with tooth rocks all over the entrance — that was the sort of place Rio Medio was reported to be. . . .

I didn't much care about either party — I was looking out for romance — but I inclined a little to the Separationists, because Macdonald, with whom I lived for two years at Horton Pen, was himself a Separationist, in a cool Scotch sort of way. He was an Argyleshire man, who had come out to the island as a lad in 1786, and had worked his way up to the position of agent to the Rooksby estate at Horton Pen. He had a little estate of his own, too, at the mouth of the River Minho, where he grew rice very profitably. He had been the first man to plant it on the island.

Horton Pen nestled down at the foot of the tall white scars that end the Vale of St. Thomas and are not much unlike Dover Cliffs, hanging over a sea of squares of the green cane, alternating with masses of pimento foliage. Macdonald's wife was an immensely stout, raven-haired, sloe-eyed, talkative body, the most motherly woman I have ever known — I suppose because she was childless.

What was anomalous in my position had passed away with the next outward mail. Veronica wrote to me; Ralph to his attorney and the Macdonalds. But by that time Mrs. Mac. had darned my socks ten times.

The surrounding gentry, the large resident landowners, of whom there remained a sprinkling in the Vale, were at first inclined to make much of me. There was Mrs. Topnambo, a withered, very dried-up personage, who affected pink trimmings; she gave the ton to the countryside as far as ton could be given to a society that rioted with hospitality. She made efforts to draw me out of the Macdonald environment, to make me differentiate myself, because I was the grandson of an earl. But the Topnambos were the great Loyalists of the place, and the Macdonalds the principal Separationists, and I stuck to the Macdonalds. I was searching for romance, you see, and could find none in Mrs. Topnambo's white figure, with its dryish, gray skin, and pink patches round the neck, that lay forever in dark or darkened rooms, and talked querulously of "Your uncle, the earl," whom I had never seen. I didn't get on with the men any better. They were either very dried up and querulous, too, or else very liquorish or boisterous in an incomprehensible way. Their evenings seemed to be a constant succession of shouts of laughter, merging into undignified staggers of white trousers through blue nights — round the corners of ragged huts. I never understood the hidden sources of their humour, and I had not money enough to mix well with their lavishness. I was too proud to be indebted to them, too. They didn't even acknowledge me on the road at last; they called me poor-spirited, a thin-blooded nobleman's cub — a Separationist traitor — and left me to superintend niggers and save money. Mrs. Mac, good Separationist though she was, as became the wife of her husband, had the word "home" forever on

her lips. She had once visited the Rooksbys at Horton; she had treasured up a host of tiny things, parts of my forgotten boyhood, and she talked of them and talked of them until that past seemed a wholly desirable time, and the present a dull thing!

Journeying in search of romance — and that, after all, is our business in this world — is much like trying to eaten the horizon. It lies a little distance before us, and a little distance behind — about as far as the eye can carry. One, discovers that one has passed through it just as one passed what is to-day our horizon — One looks back and says. “Why there it is.” One looks forward and says the same. It lies either in the old days when we used to, or in the new days when we shall. I look back upon those days of mine, and little things remain, come back to me, assume an atmosphere, take significance, go to the making of a temps jadis. Probably, when I look back upon what is the dull, arid waste of to-day, it will be much the same.

I could almost wish to take again one of the long, uninteresting night rides from the Vale to Spanish Town, or to listen once more to one of old Macdonald’s interminable harangues on the folly of Mr. Canning’s policy, or the virtues of Scotch thrift. “Jack, lad,” he used to bellow in his curious squeak of a voice, “a gentleman you may be of guid Scots blood. But ye’re a puir body’s son for a’ that.” He was set on my making money and turning honest pennies. I think he really liked me.

It was with that idea that he introduced me to Ramon, “an esteemed Spanish merchant of Kingston and Spanish Town.” Ramon had seemed mysterious when I had seen him in company with Carlos and Castro but re-introduced in the homely atmosphere of the Macdonalds, he had become merely a saturnine, tall, dusky-featured, gold-spectacled Spaniard, and very good company. I learnt nearly all my Spanish from him. The only mystery about him was the extravagantly cheap rate at which he sold his things under the flagstaff in front of Admiral Rowley’s house, the King’s House, as it was called. The admiral himself was said to have extensive dealings with Ramon; he had at least the reputation of desiring to turn an honest penny, like myself. At any rate, everyone, from the proudest planters to the editor of the Buckatoro Journal next door, was glad of a chat with Ramon, whose knowledge of an immense variety of things was as deep as a draw-well — and as placid.

I used to buy island produce through him, ship it to New Orleans, have it sold, and re-import parcels of “notions,” making a double profit. He was always ready to help me, and as ready to talk, saying that he had an immense respect for my relations, the Riegos.

That was how, at the end of my second year in the island, I had come to talking to him. The stage should have brought a letter from Veronica, who was to have presented Rooksby with a son and heir, but it was unaccountably late. I had been twice to the coach office, and was making my way desultorily back to Ramon’s. He was talking to the editor of the Buckatoro Journal — the man from next door — and to another who had, whilst I walked lazily across the blazing square, ridden furiously up to the steps of the arcade. The rider was talking to both of them with exaggerated gestures of his

arms. He had ridden off, spurring, and the editor, a little, gleaming-eyed hunchback, had remained in the sunshine, talking excitedly to Ramon.

I knew him well, an amusing, queer, warped, Satanic member of society, who was a sort of nephew to the Macdonalds, and hand in glove with all the Scotch Separationists of the island. He had started an extraordinary, scandalous paper that, to avoid sequestration, changed its name and offices every few issues, and was said by Loyalists, like the Topnambos, to have an extremely bad influence.

He subsisted a good deal on the charity of people like the Macdonalds, and I used sometimes to catch sight of him at evenfall listening to Mrs. Macdonald; he would be sitting beside her hammock on the veranda, his head very much down on his breast, very much on one side, and his great hump portending over his little white face, and ruffling up his ragged black hair. Mrs. Macdonald clacked all the scandal of the Vale, and the Buckatoro Journal got the benefit of it all, with adornments.

For the last month or so the Journal had been more than usually effective, and it was only because Rowley was preparing to confound his traducers by the boat attack on Rio Medio, that a warrant had not come against David. When I saw him talking to Ramon, I imagined that the rider must have brought news of a warrant, and that David was preparing for flight. He hopped nimbly from Ramon's steps into the obscurity of his own door. Ramon turned his spectacles softly upon me.

"There you have it," he said. "The folly; the folly! To send only little boats to attack such a nest of villains. It is inconceivable."

The horseman had brought news that the boats of Rowley's squadron had been beaten off with great loss, in their attack on Rio Medio.

Ramon went on with an air of immense superiority, "And all the while we merchants are losing thousands."

His dark eyes searched my face, and it came disagreeably into my head that he was playing some part; that his talk was delusive, his anger feigned; that, perhaps, he still suspected me of being a Separationist. He went on talking about the failure of the boat attack. All Jamaica had been talking of it, speculating about it, congratulating itself on it. British valour was going to tell; four boats' crews would do the trick. And now the boats had been beaten off, the crews captured, half the men killed! Already there was panic on the island. I could see men coming together in little knots, talking eagerly. I didn't like to listen to Ramon, to a Spaniard talking in that way about the defeat of my countrymen by his. I walked across the King's Square, and the stage driving up just then, I went to the office, and got my correspondence.

Veronica's letter came like a faint echo, like the sound of very distant surf, heard at night; it seemed impossible that any one could be as interested as she in the things that were happening over there. She had had a son; one of Ralph's aunts was its godmother. She and Ralph had been to Bath last spring; the country wanted water very badly. Ralph had used his influence, had explained matters to a very great personage, had spent a little money on the injured runners. In the meanwhile I had nearly forgotten

the whole matter; it seemed to be extraordinary that they should still be interested in it.

I was to come back; as soon as it was safe I was to come back; that was the main tenor of the letter.

I read it in a little house of call, in a whitewashed room that contained a cardboard cat labelled "The Best," for sole ornament. Four swarthy fellows, Mexican patriots, were talking noisily about their War of Independence, and the exploits of a General Trapelascis, who had been defeating the Spanish troops over there. It was almost impossible to connect them with a world that included Veronica's delicate handwriting with the pencil lines erased at the base of each line of ink. They seemed to be infinitely more real. Even Veronica's interest in me seemed a little strange; her desire for my return irritated me. It was as if she had asked me to return to a state of bondage, after having found myself. Thinking of it made me suddenly aware that I had become a man, with a man's aims, and a disillusionized view of life. It suddenly appeared very wonderful that I could sit calmly there, surveying, for instance, those four sinister fellows with daggers, as if they were nothing at all. When I had been at home the matter would have caused me extraordinary emotions, as many as if I had seen an elephant in a travelling show. As for going back to my old life, it didn't seem to be possible.

Chapter 2

One night I was riding alone towards Horton Pen. A large moon hung itself up above me like an enormous white plate. Finally the sloping roof of the Ferry Inn, with one dishevelled palm tree drooping over it, rose into the disk. The window lights were reflected like shaken torches in the river. A mass of objects, picked out with white globes, loomed in the high shadow of the inn, standing motionless. They resolved themselves into a barouche, with four horses steaming a great deal, and an army of negresses with handboxes on their heads. A great lady was on the road; her querulous voice was calling to someone within the open door that let down a soft yellow light from the top of the precipitous steps. A nondescript object, with apparently two horns and a wheel, rested inert at the foot of the sign-post; two negroes were wiping their foreheads beside it. That resolved itself into a man slumbering in a wheelbarrow, his white face turned up to the moon. A sort of buzz of voices came from above; then a man in European clothes was silhouetted against the light in the doorway. He held a full glass very carefully and started to descend. Suddenly he stopped emotionally. Then he turned half-right and called back, "Sir Charles! Sir Charles! Here's the very man! I protest, the very man!" There was an interrogative roar from within. It was like being outside a lion's cage.

People appeared and disappeared in front of the lighted door; windows stood open, with heads craning out all along the inn face. I was hurrying off the back of my horse when the admiral came out on to the steps. Someone lit a torch, and the admiral became a dark, solid figure, with the flash of the gold lace on his coat. He stood very high in the leg; had small white whiskers, and a large nose that threw a vast shadow on to his forehead in the upward light; his high collar was open, and a mass of white appeared under his chin; his head was uncovered. A third male face, very white, bobbed up and down beside his shining left shoulder. He kept on saying:

"What? what? what? Hey, what?... That man?" He appeared to be halfway between supreme content and violent anger. At last he delivered himself. "Let's duck him... hey?... Let's duck him!" He spoke with a sort of benevolent chuckle, then raised his voice and called, "Tinsley! Tinsley! Where the deuce is Tinsley?"

A high nasal sound came from the carriage window. "Sir Charles! Sir Charles! Let there be no scene in my presence, I beg."

I suddenly saw, halfway up, laboriously ascending the steps, a black figure, indistinguishable at first on account of deformities. It was David Macdonald. Since his last, really terrible comments on the failure of the boat-attack, he had been lying hidden somewhere. It came upon me in a flash that he was making his way from one hiding

place to another. In making his escape from Spanish Town, either to Kingston or the Vale, he had run against the admiral and his party returning from the Topnambos' ball. It was hardly a coincidence: everyone on the road met at the Ferry Inn. But that hardly made the thing more pleasant.

Sir Charles continued to clamour for Tinsley, his flag lieutenant, who, as a matter of fact, was the man drunk in the wheelbarrow. When this was explained by the shouts of the negroes, he grunted, "Umph!" turned on the man at his side, and said, "Here, Oldham; you lend a hand to duck the little toad." It was the sort of thing that the thirsty climate of Jamaica rendered frequent enough. Oldham dropped his glass and protested. Macdonald continued silently and enigmatically to climb the steps; now he was in for it he showed plenty of pluck. No doubt he recognized that, if the admiral made a fool of himself, he would be afraid to issue warrants in soberness. I could not stand by and see them bully the wretched little creature. At the same time I didn't, most decidedly, want to identify myself with him.

I called out impulsively, "Sir Charles, surely you would not use violence to a cripple."

Then, very suddenly, they all got to action, David Macdonald reaching the top of the steps. Shrieks came from the interior of the carriage, and from the waiting négresses. I saw three men were falling upon a little thing like a damaged cat. I couldn't stand that, come what might of it.

I ran hastily up the steps, hoping to be able to make them recover their senses, a force of purely conventional emotion impelling me. It was no business of mine; I didn't want to interfere, and I felt like a man hastening to separate half a dozen fighting dogs too large to be pleasant.

When I reached the top, there was a sort of undignified scuffle, and in the end I found myself standing above a ghastly white gentleman who, from a sitting posture, was gasping out, "I'll commit you!... I swear I'll commit you!..." I helped him to his feet rather apologetically, while the admiral behind me was asking insistently who the deuce I was. The man I had picked up retreated a little, and then turned back to look at me. The light was shining on my face, and he began to call out, "I know him. I know him perfectly well. He's John Kemp. I'll commit him at once. The papers are in the barouche." After that he seemed to take it into his head that I was going to assault him again. He bolted out of sight, and I was left facing the admiral. He stared at me contemptuously. I was streaming with perspiration and upbraiding him for assaulting a cripple.

The admiral said, "Oh, that's what you think? I will settle with you presently. This is rank mutiny." I looked at Oldham, who was the admiral's secretary. He was extremely dishevelled about his neck, much as if a monkey had been clawing him thereabouts. Half of his roll collar flapped on his heaving chest; his stock hung down behind like a cue. I had seen him kneeling on the ground with his head pinned down by the hunchback. I said loftily:

"What did you set him on a little beggar like that for? You were three to one. What did you expect?"

The admiral swore. Oldham began to mop with a lace handkerchief at a damaged upper lip from which a stream of blood was running; he even seemed to be weeping a little. Finally, he vanished in at the door, very much bent together. The undaunted David hopped in after him coolly.

The admiral said, "I know your kind. You're a treasonous dog, sir. This is mutiny. You shall be made an example of."

All the same he must have been ashamed of himself, for presently he and the two others went down the steps without even looking at me, and their carriage rolled away.

Inside the inn I found a couple of merchant captains, one asleep with his head on the table and little rings shining in his great red ears; the other very spick and span — of what they called the new school then. His name was Williams — Captain Williams of the *Lion*, which he part owned; a man of some note for the dinners he gave on board his ship. His eyes sparkled blue and very round in a round rosy face, and he clawed effusively at my arm.

"Well done!" he bubbled over. "You gave it them; strike me, you did! It did me good to see and hear. I wasn't going to poke my nose in, not I. But I admire you, my boy."

He was a quite guileless man with a strong dislike for the admiral's blundering — a dislike that all the seamen shared — and for people of the Topnambo kidney who affected to be above his dinners. He assured me that I had burst upon those gentry roaring... "like the Bull of Bashan. You should have seen!" and he drank my health in a glass of punch.

David Macdonald joined us, looming through wreaths of tobacco smoke. He was always very nice in his dress, and had washed himself into a state of enviable coolness.

"They won't touch me now," he said. "I wanted that assault and battery..." He suddenly turned vivid, sarcastic black eyes upon me. "But you," he said — "my dear Kemp! You're in a devil of a scrape! They'll have a warrant out against you under the Black Act. I know the gentry."

"Oh, he won't mind," Williams struck in, "I know him; he's a trump. Afraid of nothing."

David Macdonald made a movement of his head that did duty for an ominous shake:

"It's a devil of a mess," he said. "But I'll touch them up. Why did you hit Topnambo? He's the spitefullest beast in the island. They'll make it out high treason. They are capable of sending you home on this charge."

"Oh, never say die." Williams turned to me, "Come and dine with me on board at Kingston to-morrow night. If there's any fuss I'll see what I can do. Or you can take a trip with me to Havana till it blows over. My old woman's on board." His face fell. "But there, you'll get round her. I'll see you through."

They drank some sangaree and became noisy. I wasn't very happy; there was much truth in what David Macdonald had said. Topnambo would certainly do his best to have me in jail — to make an example of me as a Separationist to please the admiral and the Duke of Manchester. Under the spell of his liquor Williams became more and more pressing with his offers of help.

“It’s the devil that my missus should be on board, just this trip. But hang it! come and dine with me. I’ll get some of the Kingston men — the regular hot men — to stand up for you. They will when they hear the tale.”

There was a certain amount of sense in what he said. If warrants were out against me, he or some of the Kingston merchants whom he knew, and who had no cause to love the admiral, might help me a good deal.

Accordingly, I did go down to Kingston. It happened to be the day when the seven pirates were hanged at Port Royal Point. I had never seen a hanging, and a man who hadn’t was rare in those days. I wanted to keep out of the way, but it was impossible to get a boatman to row me off to the Lion. They were all dying to see the show, and, half curious, half reluctant, I let myself drift with the crowd.

The gallows themselves stood high enough to be seen — a long very stout beam supported by posts at each end. There was a blazing sun, and the crowd pushed and shouted and craned its thousands of heads every time one heard the cry of “Here they come,” for an hour or so. There was a very limpid sky, a very limpid sea, a scattering of shipping gliding up and down, and the very silent hills a long way away. There was a large flavour of Spaniards among the crowd. I got into the middle of a knot of them, jammed against the wheels of one of the carriages, standing, hands down, on tiptoe, staring at the long scaffold. There were a great many false alarms, sudden outcries, hushing again rather slowly. In between I could hear someone behind me talk Spanish to the occupants of the carriage. I thought the voice was Ramon’s, but I could not turn, and the people in the carriage answered in French, I thought. A man was shouting “Cool Drinks” on the other side of them.

Finally, there was a roar, an irresistible swaying, a rattle of musket ramrods, a rhythm of marching feet, and the grating of heavy iron-bound wheels. Seven men appeared in sight above the heads, clinging to each other for support, and being drawn slowly along. The little worsted balls on the infantry shakos bobbed all round their feet. They were a sorry-looking group, those pirates; very wild-eyed, very ragged, dust-stained, weather-beaten, begrimed till they had the colour of unpolished mahogany. Clinging still to each other as they stood beneath the dangling ropes of the long beam, they had the appearance of a group of statuary to forlorn misery. Festoons of chains completed the “composition.”

One was a very old man with long yellow-white hair, one a negro whose skin had no lustre at all. The rest were very dark-skinned, peak-bearded, and had long hair falling round their necks. A soldier with a hammer and a small anvil climbed into the cart, and bent down out of sight. There was a ring of iron on iron, and the man next the very old man raised his arms and began to speak very slowly, very distinctly, and very mournfully. It was quite easy to understand him; he declared his perfect innocence. No one listened to him; his name was Pedro Nones. He ceased speaking, and someone on a horse, the High Sheriff, I think, galloped impatiently past the cart and shouted. Two men got into the cart, one pulled the rope, the other caught the pirate by the elbows.

He jerked himself loose, and began to cry out; he seemed to be lost in amazement, and shrieked:

“Adonde está el padre?... Adonde está el padre?” No one answered; there wasn’t a priest of any denomination; I don’t know whether the omission was purposed. The man’s face grew convulsed with agony, his eyeballs stared out very white and vivid, as he struggled with the two men. He began to curse us epileptically for compassing his damnation. A hoarse patter of Spanish imprecations came from the crowd immediately round me. The man with the voice like Ramon’s groaned in a lamentable way; someone else said, “What infamy . . . what infamy!”

An aged voice said tremulously in the carriage, “This shall be a matter of official remonstrance.” Another said, “Ah, these English heretics!”

There was a forward rush of the crowd, which carried me away. Someone in front began to shout orders, and the crowd swayed back again. The infantry muskets rattled. The commotion lasted some time. When it ceased, I saw that the man about to die had been kissing the very old man; tears were streaming down the gray, parchment-coloured cheeks. Pedro Nones had the rope round his neck; it curved upwards loosely towards the beam, growing taut as the cart jolted away. He shouted:

“Adiós, viejo, para siempre adi — — — ”

My whole body seemed to go dead all over. I happened to look downwards at my hands; they were extraordinarily white, with the veins standing out all over them. They felt as if they had been sodden in water, and it was quite a long time before they recovered their natural colour. The rest of the men were hung after that, the cart jolting a little way backwards and forwards and growing less crowded after every journey. One man, who was very large framed and stout, had to go through it twice because the rope broke. He made a good deal of fuss. My head ached, and after the involuntary straining and craning to miss no details was over, I felt sick and dazed. The people talked a great deal as they streamed back, loosening over the broader stretch of pebbles; they seemed to wish to remind each other of details. I have an idea that one or two, in the sheer largeness of heart that seizes one after occasions of popular emotions, asked me in exulting voices if I had seen the nigger’s tongue sticking out.

Others thought that there wasn’t very much to be exultant over. We had not really captured the pirates; they had been handed over to the admiral by the Havana authorities — as an international courtesy I suppose, or else because they were pirates of no account and short in funds, or because the admiral had been making a fuss in front of the Morro. It was even asserted by the anti-admiral faction that the seven weren’t pirates at all, but merely Cuban *mauvais sujets*, hawkers of derogatory coplas, and known freethinkers. In any case, excited people cheered the High Sheriff and the returning infantry, because it was pleasant to hang any kind of Spaniard. I got nearly knocked down by the kettle-drummers, who came through the scattering crowd at a swinging quick-step. As I cannoned off the drums, a hand caught at my arm, and someone else began to speak to me. It was old Ramon, who was telling me that he had a special kind of Manchester goods at his store. He explained that they had arrived very

lately, and that he had come from Spanish Town solely on their account. One made the eighth of a penny a yard more on them than on any other kind. If I would deign to have some of it offered to my inspection, he had his little curricle just off the road. He was drawing me gently towards it all the time, and I had not any idea of resisting. He had been behind in the crowd, he said, beside the carriage of the commissioner and the judge of the Marine Court sent by the Havana authorities to deliver the pirates.

It was after that, that in Ramon's dusky store, I had my first sight of Seraphina and of her father, and then came my meeting with Carlos. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw him come out with extended hand. It was an extraordinary sensation, that of talking to Carlos again. He seemed to have worn badly. His face had lost its moist bloom, its hardly distinguishable subcutaneous flush. It had grown very, very pale. Dark blue circles took away from the blackness and sparkle of his eyes. And he coughed, and coughed.

He put his arm affectionately round my shoulders and said, "How splendid to see you again, my Juan." His eyes had affection in them, there was no doubt about that, but I felt vaguely suspicious of him. I remembered how we had parted on board the Thames. "We can talk here," he added; "it is very pleasant. You shall see my uncle, that great man, the star of Cuban law, and my cousin Seraphina, your kinsfolk. They love you; I have spoken well of you." He smiled gayly, and went on, "This is not a place befitting his greatness, nor my cousin's, nor, indeed, my own." He smiled again. "But I shall be very soon dead, and to me it matters little." He frowned a little, and then laughed. "But you should have seen the faces of your officers when my uncle refused to go to their governor's palace; there was to have been a fiesta, a 'reception'; is it not the word? It will cause a great scandal."

He smiled with a good deal of fine malice, and looked as if he expected me to be pleased. I said that I did not quite understand what had offended his uncle.

"Oh, it was because there was no priest," Carlos answered, "when those poor devils were hung. They were canaille. Yes; but one gives that much even to such. And my uncle was there in his official capacity as a plenipotentiary. He was very much distressed: we were all. You heard, my uncle himself had advised their being surrendered to your English. And when there was no priest he repented very bitterly. Why, after all, it was an infamy."

He paused again, and leant back against the counter. When his eyes were upon the ground and his face not animated by talking, there became lamentably insistent his pallor, the deep shadows under his eyes, and infinite sadness in the droop of his features, as if he were preoccupied by an all-pervading and hopeless grief. When he looked at me, he smiled, however.

"Well, at worst it is over, and my uncle is here in this dirty place instead of at your palace. We sail back to Cuba this very evening." He looked round him at Ramon's calicos and sugar tubs in the dim light, as if he accepted almost incredulously the fact that they could be in such a place, and the manner of his voice indicated that he thought our governor's palace would have been hardly less barbarous. "But I am

sorry," he said suddenly, "because I wanted you — you and all your countrymen — to make a good impression on him. You must do it yourself alone. And you will. You are not like these others. You are our kinsman, and I have praised you very much. You saved my life."

I began to say that I had done nothing at all, but he waved his hand with a little smile.

"You are very brave," he said, as if to silence me. "I am not ungrateful."

He began again to ask for news from home — from my home. I told him that Veronica had a baby, and he sighed.

"She married the excellent Rooksby?" he asked. "Ah, what a waste." He relapsed into silence again. "There was no woman in your land like her. She might have — — - And to marry that — that excellent personage, my good cousin. It is a tragedy."

"It was a very good match," I answered.

He sighed again. "My uncle is asleep in there, now," he said, after a pause, pointing at the inner door. "We must not wake him; he is a very old man. You do not mind talking to me? You will wait to see them? Dona Seraphina is here, too."

"You have not married your cousin?" I asked.

I wanted very much to see the young girl who had looked at me for a moment, and I certainly should have been distressed if Carlos had said she was married.

He answered, "What would you have?" and shrugged his shoulders gently. A smile came into his face. "She is very willful. I did not please her, I do not know why. Perhaps she has seen too many men like me."

He told me that, when he reached Cuba, after parting with me on the Thames, his uncle, "in spite of certain influences," had received him quite naturally as his heir, and the future head of the family. But Seraphina, whom by the laws of convenience he ought to have married, had quite calmly refused him.

"I did not impress her; she is romantic. She wanted a very bold man, a Cid, something that it is not easy to have."

He paused again, and looked at me with some sort of challenge in his eyes.

"She could have met no one better than you," I said.

He waved his hand a little. "Oh, for that — — -" he said deprecatingly. "Besides, I am dying. I have never been well since I went into your cold sea, over there, after we left your sister. You remember how I coughed on board that miserable ship."

I did remember it very well.

He went to the inner door, looked in, and then came back to me.

"Seraphina needs a guide — a controller — someone very strong and gentle, and kind and brave. My uncle will never ask her to marry against her wish; he is too old and has too little will. And for any man who would marry her — except one — there would be great dangers, for her and for him. It would need a cool man, and a brave man, and a good one, too, to hazard, perhaps even life, for her sake. She will be very rich. All our lands, all our towns, all our gold." There was a suggestion of fabulousness in his dreamy voice. "They shall never be mine," he added. "Vaya."

He looked at me with his piercing eyes set to an expression that might have been gentle mockery. At any rate, it also contained intense scrutiny, and, perhaps, a little of appeal. I sighed myself.

"There is a man called O'Brien in there," he said. "He does us the honour to pretend to my cousin's hand."

I felt singularly angry. "Well, he's not a Spaniard," I said.

Carlos answered mockingly, "Oh, for Spaniard, no. He is a descendant of the Irish kings."

"He's an adventurer," I said. "You ought to be on your guard. You don't know these bog-trotting fortune-hunters. They're the laughter of Europe, kings and all."

Carlos smiled again. "He's a very dangerous man for all that," he said. "I should not advise any one to come to Rio Medio, my uncle's town, without making a friend of the Señor O'Brien."

He went once more to the inner door, and, after a moment's whispering with someone within, returned to me.

"My uncle still sleeps," he said. "I must keep you a little longer. Ah, yes, the Señor O'Brien. He shall marry my cousin, I think, when I am dead."

"You don't know these fellows," I said.

"Oh, I know them very well," Carlos smiled, "there are many of them at Havana. They came there after what they call the '98, when there was great rebellion in Ireland, and many good Catholics were killed and ruined."

"Then he's a rebel, and ought to be hung," I said.

Carlos laughed as of old. "It may be, but, my good Juan, we Christians do not see eye to eye with you. This man rebelled against your government, but, also, he suffered for the true faith. He is a good Catholic; he has suffered for it; and in the Ever Faithful Island, that is a passport. He has climbed very high; he is a judge of the Marine Court at Havana. That is why he is here to-day, attending my uncle in this affair of delivering up the pirates. My uncle loves him very much. O'Brien was at first my uncle's clerk, and my uncle made him a juez, and he is also the intendant of my uncle's estates, and he has a great influence in my uncle's town of Rio Medio. I tell you, if you come to visit us, it will be as well to be on good terms with the Señor Juez O'Brien. My uncle is a very old man, and if I die before him, this O'Brien, I think, will end by marrying my cousin, because my poor uncle is very much in his hands. There are other pretenders, but they have little chance, because it is so very dangerous to come to my uncle's town of Rio Medio, on account of this man's intrigues and of his power with the populace."

I looked at Carlos intently. The name of the town had seemed to be familiar to me. Now I suddenly remembered that it was where Nicolas el Demonio, the pirate who was so famous as to be almost mythical, had beaten off Admiral Rowley's boats.

"Come, you had better see this Irish hidalgo who wants to do us so much honour," — he gave an inscrutable glance at me, — "but do not talk loudly till my uncle wakes."

He threw the door open. I followed him into the room, where the vision of the ancient Don and the charming apparition of the young girl had retreated only a few moments before.

Chapter 3

The room was very lofty and coldly dim; there were great bars in front of the begrimed windows. It was very bare, containing only a long black table, some packing cases, and half a dozen rocking chairs. Of these, five were very new and one very old, black and heavy, with a green leather seat and a coat of arms worked on its back cushions. There were little heaps of mahogany sawdust here and there on the dirty tiled floor, and a pile of sacking in one corner. Beneath a window the flap of an open trap-door half hid a large green damp-stain; a deep recess in the wall yawned like a cavern, and had two or three tubs in the right corner; a man with a blond head, slightly bald as if he had been tonsured, was rocking gently in one of the new chairs.

Opposite him, with his aged face towards us, sat the old Don asleep in the high chair. His delicate white hands lay along the arms, one of them holding a gold vinaigrette; his black, silver-headed cane was between his silk-stockinged legs. The diamond buckles of his shoes shot out little vivid rays, even in that gloomy place. The young girl was sitting with her hands to her temples and her elbows on the long table, minutely examining the motionlessness of a baby lizard, a tiny thing with golden eyes, whom fear seemed to have turned into stone.

We entered quietly, and after a moment she looked up candidly into my eyes, and placed her finger on her lips, motioning her head towards her father. She placed her hand in mine, and whispered very clearly:

“Be welcome, my English cousin,” and then dropped her eyes again to the lizard.

She knew all about me from Carlos. The man of whom I had seen only the top of his head, turned his chair suddenly and glinted at me with little blue eyes. He was rather small and round, with very firm flesh, and very white, plump hands. He was dressed in the black clothes of a Spanish judge. On his round face there was always a smile like that which hangs around the jaws of a pike — only more humorous. He bowed a little exaggeratedly to me and said:

“Ah, ye are that famous Mr. Kemp.”

I said that I imagined him the more famous Señor Juez O’Brien.

“It’s little use saying ye arren’t famous,” he said. His voice had the faint, infinitely sweet twang of certain Irishry; a thing as delicate and intangible as the scent of lime flowers. “Our noble friend” — he indicated Carlos with a little flutter of one white hand — “has told me what make of a dare-devil gallant ye are; breaking the skulls of half the Bow Street runners for the sake of a friend in distress. Well, I honour ye for it; I’ve done as much myself.” He added, “In the old days,” and sighed.

“You mean in the ‘98,” I said, a little insolently.

O'Brien's eyes twinkled. He had, as a matter of fact, nearly lost his neck in the Irish fiasco, either in Clonmel or Sligo, bolting violently from the English dragoons, in the mist, to a French man-of-war's boats in the bay. To him, even though he was now a judge in Cuba, it was an episode of heroism of youth — of romance, in fact. So that, probably, he did not resent my mention of it. I certainly wanted to resent something that was slighting in his voice, and patronizing in his manner.

The old Don slumbered placidly, his face turned up to the distant begrimed ceiling.

"Now, I'll make you a fair offer," O'Brien said suddenly, after an intent study of the insolent glance that I gave him. I disliked him because I knew nothing about the sort of man he was. He was, as a matter of fact, more alien to me than Carlos. And he gave me the impression that, if perhaps he were not absolutely the better man, he could still make a fool of me, or at least make me look like a fool.

"I'm told you are a Separationist," he said. "Well, it's like me. I am an Irishman; there has been a price on my head in another island. And there are warrants out against you here for assaulting the admiral. We can work together, and there's nothing low in what I have in mind for you."

He had heard frequently from Carlos that I was a desperate and aristocratically lawless young man, who had lived in a district entirely given up to desperate and murderous smugglers. But this was the first I had heard definitely of warrants against me in Jamaica. That, no doubt, he had heard from Ramon, who knew everything. In all this little sardonic Irishman said to me, it seemed the only thing worth attention. It stuck in my mind while, in persuasive tones, and with airy fluency, he discoursed of the profits that could be made, nowadays, in arming privateers under the Mexican flag. He told me I needn't be surprised at their being fitted out in a Spanish colony. "There's more than one aspect to disloyalty like this," said he dispassionately, but with a quick wink contrasting with his tone.

Spain resented our recognition of their rebellious colonies. And with the same cool persuasiveness, relieved by humorous smiles, he explained that the loyal Spaniards of the Ever Faithful Island thought there was no sin in doing harm to the English, even under the Mexican flag, whose legal existence they did not recognize.

"Mind ye, it's an organized thing, I have something to say in it. It hurts Mr. Canning's Government at home, the curse of Cromwell on him and them. They will be dropping some of their own colonies directly. And as you are a Separationist, small blame to you, and I am an Irishman, we shan't cry our eyes out over it. Come, Mr. Kemp, 'tis all for the good of the Cause... And there's nothing low. You are a gentleman, and I wouldn't propose anything that was. The very best people in Havana are interested in the matter. Our schooners lie in Rio Medio, but I can't be there all the time myself."

Surprise deprived me of speech. I glanced at Carlos. He was watching us inscrutably. The young girl touched the lizard gently, but it was too frightened to move. O'Brien, with shrewd glances, rocked his chair... What did I want? he inquired. To see life?

What he proposed was the life for a fine young fellow like me. Moreover, I was half Scotch. Had I forgotten the wrongs of my own country? Had I forgotten the '45?

"You'll have heard tell of a Scotch Chief Justice whose son spent in Amsterdam the money his father earned on the justice seat in Edinb'ro' — money paid for rum and run silks . . ."

Of course I had heard of it; everybody had; but it had been some years before.

"We're backwards hereabouts," O'Brien jeered. "But over there they winked and chuckled at the judge, and they do the same in Havana at us."

Suddenly from behind us the voice of the young girl said, "Of what do you discourse, my English cousin?"

O'Brien interposed deferentially. "Señorita, I ask him to come to Rio," he said.

She turned her large dark eyes scrutinizingly upon me, then dropped them again. She was arranging some melon seeds in a rayed circle round the lizard that looked motionlessly at her.

"Do not speak very loudly, lest you awaken my father," she warned us.

The old Don's face was still turned to the ceiling. Carlos, standing behind his chair, opened his mouth a little in a half smile. I was really angry with O'Brien by that time, with his air of omniscience, superiority, and self-content, as if he were talking to a child or someone very credulous and weak-minded.

"What right have you to speak for me, Señor Juez?" I said in the best Spanish I could.

The young girl looked at me once more, and then again looked down.

"Oh, I can speak for you," he answered in English, "because I know. Your position's this." He sat down in his rocking chair, crossed his legs, and looked at me as if he expected me to show signs of astonishment at his knowing so much. "You're in a hole. You must leave this island of Jamaica — surely it's as distressful as my own dear land — and you can't go home, because the runners would be after you. You're 'wanted' here as well as there, and you've nowhere to go."

I looked at him, quite startled by this view of my case. He extended one plump hand towards me, and still further lowered his voice.

"Now, I offer you a good berth, a snug berth. And 'tis a pretty spot." He got a sort of languorous honey into his voice, and drawled out, "The — the Señorita's." He took an air of businesslike candour. "You can help us, and we you; we could do without you better than you without us. Our undertaking — there's big names in it, just as in the Free Trading you know so well, don't be saying you don't — is worked from Havana. What we need is a man we can trust. We had one — Nichols. You remember the mate of the ship you came over in. He was Nicola el Demonio; he won't be any longer — I can't tell you why, it's too long a story."

I did remember very vividly that cadaverous Nova Scotian mate of the Thames, who had warned me with truculent menaces against showing my face in Rio Medio. I remembered his sallow, shiny cheeks, and the exaggerated gestures of his claw-like hands.

O'Brien smiled. "Nichols is alive right enough, but no more good than if he were dead. And that's the truth. He pretends his nerve's gone; he was a devil among tailors for a time, but he's taken to crying now. It was when your blundering old admiral's boats had to be beaten off that his zeal cooled. He thinks the British Government will rise in its strength." There was a bitter contempt in his voice, but he regained his calm business tone. "It will do nothing of the sort. I've given them those seven poor devils that had to die to-day without absolution. So Nichols is done for, as far as we are concerned. I've got him put away to keep him from blabbing. You can have his place — and better than his place. He was only a sailor, which you are not. However, you know enough of ships, and what we want is a man with courage, of course, but also a man we can trust. Any of the Creoles would bolt into the bush the moment they'd five dollars in hand. We'll pay you well; a large share of all you take."

I laughed outright. "You're quite mistaken in your man," I said. "You are, really."

He shook his head gently, and brushed an invisible speck from his plump black knees.

"You must go somewhere," he said. "Why not go with us?"

I looked at him, puzzled by his tenacity and assurance.

"Ramon here has told us you battered the admiral last night; and there's a warrant out already against you for attempted murder. You're hand and glove with the best of the Separationists in this island, I know, but they won't save you from being committed — for rebellion, perhaps. You know it as well as I do. You were down here to take a passage to-day, weren't you, now?"

I remembered that the Island Loyalists said that the pirates and Separationists worked together to bother the admiral and raise discontent. Living in the centre of Separationist discontent with the Macdonalds, I knew it was not true. But nothing was too bad to say against the planters who clamoured for union with the United States.

O'Brien leaned forward. His voice had a note of disdain, and then took one of deeper earnestness; it sank into his chest. He extended his hand; his eyebrows twitched. He looked — he was — a conspirator.

"I tell you I do it for the sake of Ireland," he said passionately. "Every ship we take, every clamour they raise here, is a stroke and is disgrace for them over there that have murdered us and ruined my own dear land." His face worked convulsively; I was in the presence of one of the primeval passions. But he grew calm immediately after. "You want Separation for reasons of your own. I don't ask what they are. No doubt you and your crony Macdonald and the rest of them will feather your own nests; I don't ask. But help me to be a thorn in their sides — just a little — just a little longer. What do I put in your way? Just what you want. Have your Jamaica joined to the United States. You'll be able to come back with your pockets full, and I'll be joyful — for the sake of my own dear land."

I said suddenly and recklessly — if I had to face one race-passion, he had to look at another; we were cat and dog — Celt and Saxon, as it was in the beginning: "I am

not a traitor to my country." Then I realized with sudden concern that I had probably awakened the old Don. He stirred uneasily in his chair, and lifted one hand.

"The moment I go out from here I'll denounce you," I said very low; "I swear I will. You're here; you can't get away; you'll swing."

O'Brien started. His eyes blazed at me. Then he frowned. "I've been misled," he muttered, with a dark glance at Carlos. And recovering his jocular serenity, "Ye mean it?" he asked; "it's not British heroics?"

The old Don stirred again and sighed. The young girl glided swiftly to his side. "Señor O'Brien," she said, "you have so irritated my English cousin that he has awakened my father."

O'Brien grinned gently. "'Tis ever the way," he said sardonically. "The English fools do the harm and the Irish fool gets the kicking." He rose to his feet, quite collected, a spick-and-span little man. "I suppose I've said too much. Well, well! You are going to denounce the senior judge of the Marine Court of Havana as a pirate. I wonder who will believe you!" He went behind the old Don's chair with the gliding motion of a Spanish lawyer, and slipped down the open trap-hatch near the window.

It was the disappearance of a shadow. I heard some guttural mutterings come up through the hatch, a rustling, then silence. If he was afraid of me at all he carried it off very well. I apologized to the young girl for having awakened her father. Her colour was very high, and her eyes sparkled. If she had not been so very beautiful I should have gone away at once. She said angrily:

"He is odious to me, the Señor Juez. Too long my father has suffered his insolence." She was very small, but she had an extraordinary dignity of command. "I could see, Señor, that he was annoying you. Why should you consider such a creature?" Her head drooped. "But my father is very old."

I turned upon Carlos, who stood all black in the light of the window.

"Why did you make me meet him? He may be a judge of your Marine Court, but he's nothing but a scoundrelly bog-trotter."

Carlos said a little haughtily, "You must not denounce him. You should not leave this place if I feared you would try thus to bring dishonour on this gray head, and involve this young girl in a public scandal." His manner became soft. "For the honour of the house you shall say nothing. And you shall come with us. I need you."

I was full of mistrust now. If he did countenance this unlawful enterprise, whose headquarters were in Rio Medio, he was not the man for me. Though it was big enough to be made, by the papers at home, of political importance, it was, after all, neither more nor less than piracy. The idea of my turning a sort of Irish traitor was so extravagantly outrageous that now I could smile at the imbecility of that fellow O'Brien. As to turning into a sea-thief for lucre — my blood boiled.

No. There was something else there. Something deep; something dangerous; some intrigue, that I could not conceive even the first notion of. But that Carlos wanted anxiously to make use of me for some purpose was clear. I was mystified to the point of forgetting how heavily I was compromised even in Jamaica, though it was worth

remembering, because at that time an indictment for rebellion — under the Black Act — was no joking matter. I might be sent home under arrest; and even then, there was my affair with the runners.

“It is coming to pay a visit,” he was saying persuasively, “while your affair here blows over, my Juan — and — and — making my last hours easy, perhaps.”

I looked at him; he was worn to a shadow — a shadow with dark wistful eyes. “I don’t understand you,” I faltered.

The old man stirred, opened his lids, and put a gold vinaigrette to his nostrils.

“Of course I shall not denounce O’Brien,” I said. “I, too, respect the honour of your house.”

“You are even better than I thought you. And if I entreat you, for the love of your mother — of your sister? Juan, it is not for myself, it is — — ”

The young girl was pouring some drops from a green phial into a silver goblet; she passed close to us, and handed it to her father, who had leant a little forward in his chair. Every movement of hers affected me with an intimate joy; it was as if I had been waiting to see just that carriage of the neck, just that proud glance from the eyes, just that droop of eyelashes upon the cheeks, for years and years.

“No, I shall hold my tongue, and that’s enough,” I said.

At that moment the old Don sat up and cleared his throat. Carlos sprang towards him with an infinite grace of tender obsequiousness. He mentioned my name and the relationship, then rehearsed the innumerable titles of his uncle, ending “and patron of the Bishopric of Pinar del Rio.”

I stood stiffly in front of the old man. He bowed his head at intervals, holding the silver cup carefully whilst his chair rocked a little. When Carlos’ mellow voice had finished the rehearsing of the sonorous styles, I mumbled something about “transcendent honour.”

He stopped me with a little, deferentially peremptory gesture of one hand, and began to speak, smiling with a contraction of the lips and a trembling of the head. His voice was very low, and quavered slightly, but every syllable was enunciated with the same beauty of clearness that there was in his features, in his hands, in his ancient gestures.

“The honour is to me,” he said, “and the pleasure. I behold my kinsman, who, with great heroism, I am told, rescued my dearly loved nephew from great dangers; it is an honour to me to be able to give him thanks. My beloved and lamented sister contracted a union with an English hidalgo, through whose house your own very honourable family is allied to my own; it is a pleasure to me to meet after many years with one who has seen the places where her later life was passed.”

He paused, and breathed with some difficulty, as if the speech had exhausted him. Afterwards he began to ask me questions about Rooksby’s aunt — the lamented sister of his speech. He had loved her greatly, he said. I knew next to nothing about her, and his fine smile and courtly, aged, deferential manners made me very nervous. I felt as if I had been taken to pay a ceremonial visit to a supreme pontiff in his dotage. He

spoke about Horton Priory with some animation for a little while, and then faltered, and forgot what he was speaking of. Suddenly he said:

“But where is O’Brien? Did he write to the Governor here? I should like you to know the Señor O’Brien. He is a spiritual man.”

I forbore to say that I had already seen O’Brien, and the old man sank into complete silence. It was beginning to grow dark, and the noise of suppressed voices came from the open trap-door. Nobody said anything.

I felt a sort of uneasiness; I could by no means understand the connection between the old Don and what had gone before, and I did not, in a purely conventional sense, know how long I ought to stop. The sky through the barred windows had grown pallid.

The old Don said suddenly, “You must visit my poor town of Rio Medio,” but he gave no specific invitation and said nothing more.

Afterwards he asked, rather querulously, “But where is O’Brien? He must write those letters for me.”

The young girl said, “He has preceded us to the ship; he will write there.”

She had gone back to her seat. Don Balthasar shrugged his shoulders to his ears, and moved his hands from his knees.

“Without doubt, he knows best,” he said, “but he should ask me.”

It grew darker still; the old Don seemed to have fallen asleep again. Save for the gleam of the silver buckle of his hat, he had disappeared into the gloom of the place. I remembered my engagement to dine with Williams on board the *Lion*, and I rose to my feet. There did not seem to be any chance of my talking to the young girl. She was once more leaning nonchalantly over the lizard, and her hair drooped right across her face like clusters of grapes. There was a gleam on a little piece of white forehead, and all around and about her there were shadows deepening. Carlos came concernedly towards me as I looked at the door.

“But you must not go yet,” he said a little suavely; “I have many things to say. Tell me — —”

His manner heightened my uneasiness to a fear. The expression of his eyes changed, and they became fixed over my shoulder, while on his lips the words “You must come, you must come,” trembled, hardly audible. I could only shake my head. At once he stepped back as if resigning. He was giving me up — and it occurred to me that if the danger of his seduction was over, there remained the danger of arrest just outside the door.

Some one behind me said peremptorily, “It is time,” and there was a flickering diminution of the light. I had a faint instantaneous view of the old Don dozing, with his head back — of the tall windows, cut up into squares by the black bars. Something hairily coarse ran harshly down my face; I grew blind; my mouth, my eyes, my nostrils were filled with dust; my breath shut in upon me became a flood of warm air. I had no time to resist. I kicked my legs convulsively; my elbows were drawn tight against my sides. Someone grunted under my weight; then I was carried — down, along, up, down again; my feet were knocking along a wall, and the top of my head rubbed occasionally

against what must have been the roof of a low stone passage, issuing from under the back room of Ramon's store. Finally, I was dropped upon something that felt like a heap of wood-shavings. My surprise, rage, and horror had been so great that, after the first stifled cry, I had made no sound. I heard the footsteps of several men going away.

Chapter 4

I remained lying there, bound hand and foot, for a long time; for quite long enough to allow me to collect my senses and see that I had been a fool to threaten O'Brien. I had been nobly indignant, and behold! I had a sack thrown over my head for my pains, and was put away safely somewhere or other. It seemed to be a cellar.

I was in search of romance, and here were all the elements; Spaniards, a conspirator, and a kidnapping; but I couldn't feel a fool and romantic as well. True romance, I suppose, needs a whirl of emotions to extinguish all the senses except that of sight, which it dims. Except for sight, which I hadn't at all, I had the use of them all, and all reported unpleasant things.

I ached and smarted with my head in a sack, with my mouth full of flour that had gone mouldy and offended my nostrils; I had a sense of ignominy, and I was extremely angry; I could see that the old Don was in his dotage — but Carlos I was bitter against.

I was not really afraid; I could not suppose that the Riegos would allow me to be murdered or seriously maltreated. But I was incensed against Fate or Chance or whatever it is — on account of the ignominious details, the coarse sack, the mouldy flour, the stones of the tunnel that had barked my shins, the tightness of the ropes that bound my ankles together, and seemed to cut into my wrists behind my back.

I waited, and my fury grew in a dead silence. How would it end — with what outrage? I would show my contempt and preserve my dignity by submitting without a struggle — I despised this odious plot. At last there were voices, footsteps; I found it very hard to carry out my resolution and refrain from stifled cries and kicks. I was lifted up and carried, like a corpse, with many stumbles, by men who sometimes growled as they hastened along. From time to time somebody murmured, "Take care." Then I was deposited into a boat. The world seemed to be swaying, splashing, jarring — and it became obvious to me that I was being taken to some ship. The Spanish ship, of course. Suddenly I broke into cold perspiration at the thought that, after all, their purpose might be to drop me quickly overboard. "Carlos!" I cried. I felt the point of a knife on my breast. "Silence, Señor!" said a gruff voice.

This fear vanished when we came alongside a ship evidently already under way; but I was handled so roughly and clumsily that I was thoroughly exhausted and out of breath, by the time I was got on board. All was still around me; I was left alone on a settee in the main cabin, as I imagined. For a long time I made no movement; then a door opened and shut. There was a murmured conversation between two voices. This went on in animated whispers for a time. At last I felt as if someone were trying, rather ineffectually, to remove the sack itself. Finally, that actually did rub its way over my

head, and something soft and silken began to wipe my eyes with a surprising care, and even tenderness. "This was stupidly done," came a discontented remark; "you do not handle a caballero like this."

"And how else was it to be done, to that kind of caballero?" was the curt retort.

By that time I had blinked my eyes into a condition for remaining open for minute stretches. Two men were bending over me — Carlos and O'Brien himself. The latter said:

"Believe me, your mistake made this necessary. This young gentleman was about to become singularly inconvenient, and he is in no way harmed."

He spoke in a velvety voice, and walked away gently through the darkness. Carlos followed with the lanthorn dangling at arm's length; strangely enough he had not even looked at me. I suppose he was ashamed, and I was too proud to speak to him, with my hands and feet tied fast. The door closed, and I remained sitting in the darkness. Long small windows grew into light at one end of the place, curved into an outline that suggested a deep recess. The figure of a crowned woman, that moved rigidly up and down, was silhouetted over my body. Groaning creaks of wood and the faint swish of water made themselves heard continuously.

I turned my head to a click, I saw a door open a little way, and the small blue flame of a taper floated into the room. Then the door closed with a definite sound of shutting in. The light shone redly through protecting fingers, and upwards on to a small face. It came to a halt, and I made out the figure of a girl leaning across a table and looking upwards. There was a click of glass, and then a great blaze of light created a host of shining things; a glitter of gilded carvings, red velvet couches, a shining table, a low ceiling, painted white, on carved rafters. A large silver lamp she had lighted kept on swinging to the gentle motion of the ship.

She stood just in front of me; the girl that I had seen through the door; the girl I had seen play with the melon seeds. She was breathing fast — it agitated me to be alone with her — and she had a little shining dagger in her hand.

She cut the rope round my ankles, and motioned me imperiously to turn round. "Your hands — your hands!"

I turned my back awkwardly to her, and felt the grip of small, cool, very firm fingers upon my wrists. My arms fell apart, numb and perfectly useless; I was half aware of pain in them, but it passed unnoticed among a cloud of other emotions. I didn't feel my finger-tips because I had the agitation, the flutter, the tantalization of looking at her.

I was all the while conscious of the — say, the irregularity of my position, but I felt very little fear. There were the old Don, an ineffectual, silver-haired old gentleman, who obviously was not a pirate; the sleek O'Brien, and Carlos, who seemed to cough on the edge of a grave — and this young girl. There was not any future that I could conceive, and the past seemed to be cut off from me by a narrow, very dark tunnel through which I could see nothing at all.

The young girl was, for the moment, what counted most on the whole, the only thing the eye could rest on. She affected me as an apparition familiar, yet absolutely new in her charm. I had seen her gray eyes; I had seen her red lips; her dark hair, her lithe gestures; the carriage of her head; her throat, her hands. I knew her; I seemed to have known her for years. A rush of strange, sweet feeling made me dumb. She was looking at me, her lips set, her eyes wide and still; and suddenly she said:

“Ask nothing. The land is not far yet. You can escape, Carlos thought... But no! You would only perish for nothing. Go with God.” She pointed imperiously towards the square stern-ports of the cabin.

Following the direction of her hand, my eyes fell upon the image of a Madonna; rather large — perhaps a third life-size; with a gilt crown, a pink serious face bent a little forward over a pink naked child that perched on her left arm and raised one hand. It stood on a bracket, against the rudder casing, with fat cherubs’ heads carved on the supports. The young girl crossed herself with a swift motion of the hand. The stern-ports, glazed in small panes, were black, and gleaming in a white frame-work.

“Go — go — go with God,” the girl whispered urgently. “There is a boat — — — -”

I made a motion to rise; I wanted to go. The idea of having my liberty, of its being again a possibility, made her seem of less importance; other things began to have their share. But I could not stand, though the blood was returning, warm and tingling, in my legs and hands. She looked at me with a sharp frown puckering her brows a little; beat a hasty tattoo with one of her feet, and cast a startled glance towards the forward door that led on deck. Then she walked to the other side of the table, and sat looking at me in the glow of the lamp.

“Your life hangs on a thread,” she murmured.

I answered, “You have given it to me. Shall I never — — — -?” I was acutely conscious of the imperfection of my language.

She looked at me sharply; then lowered her lids. Afterwards she raised them again. “Think of yourself. Every moment is — — — -”

“I will be as quick as I can,” I said.

I was chafing my ankles and looking up at her. I wanted, very badly, to thank her for taking an interest in me, only I found it very difficult to speak to her. Suddenly she sprang to her feet:

“That man thinks he can destroy you. I hate him — I detest him! You have seen how he treats my father.”

It struck me, like a blow, that she was merely avenging O’Brien’s insolence to her father. I had been kidnapped against Don Balthasar Riego’s will. It gave me very well the measure of the old man’s powerlessness in face of his intendant — who was obviously confident of afterwards soothing the resentment.

I was glad I had not thanked her for taking an interest in me. I was distressed, too, because once more I had missed Romance by an inch.

Someone kicked at the locked door. A voice cried — I could not help thinking — warningly, “Seraphina, Seraphina,” and another voice said with excessive softness, “Senorita! Voyons! quelle folie.”

She sprang at me. Her hand hurt my wrist as she dragged me aft. I scrambled clumsily into the recess of the counter, and put my head out. The night air was very chilly and full of brine; a little boat towing by a long painter was sheering about in the phosphorescent wake of the ship. The sea itself was pallid in the light of the moon, invisible to me. A little astern of us, on our port quarter, a vessel under a press of canvas seemed to stand still; looming up like an immense pale ghost. She might have been coming up with us, or else we had just passed her — I couldn't tell. I had no time to find out, and I didn't care. The great thing was to get hold of the painter. The whispers of the girl urged me, but the thing was not easy; the rope, fastened higher up, streamed away out of reach of my hand. At last, by watching the moment when it slacked, and throwing myself half out of the stern window, I managed to hook it with my finger-tips. Next moment it was nearly jerked away from me, but I didn't lose it, and the boat taking a run just then under the counter, I got a good hold. The sound of another kick at the door made me swing myself out, head first, without reflection. I got soused to the waist before I had reached the bows of the boat. With a frantic effort I clambered up and rolled in. When I got on my legs, the jerky motion of tossing had ceased, the boat was floating still, and the light of the stern windows was far away already. The girl had managed to cut the painter.

The other vessel was heading straight for me, rather high on the water, broad-beamed, squat, and making her way quietly, like a shadow. The land might have been four or five miles away — I had no means of knowing exactly. It looked like a high black cloud, and purple-gray mists here and there among the peaks hung like scarves.

I got an oar over the stern to scull, but I was not fit for much exertion. I stared at the ship I had left. Her stern windows glimmered with a slight up-and-down motion; her sails seemed to fall into black confusion against the blaze of the moon; faint cries came to me out of her, and by the alteration of her shape I understood that she was being brought to, preparatory to lowering a boat. She might have been half a mile distant when the gleam of her stern windows swung slowly round and went out. I had no mind to be recaptured, and began to scull frantically towards the other vessel. By that time she was quite near — near enough for me to hear the lazy sound of the water at her bows, and the occasional flutter of a sail. The land breeze was dying away, and in the wake of the moon I perceived the boat of my pursuers coming over, black and distinct; but the other vessel was nearly upon me. I sheered under her starboard bow and yelled, “Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!”

There was a lot of noise on board, and no one seemed to hear my shouts. Several voices yelled. “That cursed Spanish ship ahead is heaving-to athwart our hawse.” The crew and the officers seemed all to be forward shouting abuse at the “lubberly Dago,” and it looked as though I were abandoned to my fate. The ship forged ahead in the light air; I failed in my grab at her fore chains, and my boat slipped astern, bumping

against the side. I missed the main chain, too, and yelled all the time with desperation, "For God's sake! Ship ahoy! For God's sake throw me a rope, some-, body, before it's too late!"

I was giving up all hope when a heavy coil — of a brace, I suppose — fell upon my head, nearly knocking me over. Half stunned as I was, desperation lent me strength to scramble up her side hand over hand, while the boat floated away from under my feet. I was done up when I got on the poop. A yell came from forward, "Hard aport." Then the same voice addressed itself to abusing the Spanish ship very close to us now. "What do you mean by coming-to right across my bows like this?" it yelled in a fury.

I stood still in the shadows on the poop. We were drawing slowly past the stern of the Spaniard, and O'Brien's voice answered in English:

"We are picking up a boat of ours that's gone adrift with a man. Have you seen anything of her?" "No — confound you and your boat." Of course those forward knew nothing of my being on board. The man who had thrown me the rope — a passenger, a certain Major Cowper, going home with his wife and child — had walked away proudly, without deigning as much as to look at me twice, as if to see a man clamber on board a ship ten miles from the land was the most usual occurrence. He was, I found afterwards, an absurd, pompous person, as stiff as a ramrod, and so full of his own importance that he imagined he had almost demeaned himself by his condescension in throwing down the rope in answer to my despairing cries. On the other hand, the helmsman, the only other person aft, was so astounded as to become quite speechless. I could see, in the light of the binnacle thrown upon his face, his staring eyes and his open mouth.

The voice forward had subsided by then, and as the stern of the Spanish ship came abreast of the poop, I stepped out of the shadow of the sails, and going close to the rail I said, not very loud — there was no need to shout — but very distinctly:

"I am out of your clutches, Mr. O'Brien, after all. I promise you that you shall hear of me yet."

Meanwhile, another man had come up from forward on the poop, growling like a bear, a short, rotund little man, the captain of the ship. The Spanish vessel was dropping astern, silent, with her sails all black, hiding the low moon. Suddenly a hurried hail came out of her.

"What ship is this?"

"What's that to you, blank your eyes? The Breeze, if you want to know. What are you going to do about it?" the little skipper shouted fiercely. In the light wind the ships were separating slowly.

"Where are you bound to?" hailed O'Brien's voice again.

The little skipper laughed with exasperation. "Dash your blanked impudence. To Havana, and be hanged to you. Anything more you want to know? And my name's Lumsden, and I am sixty years old, and if I had you here, I would put a head on you for getting in my way, you — — —"

He stopped, out of breath. Then, addressing himself to his passenger:

“That’s the Spanish chartered ship that brought these sanguinary pirates that were hanged this morning, major. She’s taking the Spanish commissioner back. I suppose they had no man-of-war handy for the service in Cuba. Did you ever — — — ”

He had caught sight of me for the first time, and positively jumped a foot high with astonishment.

“Who on earth’s that there?”

His astonishment was comprehensible. The major, Without deigning to enlighten him, walked proudly away. He was too dignified a person to explain.

It was left to me. Frequenting, as I had been doing, Ramon’s store, which was a great gossiping centre of the maritime world in Kingston, I knew the faces and the names of most of the merchant captains who used to gather there to drink and swap yarns. I was not myself quite unknown to little Lumsden. I told him all my story, and all the time he kept on scratching his bald head, full of incredulous perplexity. Old Señor Ramon! Such a respectable man. And I had been kidnapped? From his store!

“If I didn’t see you here in my cuddy before my eyes, I wouldn’t believe a word you say,” he declared absurdly.

But he was ready enough to take me to Havana. However, he insisted upon calling down his mate, a gingery fellow, short, too, but wizened, and as stupid as himself.

“Here’s that Kemp, you know. The young fellow that Macdonald of the Horton Pen picked up somewhere two years ago. The Spaniards in that ship kidnapped him — so he says. He says they are pirates. But that’s a government chartered ship, and all the pirates that have ever been in her were hanged this morning in Kingston. But here he is, anyhow. And he says that at home he had throttled a Bow Street runner before he went off with the smugglers. Did you ever hear the likes of it, Mercer? I shouldn’t think he was telling us a parcel of lies; hey, Mercer?”

And the two grotesque little chaps stood nodding their heads at me sagaciously.

“He’s a desperate character, then,” said Mercer at last, cautiously. “This morning, the very last thing I heard ashore, as I went to fetch the fresh beef off, is that he had been assaulting a justice of the peace on the highroad, and had been trying to knock down the admiral, who was coming down to town in a chaise with Mr. Topnambo. There’s a warrant out against him under the Black Act, sir.”

Then he brightened up considerably. “So he must have been kidnapped or something after all, sir, or he would be in chokey now.”

It was true, after all. Romance reserved me for another fate, for another sort of captivity, for more than one sort. And my imagination had been captured, enslaved already by the image of that young girl who had called me her English cousin, the girl with the lizard, the girl with the dagger! And with every word she uttered romance itself, if I had only known it, the romance of persecuted lovers, spoke to me through her lips.

That night the Spanish ship had the advantage of us in a freshening wind, and overtook the Breeze. Before morning dawned she passed us, and before the close of the

next day she was gone out of sight ahead, steering, apparently, the same course with ourselves.

Her superior sailing had an enormous influence upon my fortunes; and I was more adrift in the world than ever before, more in the dark as to what awaited me than when I was lugged along with my head in a sack. I gave her but little thought. A sort of numbness had come over me. I could think of the girl who had cut me free, and for all my resentment at the indignity of my treatment, I had hardly a thought to spare for the man who had me bound. I was pleased to remember that she hated him; that she had said so herself. For the rest, I had a vague notion of going to the English Consul in Havana. After all, I was not a complete nobody. I was John Kemp, a gentleman, well connected; I could prove it. The Bow Street runner had not been dead as I had thought. The last letter from Veronica informed me that the man had given up thief-catching, and was keeping, now, a little inn in the neighbourhood. Ralph, my brother-in-law, had helped him to it, no doubt. I could come home safely now.

And I had discovered I was no longer anxious to return home.

Chapter 5

There wasn't any weirdness about the ship when I woke in the sunlight. She was old and slow and rather small. She carried Lumsden (master), Mercer (mate), a crew that seemed no better and no worse than any other crew, and the old gentleman who had thrown me the rope the night before, and who seemed to think that he had derogated from his dignity in doing it. He was a Major Cowper, retiring from a West Indian regiment, and had with him his wife and a disagreeable little girl, with a yellow pigtail and a bony little chest and arms.

On the whole, they weren't the sort of people that one would have chosen for companions on a pleasure-trip. Major Cowper's wife lay all day in a deck chair, alternately drawing to her and repulsing the whining little girl. The major talked to me about the scandals with which the world was filled, and kept a suspicious eye upon his wife. He spent the morning in shaving what part of his face his white whiskers did not cover, the afternoon in enumerating to me the subjects on which he intended to write to the Horse Guards. He had grown entirely amiable, perhaps for the reason that his wife ignored my existence.

Meantime I let the days slip by idly, only wondering how I could manage to remain in Havana and breathe the air of the same island with the girl who had delivered me. Perhaps some day we might meet — who knows? I was not afraid of that Irishman.

It never occurred to me to bother about the course we were taking, till one day we sighted the Cuban coast, and I heard Lumsden and Mercer pronounce the name of Rio Medio. The two ridiculous old chaps talked of Mexican privateers, which seemed to rendezvous off that place. They pointed out to me the headland near the bay. There was no sign of privateer or pirate, as far as the eye could reach. In the course of beating up to windward we closed in with the coast, and then the wind fell.

I remained motionless against the rail for half the night, looking at the land. Not a single light was visible. A wistful, dreamy longing, a quiet longing pervaded me, as though I had been drugged. I dreamed, as young men dream, of a girl's face. She was sleeping there within this dim vision of land. Perhaps this was as near as I should ever be able to approach her. I felt a sorrow without much suffering. A great stillness reigned around the ship, over the whole earth. At last I went below and fell asleep.

I was awakened by the idea that I had heard an extraordinary row — shouting and stamping. But there was a dead silence, to which I was listening with all my ears. Suddenly there was a little pop, as if someone had spat rather vigorously; then a succession of shouts, then another little pop, and more shouts, and the stamping overhead. A woman began to shriek on the other side of the bulkhead, then another

woman somewhere else, then the little girl. I hurried on deck, but it was some minutes before I could make things fit together. I saw Major Cowper on the poop; he was brandishing a little pistol and apostrophizing Lumsden, who was waving ineffectual arms towards the sky; and there was a great deal of shouting, forward and overhead. Cowper rushed at me, and explained that something was an abominable scandal, and that there were women on board. He waved his pistol towards the side; I noticed that the butt was inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Lumsden rushed at him and clawed at his clothes, imploring him not to be rash.

We were so close in with the coast that the surf along the shore gleamed and sparkled in full view.

Someone shouted aloft, "Look out! They are firing again."

Then only I noticed, a quarter of a mile astern and between the land and us, a little schooner, rather low in the water, curtseying under a cloud of white canvas — a wonderful thing to look at. It was as if I had never seen anything so instinct with life and the joy of it. A snowy streak spattered away from her bows at each plunge. She came at a great speed, and a row of faces looking our way became plain, like a beady decoration above her bulwarks. She swerved a little out of her course, and a sort of mushroom of smoke grew out of her side; there was a little gleam of smouldering light hidden in its heart. The spitting bang followed again, and something skipped along the wave-tops beside us, raising little pillars of spray that drifted away on the wind. The schooner came back on her course, heading straight for us; a shout like groaned applause went up from on board us. Lumsden hid his face in his hands.

I could hear little Mercer shrieking out orders forwards. We were shortening sail. The schooner, luffing a little, ranged abreast. A hail like a metal blare came out of her.

"If you donn'd heef-to we seenk you! We seenk you! By God!"

Major Cowper was using abominable language beside me. Suddenly he began to call out to someone:

"Go down... go down, I say."

A woman's face disappeared into the hood of the companion like a rabbit's tail into its burrow. There was a great volley of cracks from the loose sails, and the ship came to. At the same time the schooner, now on our beam and stripped of her light kites, put in stays and remained on the other tack, with her foresheet to windward.

Major Cowper said it was a scandal. The country was going to the dogs because merchantmen were not compelled by law to carry guns. He spluttered into my ears that there wasn't so much as a twopenny signal mortar on board, and no more powder than enough to load one of his duelling pistols. He was going to write to the Horse Guards.

A blue-and-white ensign fluttered up to the main gaff of the schooner; a boat dropped into the water. It all went breathlessly — I hadn't time to think. I saw old Cowper run to the side and aim his pistol overboard; there was an ineffectual click; he made a gesture of disgust, and tossed it on deck. His head hung dejectedly down upon his chest.

Lumsden said, "Thank God, oh, thank God!" and the old man turned on him like a snarling dog.

"You infernal coward," he said. "Haven't you got a spark of courage?"

A moment after, our decks were invaded by men, brown and ragged, leaping down from the bulwarks one after the other.

They had come out at break of day (we must have been observed the evening before), a big schooner — full of as ill-favoured, ragged rascals as the most vivid imagination could conceive. Of course, there had been no resistance on our part. We were outsailed, and at the first ferocious hail the halyards had been let go by the run, and all our crew had bolted aloft. A few bronzed bandits posted abreast of each mast kept them there by the menace of bell-mouthed blunderbusses pointed upwards. Lumsden and Mercer had been each tied flat down to a spare spar. They presented an appearance too ridiculous to awaken genuine compassion. Major Cowper was made to sit on a hen-coop, and a bearded pirate, with a red handkerchief tied round his head and a cutlass in his hand, stood guard over him. The major looked angry and crestfallen. The rest of that infamous crew, without losing a moment, rushed into the cuddy to loot the cabins for wearing apparel, jewellery, and money. They squabbled amongst themselves, throwing the things on deck into a great heap of booty.

The schooner flying the Mexican flag remained hove to abeam. But in the man in command of the boarding party I recognized Tomas Castro!

He was a pirate. My surmises were correct. He looked the part to the life, in a plumed hat, cloaked to the chin, and standing apart in a saturnine dignity.

"Are you going to have us all murdered, Castro?" I asked, with indignation. To my surprise he did not seem to recognize me; indeed, he pretended not to see me at all. I might have been thin air for any sign he gave of being aware of my presence; but, turning his back on me, he addressed himself to the ignobly captive Lumsden, telling him that he, Castro, was the commander of that Mexican schooner, and menacing him with dreadful threats of vengeance for what he called the resistance we had offered to a privateer of the Republic. I suppose he was pleased to qualify with the name of armed resistance the miserable little pop of the major's pocket pistol. To punish that audacity he announced that no private property would be respected.

"You shall have to give up all the money on board," he yelled at the wretched man lying there like a sheep ready for slaughter. The other could only gasp and blink. Castro's ferocity was so remarkable that for a moment it struck me as put on. There was no necessity for it. We were meek and silent enough, only poor Major Cowper muttered:

"My wife and child. . . ."

The ragged brown men were pouring on deck from below; their arms full of bundles. Half a dozen of them started to pull off the main hatch tarpaulin. Up aloft the crew looked down with scared eyes. I began to say excitedly, in my indignation, almost into his very ear:

"I know you, Tomas Castro — I know you — Tomas Castro."

Even then he seemed not to hear; but at last he looked into my face balefully, as if he wished to convey the plague to me.

“Hold your tongue,” he said very quickly in Spanish. “This is folly!” His little hawk’s beak of a nose nestled in his moustache. He waved his arm and declared forcibly, “I don’t know you. I am Nicola el Demonio, the Mexican.”

Poor old Cowper groaned. The reputation of Nicola el Demonio, if rumours were to be trusted, was a horrible thing for a man with women depending on him.

Five or six of these bandits were standing about Lumsden, the major, and myself, fingering the locks of their guns. Poor old Cowper, breaking away from his guard, was raging up and down the poop; and the big pirate kept him off the companion truculently. The major wanted to get below; the little girl was screaming in the cuddy, and we could hear her very plainly. It was rather horrible. Castro had gone forward into the crowd of scoundrels round the hatchway. It was only then that I realized that Major Cowper was in a state of delirious apprehension and fury; I seemed to remember at last that for a long time he had been groaning somewhere near me. He kept on saying:

“Oh, for God’s sake — for God’s sake — my poor wife.”

I understood that he must have been asking me to do something.

It came as a shock to me. I had a vague sensation of his fears. Up till then I hadn’t realized that any one could be much interested in Mrs. Cowper.

He caught hold of my arm, as if he wanted support, and stuttered:

“Couldn’t you — couldn’t you speak to — — — ” He nodded in the direction of Tomas Castro, who was bent and shouting down the hatch. “Try to — — — -” the old man gasped. “Didn’t you hear the child scream?” His face was pallid and wrinkled, like a piece of crumpled paper; his mouth was drawn on one side, and his lips quivered one against the other.

I went to Castro and caught him by the arm. He spun round and smiled discreetly.

“We shall be using force upon you directly. Pray resist, Señor; but not too much. What? His wife? Tell that stupid Inglez with whispers that she is safe.” He whispered with an air of profound intelligence, “We shall be ready to go as soon as these foul swine have finished their stealing. I cannot stop them,” he added.

I could not pause to think what he might mean. The child’s shrieks resounding louder and louder, I ran below. There were a couple of men in the cabin with the women. Mrs. Cowper was lying back upon a sofa, her face very white and drawn, her eyes wide open. Her useless hands twitched at her dress; otherwise she was absolutely motionless, like a frozen woman. The black nurse was panting convulsively in a corner — a palpitating bundle of orange and purple and white clothes. The child was rushing round and round, shrieking. The two men did nothing at all. One of them kept saying in Spanish:

“But — we only want your rings. But — we only want your rings.”

The other made feeble efforts to catch the child as it rushed past him. He wanted its earrings — they were contraband of war, I suppose.

Mrs. Cowper was petrified with terror. Explaining the desires of the two men was like shouting things into the ear of a very deaf woman. She kept on saying:

“Will they go away then? Will they go away then?” All the while she was drawing the rings off her thin fingers, and handing them to me. I gave them to the ruffians whose presence seemed to terrify her out of her senses. I had no option. I could do nothing else. Then I asked her whether she wished me to remain with her and the child. She said:

“Yes. No. Go away. Yes. No — let me think.”

Finally it came into my head that in the captain’s cabin she would be able to talk to her husband through the deck ventilator, and, after a time, the idea filtered through to her brain. She could hardly walk at all. The child and the nurse ran in front of us, and, practically, I carried her there in my arms. Once in the stateroom she struggled loose from me, and, rushing in, slammed the door violently in my face. She seemed to hate me.

Chapter 6

I went on deck again. On the poop about twenty men had surrounded Major Cowper; his white head was being jerked backwards and forwards above their bending backs; they had got his old uniform coat off, and were fighting for the buttons. I had just time to shout to him, "Your wife's down there, she's all right!" when very suddenly I became aware that Tomas Castro was swearing horribly at these thieves. He drove them away, and we were left quite alone on the poop, I holding the major's coat over my arm. Major Cowper stooped down to call through the skylight. I could hear faint answers coming up to him.

Meantime, some of the rascals left on board the schooner had filled on her in a light wind, and, sailing round our stern, had brought their vessel alongside. Ropes were thrown on board and we lay close together, but the schooner with her dirty decks looked to me, now, very sinister and very sordid.

Then I remembered Castro's extraordinary words; they suggested infinite possibilities of a disastrous nature, I could not tell just what. The explanation seemed to be struggling to bring itself to light, like a name that one has had for hours on the tip of a tongue without being able to formulate it. Major Cowper rose stiffly, and limped to my side. He looked at me askance, then shifted his eyes away. Afterwards, he took his coat from my arm. I tried to help him, but he refused my aid, and jerked himself painfully into it. It was too tight for him. Suddenly, he said:

"You seem to be deuced intimate with that man — deuced intimate."

His tone caused me more misgiving than I should have thought possible. He took a turn on the deserted deck; went to the skylight; called down, "All well, still?" waited, listening with his head on one side, and then came back to me.

"You drop into the ship," he said, "out of the clouds. Out of the clouds, I say. You tell us some sort of cock-and-bull story. I say it looks deuced suspicious." He took another turn and came back. "My wife says that you took her rings and — and — gave them to — — —"

He had an ashamed air. It came into my head that that hateful woman had been egging him on to this through the skylight, instead of saying her prayers.

"Your wife!" I said. "Why, she might have been murdered — if I hadn't made her give them up. I believe I saved her life."

He said suddenly, "Tut, tut!" and shrugged his shoulders. He hung his head for a minute, then he added, "Mind, I don't say — I don't say that it mayn't be as you say. You're a very nice young fellow... But what I say is — I am a public man — you ought to clear yourself." He was beginning to recover his military bearing.

“Oh! don’t be absurd,” I said.

One of the Spaniards came up to me and whispered, “You must come now. We are going to cast off.” At the same time Tomas Castro prowled to the other side of the ship, within five yards of us. I called out, “Tomas Castro! Tomas Castro! I will not go with you.” The man beside me said, “Come, señor! Vamos!”

Suddenly Castro, stretching his arm out at me, cried, “Come, hombres. This is the caballero; seize him.” And to me in his broken English he shouted, “You may resist, if you like.”

This was what I meant to do with all my might. The ragged crowd surrounded me; they chattered like monkeys. One man irritated me beyond conception. He looked like an inn-keeper in knee-breeches, had a broken nose that pointed to the left, and a double chin. More of them came running up every minute. I made a sort of blind rush at the fellow with the broken nose; my elbow caught him on the soft folds of flesh and he skipped backwards; the rest scattered in all directions, and then stood at a distance, chattering and waving their hands. And beyond them I saw old Cowper gesticulating approval. The man with the double chin drew a knife from his sleeve, crouched instantly, and sprang at me. I hadn’t fought anybody since I had been at school; raising my fists was like trying a dubious experiment in an emergency. I caught him rather hard on the end of his broken nose; I felt the contact on my right, and a small pain in my left hand. His arms went up to the sky; his face, too. But I had started forward to meet him, and half a dozen of them flung their arms round me from behind.

I seemed to have an exaggerated clearness of vision; I saw each brown dirty paw reach out to clutch some part of me. I was not angry any more; it wasn’t any good being angry, but I made a fight for it. There were dozens of them; they clutched my wrists, my elbows, and in between my wrists and my elbows, and my shoulders. One pair of arms was round my neck, another round my waist, and they kept on trying to catch my legs with ropes. We seemed to stagger all over the deck; I expect they got in each other’s way; they would have made a better job of it if they hadn’t been such a multitude. I must then have got a crack on the head, for everything grew dark; the night seemed to fall on us, as we fought.

Afterwards I found myself lying gasping on my back on the deck of the schooner; four or five men were holding me down. Castro was putting a pistol into his belt. He stamped his foot violently, and then went and shouted in Spanish:

“Come you all on board. You have done mischief enough, fools of Lugarenos. Now we go.”

I saw, as in a dream of stress and violence, some men making ready to cast off the schooner, and then, in a supreme effort, an effort of lusty youth and strength, which I remember to this day, I scattered men like chaff, and stood free.

For the fraction of a second I stood, ready to fall myself, and looking at prostrate men. It was a flash of vision, and then I made a bolt for the rail. I clambered furiously; I saw the deck of the old barque; I had just one exulting sight of it, and then Major

Cowper uprose before my eyes and knocked me back on board the schooner, tumbling after me himself.

Twenty men flung themselves upon my body. I made no movement. The end had come. I hadn't the strength to shake off a fly, my heart was bursting my ribs. I lay on my back and managed to say, "Give me air." I thought I should die.

Castro, draped in his cloak, stood over me, but Major Cowper fell on his knees near my head, almost sobbing: "My papers! My papers! I tell you I shall starve. Make them give me back my papers. They ain't any use to them — my pension — mortgages — not worth a penny piece to you."

He crouched over my face, and the Spaniards stood around, wondering. He begged me to intercede, to save him those papers of the greatest importance.

Castro preserved his attitude of a conspirator. I was touched by the major's distress, and at last I condescended to address Castro on his behalf, though it cost me an effort, for I was angry, indignant, and humiliated.

"Whart — whart? What do I know of his papers? Let him find them." He waved his hand loftily.

The deck was hillocked with heaps of clothing, of bedding, casks of rum, old hats, and tarpaulins. Cowper ran in and out among the plunder, like a pointer in a turnip field. He was groaning.

Beside one of the pumps was a small pile of shiny cases; ship's instruments, a chronometer in its case, a medicine chest.

Cowper tottered at a black dispatch-box. "There, there!" he said; "I tell you I shall starve if I don't have it. Ask him — ask him — — —" He was clutching me like a drowning man.

Castro raised the inevitable arm towards heaven, letting his round black cloak fall into folds like those of an umbrella. Cowper gathered that he might take his japanned dispatch-box; he seized the brass handles and rushed towards the side, but at the last moment he had the good impulse to return to me, holding out his hand, and spluttering distractedly, "God bless you, God bless you." After a time he remembered that I had rescued his wife and child, and he asked God to bless me for that too. "If it is ever necessary," he said, "on my honour, if you escape, I will come a thousand miles to testify. On my honour — remember." He said he was going to live in Clapham. That is as much as I remember. I was held pinned down to the deck, and he disappeared from my sight. Before the ships had separated, I was carried below in the cabin of the schooner.

They left me alone there, and I sat with my head on my arms for a long time, I did not think of anything at all; I was too utterly done up with my struggles, and there was nothing to be thought about. I had grown to accept the meanness of things as if I had aged a great deal. I had seen men scratch each other's faces over coat buttons, old shoes — over Mercer's trousers. My own future did not interest me at this stage. I sat up and looked round me.

I was in a small, bare cabin, roughly wainscotted and exceedingly filthy. There were the grease-marks from the backs of heads all along a bulkhead above a wooden bench; the rough table, on which my arms rested, was covered with layers of tallow spots. Bright light shone through a porthole. Two or three ill-assorted muskets slanted about round the foot of the mast — a long old piece, of the time of Pizarro, all red velvet and silver' chasing, on a swivelled stand, three English fowling-pieces, and a coachman's blunderbuss. A man was rising from a mattress stretched on the floor; he placed a mandolin, decorated with red favours, on the greasy table. He was shockingly thin, and so tall that his head disturbed the candle-soot on the ceiling. He said: "Ah, I was waiting for the cavalier to awake."

He stalked round the end of the table, slid between it and the side, and grasped my arm with wrapt earnestness as he settled himself slowly beside me. He wore a red shirt that had become rather black where his long brown ringlets fell on his shoulders; it had tarnished gilt buttons ciphered "G. R.," stolen, I suppose, from some English ship.

"I beg the Señor Caballero to listen to what I have to record," he said, with intense gravity. "I cannot bear this much longer — no, I cannot bear my sufferings much longer."

His face was of a large, classical type; a close-featured, rather long face, with an immense nose that from the front resembled the section of a bell; eyebrows like horse-shoes, and very large-pupilled eyes that had the purplish-brown lustre of a horse's. His air was mournful in the extreme, and he began to speak resonantly as if his chest were a sounding-board. He used immensely long sentences, of which I only understood one-half.

"What, then, is the difference between me, Manuel-del-Popolo Isturiz, and this Tomas Castro? The Señor Caballero can tell at once. Look at me. I am the finer man. I would have you ask the ladies of Rio Medio, and leave the verdict to them. This Castro is an Andalou — a foreigner. And we, the braves of Rio Medio, will suffer no foreigner to make headway with our ladies. Yet this Andalusian is preferred because he is a humble friend of the great Don, and because he is for a few days given the command. I ask you, Señor, what is the radical difference between me, the sailing captain of this vessel, and him, the fighting captain for a few days? Is it not I that am, as it were, the brains of it, and he only its knife? I ask the Señor Caballero."

I didn't in the least know what to answer. His great eyes wistfully explored my face. I expect I looked bewildered.

"I lay my case at your feet," he continued. "You are to be our chief leader, and, on account of your illustrious birth and renowned intelligence, will occupy a superior position in the council of the notables. Is it not so? Has not the Señor Juez O'Brien so ordained? You will give ear to me, you will alleviate my indignant sufferings?" He implored me with his eyes for a long time.

Manuel-del-Popolo, as he called himself, pushed the hair back from his forehead. I had noticed that the love-locks were plaited with black braid, and that he wore large dirty silk ruffles.

“The caballero” he continued, marking his words with a long, white finger a-tap on the table, “will represent my views to the notables. My position at present, as I have had the honour to observe, is become unbearable. Consider, too, how your worship and I would work together. What lightness for you and me. You will find this Castro unbearably gross. But I — I assure you I am a man of taste — an improvisador — an artist. My songs are celebrated. And yet!...”

He folded his arms again, and waited; then he said, employing his most impressive voice:

“I have influence with the men of Rio. I could raise a riot. We Cubans are a jealous people; we do not love that foreigners should take our best from us. We do not love it; we will not suffer it. Let this Castro bethink himself and go in peace, leaving us and our ladies. As the proverb says, ‘It is well to build a bridge for a departing enemy.’”

He began to peer at me more wistfully, and his eyes grew more luminous than ever. This man, in spite of his grotesqueness, was quite in earnest, there was no doubting that.

“I have a gentle spirit,” he began again, “a gentle spirit. I am submissive to the legitimate authorities. What the Señor Juez O’Brien asks me to do, I do. I would put a knife into any one who inconvenienced the Señor Juez O’Brien, who is a good Catholic; we would all do that, as is right and fitting. But this Castro — this Andalou, who is nearly as bad as a heretic! When my day comes, I will have his arms flayed and the soles of his feet, and I will rub red pepper into them; and all the men of Rio who do not love foreigners will applaud. And I will stick little thorns under his tongue, and I will cut off his eyelids with little scissors, and set him facing the sun. Caballero, you would love me; I have a gentle spirit. I am a pleasant companion.” He rose and squeezed round the table. “Listen” — his eyes lit up with rapture — “you shall hear me. It is divine — ah, it is very pleasant, you will say.”

He seized his mandolin, slung it round his neck, and leant against the bulkhead. The bright light from the port-hole gilded the outlines of his body, as he swayed about and moved his long fingers across the strings; they tinkled metallically. He sang in a nasal voice:

“‘Listen!’ the young girls say as they hasten to the barred window.

‘Listen! Ah, surely that is the guitar of Man — u — el — del-Popolo,
As he glides along the wall in the twilight.’”

It was a very long song. He gesticulated freely with his hand in between the scratching of the strings, which seemed to be a matter of luck. His eyes gazed distantly at the wall above my head. The performance bewildered and impressed me; I wondered if this was what they had carried me off for. It was like being mad. He made a decrescendo tinkling, and his lofty features lapsed into their normal mournfulness.

At that moment Castro put his face round the door, then entered altogether. He sighed in a satisfied manner, and had an air of having finished a laborious undertaking.

“We have arranged the confusion up above,” he said to Manuel-del-Popolo; “you may go and see to the sailing. . . . Hurry; it is growing late.”

Manuel blazed silently, and stalked out of the door as if he had an electric cloud round his head. Tomas Castro turned towards me.

“You are better?” he asked benevolently. “You exerted yourself too much. . . . But still, if you liked — — —” He picked up the mandolin, and began negligently scratching the strings. I noticed an alteration in him; he had grown softer in the flesh in the past years; there were little threads of gray in the knotted curls of his beard. It was as if he had lived well, on the whole. He bent his head over the strings, plucked one, tightened a peg, plucked it again, then set the instrument on the table, and dropped on to the mattress. “Will you have some rum?” he said. “You have grown broad and strong, like a bull... You made those men fly, sacré nom d’une pipe... One would have thought you were in earnest... Ah, well!” He stretched himself at length on the mattress, and closed his eyes.

I looked at him to discover traces of irony. There weren’t any. He was talking quietly; he even reproved me for having carried the pretence of resistance beyond a joke.

“You fought too much; you struck many men — and hard. You will have made enemies. The picaros of this dirty little town are as conceited as pigs. You must take care, or you will have a knife in your back.”

He lay with his hands crossed on his stomach, which was round like a pudding. After a time he opened his eyes, and looked at the dancing white reflection of the water on the grimy ceiling.

“To think of seeing you again, after all these years,” he said. “I did not believe my ears when Don Carlos asked me to fetch you like this. Who would have believed it? But, as they say,” he added philosophically, ““The water flows to the sea, and the little stones find their places.”“ He paused to listen to the sounds that came from above. “That Manuel is a fool,” he said without rancour; “he is mad with jealousy because for this day I have command here. But, all the same, they are dangerous pigs, these slaves of the Señor O’Brien. I wish the town were rid of them. One day there will be a riot — a function — with their jealousies and madness.”

I sat and said nothing, and things fitted themselves together, little patches of information going in here and there like the pieces of a puzzle map. O’Brien had gone on to Havana in the ship from which I had escaped, to render an account of the pirates that had been hung at Kingston; the Riegos had been landed in boats at Rio Medio, of course.

“That poor Don Carlos!” Castro moaned lamentably. “They had the barbarity to take him out in the night, in that raw fog. He coughed and coughed; it made me faint to hear him. He could not even speak to me — his Tomas; it was pitiful. He could not speak when we got to the Casa.”

I could not really understand why I had been a second time kidnapped. Castro said that O’Brien had not been unwilling that I should reach Havana. It was Carlos that had ordered Tomas to take me out of the Breeze. He had come down in the raw morning, before the schooner had put out from behind the point, to impress very

elaborate directions upon Tomas Castro; indeed, it was whilst talking to Tomas that he had burst a blood-vessel.

“He said to me: ‘Have a care now. Listen. He is my dear friend, that Señor Juan. I love him as if he were my only brother. Be very careful, Tomas Castro. Make it appear that he comes to us much against his will. Let him be dragged on board by many men. You are to understand, Tomas, that he is a youth of noble family, and that you are to be as careful of compromising him as you are of the honour of Our Lady.’!”

Tomas Castro looked across at me. “You will be able to report well of me,” he said; “I did my best. If you are compromised, it was you who did it by talking to me as if you knew me.”

I remembered, then, that Tomas certainly had resented my seeming to recognize him before Cowper and Lumsden. He closed his eyes again. After a time he added:

“Vaya! After all, it is foolishness to fear being compromised. You would never believe that his Excellency Don Balthasar had led a riotous life — to look at him with his silver head. It is said he had three friars killed once in Seville, a very, very long time ago. It was dangerous in those days to come against our Mother, the Church.” He paused, and undid his shirt, laying bare an incredibly hairy chest; then slowly kicked off his shoes. “One stifles here,” he said. “Ah! in the old days — — — ”

Suddenly he turned to me and said, with an air of indescribable interest, as if he were gloating over an obscene idea:

“So they would hang a gentleman like you, if they caught you? What savages you English people are! — what savages! Like cannibals! You did well to make that comedy of resisting. Quel pays!... What a people... I dream of them still... The eyes; the teeth! Ah, well! in an hour we shall be in Rio. I must sleep...”

Chapter 7

By two of the afternoon we were running into the inlet of Rio Medio. I had come on deck when Tomas Castro had started out of his doze. I wanted to see. We went round violently as I emerged, and, clinging to the side, I saw, in a whirl, tall, baked, brown hills dropping sheer down to a strip of flat land and a belt of dark-green scrub at the water's edge; little pink squares of house-walls dropped here and there, mounting the hillside among palms, like men standing in tall grass, running back, hiding in a steep valley; silver-gray huts with ragged dun roofs, like dishevelled shocks of hair; a great pink church-face, very tall and narrow, pyramidal towards the top, and pierced for seven bells, but having only three. It looked as if it had been hidden for centuries in the folds of an ancient land, as it lay there asleep in the blighting sunlight.

When we anchored, Tomas, beside me in saturnine silence, grunted and spat into the water.

"Look here," I said. "What is the meaning of it all? What is it? What is at the bottom?"

He shrugged his shoulders gloomily. "If your worship does not know, who should?" he said. "It is not for me to say why people should wish to come here."

"Then take me to Carlos," I said. "I must get this settled."

Castro looked at me suspiciously. "You will not excite him?" he said. "I have known people die right out when they were like that."

"Oh, I won't excite him," I said.

As we were rowed ashore, he began to point out the houses of the notables. Rio Medio had been one of the principal ports of the Antilles in the seventeenth century, but it had failed before the rivalry of Havana because its harbour would not take the large vessels of modern draft. Now it had no trade, no life, no anything except a bishop and a great monastery, a few retired officials from Havana. A large settlement of ragged thatched huts and clay hovels lay to the west of the cathedral. The Casa Riego was an enormous palace, with windows like loopholes, facing the shore. Don Balthasar practically owned the whole town and all the surrounding country, and, except for his age and feebleness, might have been an absolute monarch.

He had lived in Havana with great splendour, but now, in his failing years, had retired to his palace, from which he had since only twice set foot. This had only been when official ceremonies of extreme importance, such as the international execution of pirates that I had witnessed, demanded the presence of someone of his eminence and lustre. Otherwise he had lived shut up in his palace. There was nowhere in Rio Medio for him to go to.

He was said to regard his intendente O'Brien as the apple of his eye, and had used his influence to get him made one of the judges of the Marine Court. The old Don himself probably knew nothing about the pirates. The inlet had been used by buccaneers ever since the days of Columbus; but they were below his serious consideration, even if he had ever seen them, which Tomas Castro doubted.

There was no doubting the sincerity of his tone.

"Oh, you thought I was a pirate!" he muttered. "For a day — yes — to oblige a Riego, my friend — yes! Moreover, I hate that familiar of the priests, that soft-spoken Juez, intendente, intriguer — that O'Brien. A sufferer for the faith! Que picardia! Have I, too, not suffered for the faith? I am the trusted humble friend of the Riegos. But, perhaps, you think Don Balthasar is himself a pirate! He who has in his veins the blood of the Cid Campeador; whose ancestors have owned half this island since the days of Christopher himself. . . ."

"Has he nothing whatever to do with it?" I asked. "After all, it goes on in his own town."

"Oh, you English," he muttered; "you are all mad! Would one of your great nobles be a pirate? Perhaps they would — God knows. Alas, alas!" he suddenly broke off, "when I think that my Carlos shall leave his bones in this ungodly place. . . ."

I gave up questioning Tomas Castro; he was too much for me.

We entered the grim palace by the shore through an imposing archway, and mounted a broad staircase. In a lofty room, giving off the upper gallery round the central court of the Casa Riego, Carlos lay in a great bed. I stood before him, having pushed aside Tomas Castro, who had been cautiously scratching the great brilliant mahogany panels with a dirty finger-nail.

"Damnation, Carlos!" I said. "This is the third of your treacheries. What do you want with me?"

You might well have imagined he was a descendant of the Cid Campeador, only to look at him lying there without a quiver of a feature, his face stainlessly white, a little bluish in extreme lack of blood, with all the nobility of death upon it, like an alabaster effigy of an old knight in a cathedral. On the red-velvet hangings of the bed was an immense coat-of-arms, worked in silk and surrounded by a collar, with the golden sheep hanging from the ring. The shield was patched in with an immense number of quarterings — lions rampant, leopards courant, fleurs de lis, castles, eagles, hands, and arms. His eyes opened slowly, and his face assumed an easy, languorous smile of immense pleasure.

"Ah, Juan," he said, "se bienvenido, be welcome, be welcome."

Castro caught me roughly by the shoulder, and gazed at me with blazing, yellow eyes.

"You should not speak roughly to him," he said. "English beast! He is dying."

"No, I won't speak roughly to him," I answered. "I see."

I did see. At first I had been suspicious; it might have been put on to mollify me. But one could not put on that blueness of tinge, that extra — nearly final — touch

of the chisel to the lines round the nose, that air of restfulness that nothing any more could very much disturb. There was no doubt that Carlos was dying.

“Treacheries — no. You had to come,” he said suddenly. “I need you. I am glad, dear Juan.” He waved a thin long hand a little towards mine. “You shall not long be angry. It had to be done — you must forgive the means.”

His air was so gay, so uncomplaining, that it was hard to believe it came from him.

“You could not have acted worse if you had owed me a grudge, Carlos,” I said. “I want an explanation. But I don’t want to kill you. . . .”

“Oh, no, oh, no,” he said; “in a minute I will tell.”

He dropped a gold ball into a silver basin that was by the bedside, and it sounded like a great bell. A nun in a sort of coif that took the lines of a buffalo’s horns glided to him with a gold cup, from which he drank, raising himself a little. Then the religious went out with Tomas Castro, who gave me a last ferocious glower from his yellow eyes. Carlos smiled.

“They try to make my going easy,” he said. “Vamos! The pillow is smooth for him who is well loved.” He shut his eyes. Suddenly he said, “Why do you, alone, hate me, John Kemp? What have I done?”

“God knows I don’t hate you, Carlos,” I answered.

“You have always mistrusted me,” he said. “And yet I am, perhaps, nearer to you than many of your countrymen, and I have always wished you well, and you have always hated and mistrusted me. From the very first you mistrusted me. Why?”

It was useless denying it; he had the extraordinary incredulity of his kind. I remembered how I had idolized him as a boy at home.

“Your brother-in-law, my cousin Rooksby, was the very first to believe that I was a pirate. I, a vulgar pirate! I, Carlos Riego! Did he not believe it — and you?” He glanced a little ironically, and lifted a thin white finger towards the great coat-of-arms. “That sort of thing,” he said, “amigo mio, does not allow one to pick pockets.” He suddenly turned a little to one side, and fixed me with his clear eyes. “My friend,” he said, “if I told you that Rooksby and your greatest Kent earls carried smugglers’ tubs, you would say I was an ignorant fool. Yet they, too, are magistrates. The only use I have ever made of these ruffians was to-day, to bring you here. It was a necessity. That O’Brien had gone on to take you when you arrived. You would never have come alive out of Havana. I was saving your life. Once there, you could never have escaped from that man.”

I saw suddenly that this might be the truth. There had been something friendly in Tomas Castro’s desire not to compromise me before the people on board the ship. Obviously he had been acting a part, with a visible contempt for the pilfering that he could not prevent. He had been sent merely to bring me to Rio Medio.

“I never disliked you,” I protested. “I do not understand what you mean. All I know is, that you have used me ill — outrageously ill. You have saved my life now, you say. That may be true; but why did you ever make me meet with that man O’Brien?”

“And even for that you should not hate me,” he said, shaking his head on the silk pillows. “I never wished you anything but well, Juan, because you were honest and young, of noble blood, good to look upon; you had done me and my friend good service, to your own peril, when my own cousin had deserted me. And I loved you for the sake of another. I loved your sister. We have a proverb: ‘A man is always good to the eyes in which the sister hath found favour.’”

I looked at him in amazement. “You loved Veronica!” I said. “But Veronica is nothing at all. There was the Señorita.”

He smiled wearily. “Ah, the Señorita; she is very well; a man could love her, too. But we do not command love, my friend.”

I interrupted him. “I want to know why you brought me here. Why did you ask me to come here when we were on board the Thames?”

He answered sadly, “Ah, then! Because I loved your sister, and you reminded me always of her. But that is all over now — done with for good... I have to address myself to dying as it becomes one of my race to die.” He smiled at me. “One must die in peace to die like a Christian. Life has treated me rather scurvily, only the gentleman must not repine like a poor man of low birth. I would like to do a good turn to the friend who is the brother of his sister, to the girl-cousin whom I do not love with love, but whom I understand with affection — to the great inheritance that is not for my wasted hands.”

I looked out of the open door of the room. There was the absolutely quiet inner court of the palace, a colonnade of tall square pillars, in the centre the little thread of a fountain. Round the fountain were tangled bushes of flowers — enormous geraniums, enormous hollyhocks, a riot of orange marigolds.

“How like our flowers at home!” I said mechanically.

“I brought the seeds from there — from your sister’s garden,” he said.

I felt horribly hipped. “But all these things tell me nothing,” I said, with an attempt towards briskness.

“I have to husband my voice.” He closed his eyes.

There is no saying that I did not believe him; I did, every word. I had simply been influenced by Rooks-by’s suspicions. I had made an ass of myself over that business on board the Thames. The passage of Carles and his faithful Tomas had been arranged for by some agent of O’Brien in London, who was in communication with Ramon and Rio Medio. The same man had engaged Nichols, that Nova Scotian mate, an unscrupulous sailor, for O’Brien’s service. He was to leave the ship in Kingston, and report himself to Ramon, who furnished him with the means to go to Cuba. That man, seeing me intimate with two persons going to Rio Medio, had got it into his head that I was going there, too. And, very naturally, he did not want an Englishman for a witness of his doings.

But Rooksby’s behaviour, his veiled accusations, his innuendoes against Carlos, had influenced me more than anything else. I remembered a hundred little things now that I knew that Carlos loved Veronica. I understood Rooksby’s jealous impatience,

Veronica's friendly glances at Carlos, the fact that Rooksby had proposed to Veronica on the very day that Carlos had come again into the neighbourhood with the runners after him. I saw very well that there was no more connection between the Casa Riego and the rascality of Rio Medio than there was between Ralph himself and old drunken Rangsley on Hythe beach. There was less, perhaps.

"Ah, you have had a sad life, my Carlos," I said, after a long time.

He opened his eyes, and smiled his brave smile. "Ah, as to that," he said, "one kept on. One has to husband one's voice, though, and not waste it over lamentations. I have to tell you — ah, yes..." He paused and fixed his eyes upon me. "Figure to yourself that this house, this town, an immense part of this island, much even yet in Castile itself, much gold, many slaves, a great name — a very great name — are what I shall leave behind me. Now think that there is a very noble old man, one who has been very great in the world, who shall die very soon; then all these things shall go to a young girl. That old man is very old, is a little foolish with age; that young girl knows very little of the world, and is very passionate, very proud, very helpless.

"Add, now, to that a great menace — a very dangerous, crafty, subtle personage, who has the ear of that old man; whose aim it is to become the possessor of that young girl and of that vast wealth. The old man is much subject to the other. Old men are like that, especially the very great. They have many things to think of; it is necessary that they rely on somebody. I am, in fact, speaking of my uncle and the man called O'Brien. You have seen him." Carlos spoke in a voice hardly above a whisper, but he stuck to his task with indomitable courage. "If I die and leave him here, he will have my uncle to himself. He is a terrible man. Where would all that great fortune go? For the re-establishing of the true faith in Ireland? Quien sabe? Into the hands of O'Brien, at any rate. And the daughter, too — a young girl — she would be in the hands of O'Brien, too. If I could expect to live, it might be different. That is the greatest distress of all." He swallowed painfully, and put his frail hand on to the white ruffle at his neck. "I was in great trouble to find how to thwart this O'Brien. My uncle went to Kingston because he was persuaded it was his place to see that the execution of those unhappy men was conducted with due humanity. O'Brien came with us as his secretary. I was in the greatest horror of mind. I prayed for guidance. Then my eyes fell upon you, who were pressed against our very carriage wheels. It was like an answer to my prayers." Carlos suddenly reached out and caught my hand.

I thought he was wandering, and I was immensely sorry for him. He looked at me so wistfully with his immense eyes. He continued to press my hand.

"But when I saw you," he went on, after a time, "it had come into my head, 'That is the man who is sent in answer to my prayers.' I knew it, I say. If you could have my cousin and my lands, I thought, it would be like my having your sister — not quite, but good enough for a man who is to die in a short while, and leave no trace but a marble tomb. Ah, one desires very much to leave a mark under God's blessed sun, and to be able to know a little how things will go after one is dead... I arranged the matter very quickly in my mind. There was the difficulty of O'Brien. If I had said,

‘Here is the man who is to marry my cousin,’ he would have had you or me murdered; he would stop at nothing. So I said to him very quietly, ‘Look here, Señor Secretary, that is the man you have need of to replace your Nichols — a devil to fight; but I think he will not consent without a little persuasion. Decoy him, then, to Ramon’s, and do your persuading.’ O’Brien was very glad, because he thought that at last I was coming to take an interest in his schemes, and because it was bringing humiliation to an Englishman. And Sera-phina was glad, because I had often spoken of you with enthusiasm, as very fearless and very honourable. Then I made that man Ramon decoy you, thinking that the matter would be left to me.”

That was what Carlos had expected. But O’Brien, talking with Ramon, had heard me described as an extreme Separationist so positively that he had thought it safe to open himself fully. He must have counted, also, on my youth, my stupidity, or my want of principle. Finding out his mistake, he very soon made up his mind how to act; and Carlos, fearing that worse might befall me, had let him.

But when the young girl had helped me to escape, Carlos, who understood fully the very great risks I ran in going to Havana in the ship that picked me up, had made use of O’Brien’s own picaroons to save me from him. That was the story.

Towards the end his breath came fast and short; there was a flush on his face; his eyes gazed imploringly at me.

“You will stay here, now, till I die, and then — I want you to protect. — — — ” He fell back on the pillows.

Part 3 — Casa Riego

Chapter 1

All this is in my mind now, softened by distance, by the tenderness of things remembered — the wonderful dawn of life, with all the mystery and promise of the young day breaking amongst heavy thunder-clouds. At the time I was overwhelmed — I can't express it otherwise. I felt like a man thrown out to sink or swim, trying to keep his head above water. Of course, I did not suspect Carlos now; I was ashamed of ever having done so. I had long ago forgiven him his methods. "In a great need, you must," he had said, looking at me anxiously, "recur to desperate remedies." And he was going to die. I had made no answer, and only hung my head — not in resentment, but in doubt of my strength to bear the burden of the great trust that this man whom I loved for his gayety, his recklessness and romance, was going to leave in my inexperienced hands.

He had talked till, at last exhausted, he sank back gently on the pillows of the enormous bed emblazoned like a monument. I went out, following a gray-headed negro, and the nun glided in, and stood at the foot with her white hands folded patiently.

"Señor!" I heard her mutter reproachfully to the invalid.

"Do not scold a poor sinner, Dona Maria," he addressed her feebly, with valiant jocularity. "The days are not many now."

The strangeness and tremendousness of what was happening came over me very strongly whilst, in a large chamber with barred loopholes, I was throwing off the rags in which I had entered this house. The night had come already, and I was putting on some of Carlos' clothes by the many flames of candles burning in a tall bronze candelabrum, whose three legs figured the paws of a lion. And never, since I had gone on the road to wait for the smugglers, and been choked by the Bow Street runners, had I remembered so well the house in which I was born. It was as if, till then, I had never felt the need to look back. But now, like something romantic and glamorous, there came before me Veronica's sweet, dim face, my mother's severe and resolute countenance. I had need of all her resoluteness now. And I remembered the figure of my father in the big chair by the ingle, powerless and lost in his search for rhymes. He might have understood the romance of my situation.

It grew upon me as I thought. Don Balthasar, I understood, was apprised of my arrival. As in a dream, I followed the old negro, who had returned to the door of my room. It grew upon me in the silence of this colonnaded court. We walked along the upper gallery; his cane tapped before me on the tessellated pavement; below, the water splashed in the marble basins; glass lanthorns hung glimmering between the pillars and, in wrought silver frames, lighted the broad white staircase. Under the inner curve of

the vaulted gateway a black-faced man on guard, with a bell-mouthed gun, rose from a stool at our passing. I thought I saw Castro's peaked hat and large cloak flit in the gloom into which fell the light from the small doorway of a sort of guardroom near the closed gate. We continued along the arcaded walk; a double curtain was drawn to right and left before me, while my guide stepped aside.

In a vast white apartment three black figures stood about a central glitter of crystal and silver. At once the aged, slightly mechanical voice of Don Balthasar rose thinly, putting himself and his house at my disposition.

The formality of movements, of voices, governed and checked the unbounded emotions of my wonder. The two ladies sank, with a rustle of starch and stiff silks, in answer to my profound bow. I had just enough control over myself to accomplish that, but mentally I was out of breath; and when I felt the slight, trembling touch of Don Balthasar's hand resting on my inclined head, it was as if I had suddenly become aware for a moment of the earth's motion. The hand was gone; his face was averted, and a corpulent priest, all straight and black below his rosy round face, had stepped forward to say a Latin grace in solemn tones that wheezed a little. As soon as he had done he withdrew with a circular bow to the ladies, to Don Balthasar, who inclined his silvery head. His lifeless voice propounded:

"Our excellent Father Antonio, in his devotion, dines by the bedside of our beloved Carlos." He sighed. The heavy carvings of his chair rose upright at his back; he sat with his head leaning forward over his silver plate. A heavy silence fell. Death hovered over that table — and also, as it were, the breath of past ages. The multitude of lights, the polished floor of costly wood, the bare whiteness of walls wainscotted with marble, the vastness of the room, the imposing forms of furniture, carved heavily in ebony, impressed me with a sense of secular and austere magnificence. For centuries there had always been a Riego living in this fortress-like palace, ruling this portion of the New World with the whole majesty of his race. And I thought of the long, loop-holed, buttressed walls that this abode of noble adventurers presented foursquare to the night outside, standing there by the seashore like a tomb of warlike glories. They built their houses thus, centuries ago, when the bands of buccaneers, indomitable and atrocious, had haunted their conquest with a reminder of mortality and weakness.

It was a tremendous thing for me, this dinner. The portly duenna on my left had a round eye and an irritated, parrot-like profile, crowned by a high comb, a head shaded by black lace. I dared hardly lift my eyes to the dark and radiant presence facing me across a table furniture that was like a display of treasure.

But I did look. She was the girl of the lizard, the girl of the dagger, and, in the solemnity of the silence, she was like a fabulous apparition from a half-forgotten tale. I watched covertly the youthful grace of her features. The curve of her cheek filled me with delight. From time to time she shook the heavy clusters of her curls, and I was amazed, as though I had never before seen a woman's hair. Each parting of her lips was a distinct anticipation of a great felicity; when she said a few words to me, I felt an inward trembling. They were indifferent words.

Had she forgotten she was the girl with the dagger? And the old Don? What did that old man know? What did he think? What did he mean by that touch of a blessing on my head? Did he know how I had come to his house? But every turn of her head troubled my thoughts. The movements of her hands made me forget myself. The gravity of her eyes above the smile of her lips suggested ideas of adoration.

We were served noiselessly. A battalion of young lusty negroes, in blue jackets laced with silver, walked about barefooted under the command of the old major-domo. He, alone, had white silk stockings, and shoes with silver buckles; his wide-skirted maroon velvet coat, with gold on the collar and cuffs, hung low about his thin shanks; and, with a long ebony staff in his hand, he directed the service from behind Don Balthasar's chair. At times he bent towards his master's ear. Don Balthasar answered with a murmur: and those two faces brought close together, one like a noble ivory carving, the other black with the mute pathos of the African faces, seemed to commune in a fellowship of age, of things far off, remembered, lived through together. There was something mysterious and touching in this violent contrast, toned down by the near approach to the tomb — the brotherhood of master and slave.

At a given moment an enormous iron key was brought in on a silver salver, and, bending over the chair, the gray-headed negro laid it by Don Balthasar's plate.

"Don Carlos' orders," he muttered.

The old Don seemed to wake up; a little colour mounted to his cheeks.

"There was a time, young caballero, when the gates of Casa Riego stood open night and day to the griefs and poverty of the people, like the doors of a church — and as respected. But now it seems . . ."

He mumbled a little peevishly, but seemed to recollect himself. "The safety of his guest is like the breath of life to a Castilian," he ended, with a benignant but attentive look at me.

He rose, and we passed out through the double lines of the servants ranged from table to door. By the splash of the fountain, on a little round table between two chairs, stood a many-branched candlestick. The duenna sat down opposite Don Balthasar. A multitude of stars was suspended over the breathless peace of the court.

"Señorita," I began, mustering all my courage, and all my Spanish, "I do not know — — —"

She was walking by my side with upright carriage and a nonchalant step, and shut her fan smartly.

"Don Carlos himself had given me the dagger," she said rapidly.

The fan flew open; a touch of the wind fanning her person came faintly upon my cheek with a suggestion of delicate perfume.

She noticed my confusion, and said, "Let us walk to the end, Señor."

The old man and the duenna had cards in their hands now. The intimate tone of her words ravished me into the seventh heaven.

"Ah," she said, when we were out of ear-shot, "I have the spirit of my house; but I am only a weak girl. We have taken this resolution because of your hidal-guidad,

because you are our kinsman, because you are English. Ay de mi! Would I had been a man. My father needs a son in his great, great age. Poor father! Poor Don Carlos!"

There was the catch of a sob in the shadow of the end gallery. We turned back, and the undulation of her walk seemed to throw me into a state of exaltation.

"On the word of an Englishman — — —" I began.

The fan touched my arm. The eyes of the duenna glittered over the cards.

"This woman belongs to that man, too," muttered Seraphina. "And yet she used to be faithful — almost a mother. Misericordia! Señor, there is no one in this unhappy place that he has not bought, corrupted, frightened, or bent to his will — to his madness of hate against England. Of our poor he has made a rabble. The bishop himself is afraid."

Such was the beginning of our first conversation in this court suggesting the cloistered peace of a convent. We strolled to and fro; she dropped her eyelids, and the agitation of her mind, pictured in the almost fierce swiftness of her utterance, made a wonderful contrast to the leisurely rhythm of her movements, marked by the slow beating of the fan. The retirement of her father from the world after her mother's death had made a great solitude round his declining years. Yes, that sorrow, and the base intrigues of that man — a fugitive, a hanger-on of her mother's family — recommended to Don Balthasar's grace by her mother's favour. Yes! He had, before she died, thrown his baneful influence even upon that saintly spirit, by the piety of his practices and these sufferings for his faith he always paraded. His faith! Oh, hypocrite, hypocrite, hypocrite! His only faith was hate — the hate of England. He would sacrifice everything to it. He would despoil and ruin his greatest benefactors, this fatal man!

"Señor, my cousin," she said picturesquely, "he would, if he could, drop poison into every spring of clear water in your country. . . . Smile, Don Juan."

Her repressed vehemence had held me spellbound, and the silvery little burst of laughter ending her fierce tirade had the bewildering effect of a crash on my mind. The other two looked up from their cards.

"I pretend to laugh to deceive that woman," she explained quickly. "I used to love her."

She had no one now about her she could trust or love. It was as if the whole world were blind to the nefarious nature of that man. He had possessed himself of her little father's mind. I glanced towards the old Don, who at that moment was brokenly taking a pinch of snuff out of a gold snuff-box, while the duenna, very sallow and upright, waited, frowning loftily at her cards.

"It seemed as if nothing could restrain that man," Seraphina's voice went on by my side, "neither fear nor gratitude." He seemed to cast a spell upon people. He was the plenipotentiary of a powerful religious order — no matter. Don Carlos knew these things better than she did. He had the ear of the Captain-General through that. "Sh! But the intrigues, the intrigues!" I saw her little hand clenched on the closed fan. There were no bounds to his audacity. He wasted their wealth. "The audacity!" He had overawed her father's mind; he claimed descent from his Irish kings, he who — — — "Señor, my English cousin, he even dares aspire to my person."

The game of cards was over.

“Death rather,” she let fall in a whisper of calm resolution.

She dropped me a deep curtsey. Servants were ranging themselves in a row, holding upright before their black faces wax lights in tall silver candlesticks inherited from the second Viceroy of Mexico. I bowed profoundly, with indignation on her behalf and horror in my breast; and, turning away from me, she sank low, bending her head to receive her father’s blessing. The major-domo preceded the cortège. The two women moved away with an ample rustling of silk, and with lights carried on each side of their black, stiff figures. Before they had disappeared up the wide staircase, Don Balthasar, who had stood perfectly motionless with his old face over his snuff-box, seemed to wake up, and made in the air a hasty sign of the cross after his daughter.

They appeared again in the upper gallery between the columns. I saw her head, draped in lace, carried proudly, with the white flower in her hair. I raised my eyes. All my being seemed to strive upwards in that glance. Had she turned her face my way just a little? Illusion! And the double door above closed with an echoing sound along the empty galleries. She had disappeared.

Don Balthasar took three turns in the courtyard, no more. It was evidently a daily custom. When he withdrew his hand from my arm to tap his snuff-box, we stood still till he was ready to slip it in again. This was the strangest part of it, the most touching, the most startling — that he should lean like this on me, as if he had done it for years. Before me there must have been somebody else. Carlos? Carlos, no doubt. And in this placing me in that position there was apparent the work of death, the work of life, of time, the pathetic realization of an inevitable destiny. He talked a little disjointedly, with the uncertain swaying of a shadow on his thoughts, as if the light of his mind had flickered like an expiring lamp. I remember that once he asked me, in a sort of senile worry, whether I had ever heard of an Irish king called Brian Boru; but he did not seem to attach any importance to my reply, and spoke no more till he said good-night at the door of my chamber.

He went on to his apartment, surrounded by lights and preceded by his major-domo, who walked as bowed with age as himself; but the African had a firmer step.

I watched him go; there was about his progress in state something ghostlike and royal, an old-time, decayed majesty. It was as if he had arisen before me after a hundred years’ sleep in his retreat — that man who, in his wild and passionate youth, had endangered the wealth of the Riegos, had been the idol of the Madrid populace, and a source of dismay to his family. He had carried away, *vi et armis*, a nun from a convent, incurring the enmity of the Church and the displeasure of his sovereign. He had sacrificed all his fortune in Europe to the service of his king, had fought against the French, had a price put upon his head by a special proclamation. He had known passion, power, war, exile, and love. He had been thanked by his returned king, honoured for his wisdom, and crushed with sorrow by the death of his young wife — Seraphina’s mother.

What a life! And what was my arm — my arm on which he had leaned in his decay? I looked at it with a sort of surprise, dubiously. What was expected of it? I asked myself. Would it have the strength? Ah, let her only lean on it!

It seemed to me that I would have the power to shake down heavy pillars of stone, like Samson, in her service; to reach up and take the stars, one by one, to lay at her feet. I heard a sigh. A shadow appeared in the gallery.

The door of my room was open. Leaning my back against the balustrade, I saw the black figure of the Father Antonio, muttering over his breviary, enter the space of the light.

He crossed himself, and stopped with a friendly, "You are taking the air, my son. The night is warm." He was rubicund, and his little eyes looked me over with priestly mansuetude.

I said it was warm indeed. I liked him instinctively.

He lifted his eyes to the starry sky. "The orbs are shining excessively," he said; then added, "To the greater glory of God. One is never tired of contemplating this sublime spectacle."

"How is Don Carlos, your reverence?" I asked.

"My beloved penitent sleeps," he answered, peering at me benevolently; "he reposes. Do you know, young caballero, that I have been a prisoner of war in your country, and am acquainted with Londres? I was chaplain of the ship San José at the battle of Trafalgar. On my soul, it is, indeed, a blessed, fertile country, full of beauty and of well-disposed hearts. I have never failed since to say every day an especial prayer for its return to our holy mother, the Church. Because I love it."

I said nothing to this, only bowing; and he laid a short, thick hand on my shoulder.

"May your coming amongst us, my son, bring calmness to a Christian soul too much troubled with the affairs of this world." He sighed, nodded to me with a friendly, sad smile, and began to mutter his prayers as he went.

Chapter 2

Don Balthasar accepted my presence without a question. Perhaps he fancied he had invited me; of my manner of coming he was ignorant, of course. O'Brien, who had gone on to Havana in the ship which had landed the Riegos in Rio Medio, gave no sign of life. And yet, on the arrival of the Breeze, he must have found out I was no longer on board. I forgot the danger suspended over my head. For a fortnight I lived as if in a dream.

"What is the action you want me to take, Carlos?"

I asked one day.

Propped up with pillows, he looked at me with the big eyes of his emaciation.

"I would like best to see you marry my cousin. Once before a woman of our race had married an Englishman. She had been happy. English things last forever — English peace, English power, English fidelity. It is a country of much serenity, of order, of stable affection. . . ."

His voice was very weak and full of faith. I remained silent, overwhelmed at this secret of my innermost heart, voiced by his bloodless lips — as if a dream had come to pass, as if a miracle had taken place. He added, with an indefinable smile of an almost unearthly wistfulness:

"I would have married your sister, my Juan."

He had on him the glamour of things English — of English power emerging from the dust of wars and revolution; of England stable and undismayed, like a strong man who had kept his feet in the tottering of secular edifices shaken to their foundations by an earthquake. It was as if for him that were something fine, something romantic, just as for me romance had always seemed to be embodied in his features, in his glance, and to live in the air he breathed. On the other side of the bed the old Don, lost in a high-backed armchair, remained plunged in that meditation of the old which resembles sleep, as sleep resembles death. The priest, lighted up by the narrow, bright streak of the window, was reading his breviary through a pair of enormous spectacles. The white coif of the nun hovered in distant corners of the room.

We were constantly talking of O'Brien. He was the only subject of all our conversations; and when Carlos inveighed against the Intendente, the old Don nodded sadly in his chair. He was dishonouring the name of the Riegos, Carlos would exclaim feebly, turning his head towards his uncle. His uncle's own province, the name of his own town, stood for a refuge of the scum of the Antilles. It was a shameful sanctuary. Every ruffian, rascal, murderer, and thief of the West Indies had come to think of this ancient and honourable town as a safe haven.

I myself could very well remember the Jamaica household expression, "The Rio Medio piracies," and all these paragraphs in the home papers that reached us a month old headed, "The Activity of the So-called Mexican Privateers," and urging upon our Government the necessity of energetic remonstrances in Madrid. "The fact, incredible as it may appear," said the writers, "seeming to be that the nest of these Picaroons is actually within the loyal dominions of the Spanish Crown." If Spain, our press said, resented our recognition of South American independence, let it do so openly, not by countenancing criminals. It was unworthy of a great nation. "Our West Indian trade is being stabbed in the back," declaimed the Bristol Mirror. "Where is our fleet?" it asked. "If the Cuban authorities are unable or unwilling, let us take the matter in our own hands."

There was a great deal of mystery about this peculiar outbreak of lawlessness that seemed to be directed so pointedly against the British trade. The town of Rio Medio was alluded to as one of the unapproachable towns of the earth — closed, like the capital of Prester John to the travellers, or Mecca to the infidels. Nobody I ever met in Jamaica had set eyes on the place. The impression prevailed that no stranger could come out of it alive. Incredible stories were told of it in the island, and indignation at its existence grew at home and in the colonies.

Admiral Rowley, an old fighter, grown a bit lazy, no diplomatist (the stories of his being venal, I take it, were simply abominable calumnies), unable to get anything out of the Cuban authorities but promises and lofty protestations, had made up his mind, under direct pressure from home, to take matters into his own hands. His boat attack had been a half-and-half affair, for all that. He intended, he had said, to go to the bottom of the thing, and find out what there was in the place; but he could not believe that anybody would dare offer resistance to the boats of an English squadron. They were sent in as if for an exploration rather than for an armed landing.

It ended in a disaster, and a sense of wonder had been added to the mystery of the fabulous Rio Medio organization. The Cuban authorities protested against the warlike operations attempted in a friendly country; at the same time, they had delivered the seven pirates — the men whom I saw hanged in Kingston. And Rowley was recalled home in disgrace.

It was my extraordinary fate to penetrate into this holy city of the last organized piracy the world would ever know. I beheld it with my eyes; I had stood on the point behind the very battery of guns which had swept Rowley's boats out of existence.

The narrow entrance faced, across the water, the great portal of the cathedral. Rio Medio had been a place of some splendour in its time. The ruinous heavy buildings clung to the hillsides, and my eyes plunged into a broad vista of an empty and magnificent street. Behind many of the imposing and escutcheoned frontages there was nothing but heaps of rubble; the footsteps of rare passers-by woke lonely echoes, and strips of grass outlined in parallelograms the flagstones of the roadway. The Casa Riego raised its buttressed and loop-holed bulk near the shore, resembling a defensive outwork; on my other hand the shallow bay, vast, placid, and shining, extended itself

behind the strip of coast like an enormous lagoon. The fronds of palm-clusters dotted the beach over the glassy shimmer of the far distance. The dark and wooded slopes of the hills closed the view inland on every side.

Under the palms the green masses of vegetation concealed the hovels of the rabble. There were three so-called 'villages' at the bottom of the bay; and that good Catholic and terrible man, Señor Juez O'Brien, could with a simple nod send every man in them to the gallows.

The respectable population of Rio Medio, leading a cloistered existence in the ruins of old splendour, used to call that thievish rabble *Lugarenos* — villagers. They were sea-thieves, but they were dangerous. At night, from these clusters of hovels surrounded by the banana plantations, there issued a villainous noise, the humming of hived scoundrels. Lights twinkled. One could hear the thin twanging of guitars, uproarious songs, all the sounds of their drinking, singing, gambling, quarrelling, love-making, squalor. Sometimes the long shriek of a woman rent the air, or shouting tumults rose and subsided; while, on the other side of the cathedral, the houses of the past, the houses without life, showed no light and made no sound.

There would be no strollers on the beach in the daytime; the masts of the two schooners (bought in the United States by O'Brien to make war with on the British Empire) appeared like slender sticks far away up the empty stretch of water; and that gathering of ruffians, thieves, murderers, and runaway slaves slept in their noisome dens. Their habits were obscene and nocturnal. Cruel without hardihood, and greedy without courage, they were no skull-and-crossbones pirates of the old kind, that, under the black flag, neither gave nor expected quarter. Their usual practice was to hang in rowboats round some unfortunate ship becalmed in sight of their coast, like a troop of vultures hopping about the carcass of a dead buffalo on a plain. When they judged the thing was fairly safe, they would attack with a great noise and show of ferocity; do some hasty looting amongst the cargo; break into the cabins for watches, wearing apparel, and so on; perpetrate at times some atrocity, such as singeing the soles of some poor devil of a ship-master, when they had positive information (from such affiliated helpers as Ramon, the storekeeper in Jamaica) that there was coined money concealed on board; and take themselves off to their sordid revels on shore, and to hold auctions of looted property on the beach. These were attended by people from the interior of the province, and now and then even the Havana dealers would come on the quiet to secure a few pieces of silk or a cask or two of French wine. Tomas Castro could not mention them without spitting in sign of contempt. And it was with that base crew that O'Brien imagined himself to be making war on the British Empire!

In the time of Nichols it did look as if they were really becoming enterprising. They had actually chased and boarded ships sixty miles out at sea. It seems he had inspired them with audacity by means of kicks, blows, and threats of instant death, after the manner of *Bluenose* sailors. His long limbs, the cadaverous and menacing aspect, the strange nasal ferocity of tone, something mocking and desperate in his aspect, had persuaded them that this unique sort of heretic was literally in league with the devil.

He had been the most efficient of the successive leaders O'Brien had imported to give some sort of effect to his warlike operations. I laugh and wonder as I write these words; but the man did look upon it as a war and nothing else. What he had had the audacity to propose to me had been treason, not thieving. It had a glamour for him which, he supposed, a Separationist (as I had the reputation of being) could not fail to see. He was thinking of enlarging his activity, of getting really in touch with the Mexican Junta of rebels. As he had said, he needed a gentleman now. These were Carlos' surmises.

Before Nichols there had been a rather bloodthirsty Frenchman, but he got himself stabbed in an aguardiente shop for blaspheming the Virgin. Nichols, as far as I could understand, had really grown scared at O'Brien's success in repulsing Rowley's boats; he had mysteriously disappeared, and neither of the two schooners had been out till the day of my kidnapping, when Castro, by order of Carlos, had taken the command. The freebooters of Rio Medio had returned to their cautious and petty pilfering in boats, from such unlucky ships as the chance of the weather had delivered into their hands. I heard, also, during my walks with Castro (he attended me wrapped in his cloak, and with two pistols in his belt), that there were great jealousies and bickerings amongst that base populace. They were divided into two parties. For instance, the rascals living in the easternmost village accepted tacitly the leadership of a certain Domingo, a mulatto, keeper of a vile grogshop, who was skilled in the art of throwing a knife to a great distance. Man-uel-del-Popolo, the extraordinary improvisador with the guitar, was an aspirant for power with a certain following of his own. Words could not express Castro's scorn for these fellows. Ladrones! vermin of the earth, scum of the sea, he called them.

His position, of course, was exceptional. A dependent of the Riegos, a familiar of the Casa, he was infinitely removed from a Domingo or a Manuel. He lived soberly, like a Spaniard, in some hut in the nearest of the villages, with an old woman who swept the earth floor and cooked his food at an outside fire — his puchero and tortillas — and rolled for him his provision of cigarettes for the day. Every morning he marched up to the Casa, like a courtier, to attend on his king. I never saw him eat or drink anything there. He leaned a shoulder against the wall, or sat on the floor of the gallery with his short legs stretched out near the big mahogany door of Carlos' room, with many cigarettes stuck behind his ears and in the band of his hat. When these were gone he grubbed for more in the depths of his clothing, somewhere near his skin. Puffs of smoke issued from his pursed lips; and the desolation of his pose, the sorrow of his round, wrinkled face, was so great that it seemed were he to cease smoking, he would die of grief.

The general effect of the place was of vitality exhausted, of a body calcined, of romance turned into stone. The still air, the hot sunshine, the white beach curving around the deserted sheet of water, the sombre green of the hills, had the motionlessness of things petrified, the vividness of things painted, the sadness of things abandoned, desecrated. And, as if alone intrusted with the guardianship of life's sacred fire, I was moving amongst them, nursing my love for Sera-phina. The words of Carlos were like

oil upon a flame; it enveloped me from head to foot with a leap. I had the physical sensation of breathing it, of seeing it, of being at the same time driven on and restrained. One moment I strode blindly over the sand, the next I stood still; and Castro, coming up panting, would remark from behind that, on such a hot day as this, it was a shame to disturb even a dog sleeping in the shade. I had the feeling of absolute absorption into one idea. I was ravaged by a thought. It was as if I had never before imagined, heard spoken of, or seen a woman.

It was true. She was a revelation to my eye and my ear, as much as to my heart and mind. Indeed, I seemed never before to have seen a woman. Whom had I seen? Veronica? We had been too poor, and my mother too proud, to keep up a social intercourse with our neighbours; the village girls had been devoid of even the most rustic kind of charm; the people were too poor to be handsome. I had never been tempted to look at a woman's face; and the manner of my going from home is known. In Jamaica, sharing with an exaggerated loyalty the unpopularity of the Mac-donalds, I had led a lonely life; for I had no taste for their friends' society, and the others, after a time, would have nothing to do with me. I had made a sort of hermitage for myself out of a house in a distant plantation, and sometimes I would see no white face for whole weeks together. She was the first woman to me — a strange new being, a marvel as great as Eve herself to Adam's wondering awakening.

It may be that a close intimacy stands in the way of love springing up between two young people, but in our case it was different. My passion seemed to spring from our understanding, because the understanding was in the face of danger. We were like two people in a slowly sinking ship; the feeling of the abyss under our feet was our bond, not the real comprehension of each other. Apart from that, she remained to me always unattainable and romantic? — unique, with all the unexpressed promises of love such as no world had ever known. And naturally, because for me, hitherto, the world had held no woman. She was an apparition of dreams — the girl with the lizard, the girl with the dagger, a wonder to stretch out my hands to from afar; and yet I was permitted to whisper intimately to this my dream, to this vision. We had to put our heads close together, talking of the enemy and of the shadow over the house; while under our eyes Carlos waited for death, made cruel by his anxieties, and the old Don walked in the darkness of his accumulated years.

As to me, what was I to her?

Carlos, in a weak voice, and holding her hand with a feeble and tenacious grasp, had told her repeatedly that the English cousin was ready to offer up his life to her happiness in this world. Many a time she would turn her glance upon me — not a grateful glance, but, as it were, searching and pensive — a glance of penetrating candour, a young girl's glance, that, by its very trustfulness, seems to look one through and through.

And then the sense of my unworthiness made me long for her love as a sinner, in his weakness, longs for the saving grace.

“Our English cousin is worthy of his great nation. He is very brave, and very chivalrous to a poor girl,” she would say softly.

One day, I remember, going out of Carlos’ room, she had just paused on the threshold for an almost imperceptible moment, the time to murmur, with feeling, “May Heaven reward you, Don Juan.” This sound, faint and enchanting, like a breath of sweet wind, staggered me. Castro, sitting outside as usual, had scrambled to his feet and stood by, hat in hand, his head bent slightly with saturnine deference. She smiled at him. I think she felt kindly towards the tubby little bandit of a fellow. After all, there was something touching and pathetic in his mournful vigil at the door of our radiant Carlos. I could have embraced that figure of grotesque and truculent devotion. Had she not smiled upon him?

The rest of that memorable day I spent in a state of delightful distraction, as if I had been ravished into the seventh heaven, and feared to be cast out again presently, as my unworthiness deserved. What if it were possible, after all? — this, what Carlos wished, what he had said. The heavens shook; the constellations above the court of Casa Riego trembled at the thought.

Carlos fought valiantly. There were days when his courage seemed to drive the grim presence out of the chamber, where Father Antonio with his breviary, and the white coif of the nun, seemed the only reminders of illness and mortality. Sometimes his voice was very strong, and a sort of hopefulness lighted his wasted features. Don Balthasar paid many visits to his nephew in the course of each day. He sat apparently attentive, and nodding at the name of O’Brien. Then Carlos would talk against O’Brien from amongst his pillows as if inspired, till the old man, striking the floor with his gold-headed cane, would exclaim, in a quavering voice, that he, alone, had made him, had raised him up from the dust, and could abase him to the dust again. He would instantly go to Havana; orders would be given to Cesar for the journey this very moment. He would then take a pinch of snuff with shaky energy, and lean back in the armchair. Carlos would whisper to me, “He will never leave the Casa again,” and an air of solemn, brooding helplessness would fall upon the funereal magnificence of the room. Presently we would hear the old Don muttering dotingly to himself the name of Seraphina’s mother, the young wife of his old days, so saintly, and snatched away from him in punishment of his early sinfulness. It was impossible that she should have been deceived in Don Patricio (O’Brien’s Christian name was Patrick). The intendente was a man of great intelligence, and full of reverence for her memory. Don Balthasar admitted that he himself was growing old; and, besides, there was that sorrow of his life. . . . He had been fortunate in his affliction to have a man of his worth by his side. There might have been slight irregularities, faults of youth (O’Brien was five-and-forty if a day). The archbishop himself was edified by the life of the upright judge — all Havana, all the island. The intendente’s great zeal for the House might have led him into an indiscretion or two. So many years now, so many years. A noble himself. Had we heard of an Irish king? A king . . . king... he could not recall the name at present. It might be well to hear what a man of such abilities had to say for himself.

Carlos and I looked at each other silently. "And his life hangs on a thread," whispered the dying man with something like despair.

The crisis of all these years of plotting would come the moment the old Don closed his eyes. Meantime, why was it that O'Brien did not show himself in Rio Medio? What was it that kept him in Havana?

"Already I do not count, my Juan," Carlos would say. "And he prepares all things for the day of my uncle's death."

The dark ways of that man were inscrutable. He must have known, of course, that I was in Rio Medio. His presence was to be feared, and his absence itself was growing formidable.

"But what do you think he will do? How do you think he will act?" I would ask, a little bewildered by my responsibility.

Carlos could not tell precisely. It was not till some time after his arrival from Europe that he became clearly aware of all the extent of that man's ambition. At the same time, he had realized all his power. That man aimed at nothing less than the whole Riego fortune, and, of course, through Seraphina. I would feel a rage at this — a sort of rage that made my head spin as if the ground had reeled. "He would have found means of getting rid of me if he had not seen I was not long for this world," Carlos would say. He had gained an unlimited ascendancy over his uncle's mind; he had made a solitude round this solemn dotage in which ended so much power, a great reputation, a stormy life of romance and passion — so picturesque and excessive even in his old man's love, whose after-effect, as though the work of a Nemesis resenting so much brilliance, was casting a shadow upon the fate of his daughter.

Small, fair, plump, concealing his Irish vivacity of intelligence under the taciturn gravity of a Spanish lawyer, and backed by the influence of two noble houses, O'Brien had attained to a remarkable reputation of sagacity and unstained honesty. Hand in glove with the clergy, one of the judges of the Marine Court, procurator to the cathedral chapter, he had known how to make himself so necessary to the highest in the land that everybody but the very highest looked upon him with fear. His occult influence was altogether out of proportion to his official position. His plans were carried out with an unswerving tenacity of purpose. Carlos believed him capable of anything but a vulgar peculation. He had been reduced to observe his action quietly, hampered by the weakness of ill-health. As an instance of O'Brien's methods, he related to me the manner in which, faithful to his purpose of making a solitude about the Riegos, he had contrived to prevent overtures for an alliance from the Salazar family. The young man Don Vincente himself was impossible, an evil liver, Carlos said, of dissolute habits. Still, to have even that shadow of a rival out of the way, O'Brien took advantage of a sanguinary affray between that man and one of his boon companions about some famous guitar-player girl. The encounter having taken place under the wall of a convent, O'Brien had contrived to keep Don Vincente in prison ever since — not on a charge of murder (which for a young man of that quality would have been a comparatively venial offence), but of sacrilege. The Salazars were a powerful family, but he was strong

enough to risk their enmity. "Imagine that, Juan!" Carlos would exclaim, closing his eyes. What had caused him the greatest uneasiness was the knowledge that Don Balthasar had been induced lately to write some letter to the archbishop in Havana. Carlos was afraid it was simply an expression of affection and unbounded trust in his intendente, practically dictated to the old man by O'Brien. "Do you not see, Juan, how such a letter would strengthen his case, should he ask the guardians for Seraphina's hand?" And perhaps he was appointed one of the guardians himself. It was impossible to know what, were the testamentary dispositions; Father Antonio, who had learned many things in the confessional, could tell us nothing, but, when the matter was mentioned, only rolled his eyes up to heaven in an alarming manner. It was startling to think of all the unholy forces awakened by the temptation of Seraphina's helplessness and her immense fortune. Incorruptible himself, that man knew how to corrupt others. There might have been combined in one dark intrigue the covetousness of religious orders, the avarice of high officials — God knows what conspiracy — to help O'Brien's ambition, his passions. He could make himself necessary; he could bribe; he could frighten; he was able to make use of the highest in the land and of the lowest, from the present Captain-General to the Lugarenos. In Havana he had for him the reigning powers; in Rio Medio the lowest outcasts of the island.

This last was the most dangerous aspect of his power for us, and also his weakest point. This was the touch of something fanciful and imaginative; a certain grim childishness in the idea of making war on the British Empire; a certain disregard of risk; a bizarre illusion of his hate for the abhorred Saxon. That he risked his position by his connection with such a nest of scoundrels, there could be no doubt. It was he who had given them such organization as they had, and he stood between them and the law. But whatever might have been suspected of him, he was cautious enough not to go too far. He never appeared personally; his agents directed the action — men who came from Havana rather mysteriously. They were of all sorts; some of them were friars. But the rabble, who knew him really only as the intendente of the great man, stood in the greatest dread of him. Who was it procured the release of some of them who had got into trouble in Havana? The intendente. Who was it who caused six of their comrades, who had been taken up on a matter of street-brawling in the capital, to be delivered to the English as pirates? Again, the intendente, the terrible man, the Juez, who apparently had the power to pardon and condemn.

In this way he was most dangerous to us in Rio Medio. He had that rabble at his beck and call. He could produce a rising of cut-throats by lifting his little finger. He was not very likely to do that, however. He was intriguing in Havana — but how could we unmask him there? "He has cut us off from the world," Carlos would say. "It is so, my Juan, that, if I tried to write, no letter of mine would reach its destination; it would fall into his hands. And if I did manage to make my voice heard, he would appeal to my uncle himself in his defence."

Besides, to whom could he write? — who would believe him? O'Brien would deny everything, and go on his way. He had been accepted too long, had served too many

people and known so many secrets. It was terrible. And if I went myself to Havana, no one would believe me. But I should disappear; they would never see me again. It was impossible to unmask that man unless by a long and careful action. And for this he — Carlos — had no time; and I — I had no standing, no relations, no skill even...

“But what is my line of conduct, Carlos?” I insisted; while Father Antonio, from whom Carlos had, of course, no secrets, stood by the bed, his round, jolly face almost comical in its expression of compassionate concern.

Carlos passed his thin, wasted hand over a white brow pearly with the sweat of real anguish.

Carlos thought that while Don Balthasar lived, O’Brien would do nothing to compromise his influence over him. Neither could I take any action; I must wait and watch. O’Brien would, no doubt, try to remove me; but as long as I kept within the Casa, he thought I should be safe. He recommended me to try to please his cousin, and even found strength to smile at my transports. Don Balthasar liked me for the sake of his sister, who had been so happy in England. I was his kinsman and his guest. From first to last, England, the idea of my country, of my home, played a great part in my life then; it seemed to rest upon all our thoughts. To me it was but my boyhood, the farm at the foot of the downs — Rooksby’s Manor — all within a small nook between the quarry by the side of the Canterbury road and the shingle beach, whose regular crashing under the feet of a smuggling band was the last sound of my country I had heard. For Carlos it was the concrete image of stability, with the romantic feeling of its peace and of Veronica’s beauty; the unchangeable land where he had loved. To O’Brien’s hate it loomed up immense and odious, like the form of a colossal enemy. Father Antonio, in the naïve benevolence of his heart, prayed each night for its conversion, as if it were a loved sinner. He believed this event to be not very far off accomplishment, and told me once, with an amazing simplicity of certitude, that “there will be a great joy amongst the host of heaven on that day.” It is marvellous how that distant land, from which I had escaped as if from a prison to go in search of romance, appeared romantic and perfect in these days — all things to all men! With Seraphina I talked of it and its denizens as of a fabulous country. I wonder what idea she had formed of my father, of my mother, my sister — “Señora Dona Veronica Rooksby,” she called her — of the landscape, of the life, of the sky. Her eyes turned to me seriously. Once, stooping, she plucked an orange marigold for her hair; and at last we came to talk of our farm as the only perfect refuge for her.

Chapter 3

One evening Carlos, after a silence of distress, had said, "There's nothing else for it. When the crisis comes, you must carry her off from this unhappiness and misery that hangs over her head. You must take her out of Cuba; there is no safety for her here."

This took my breath away. "But where are we to go, Carlos?" I asked, bending over him.

"To — to England," he whispered.

He was utterly worn out that evening by all the perplexities of his death-bed. He made a great effort and murmured a few words more — about the Spanish ambassador in London being a near relation of the Riegos; then he gave it up and lay still under my amazed eyes. The nun was approaching, alarmed, from the shadows. Father Antonio, gazing sadly upon his beloved penitent, signed me to withdraw.

Castro had not gone away yet; he greeted me in low tones outside the big door.

"Señor," he went on, "I make my report usually to his Señoría Don Carlos; only I have not been admitted to-day into his rooms at all. But what I have to say is for your ear, also. There has arrived a friar from a Havana convent amongst the Lugarenos of the bay. I have known him come like this before."

I remembered that in the morning, while dressing, I had glanced out of the narrow outside window of my room, and had seen a brown, mounted figure passing on the sands. Its sandalled feet dangled against the flanks of a powerful mule.

Castro shook his head. "Malediction on his green eyes! He baptizes the offspring of this vermin sometimes, and sits for hours in the shade before the door of Domingo's posada telling his beads as piously as a devil that had turned monk for the greater undoing of us Christians. These women crowd there to kiss his oily paw. What else they — — — Basta! Only I wanted to tell you, Señor, that this evening (I just come from taking a pasear that way) there is much talk in the villages of an evil-intentioned heretic that has introduced himself into this our town; of an Inglez hungry for men to hang — of you, in short."

The moon, far advanced in its first quarter, threw an ashen, bluish light upon one-half of the courtyard; and the straight shadow upon the other seemed to lie at the foot of the columns, black as a broad stroke of Indian ink.

"And what do you think of it, Castro?" I asked.

"I think that Domingo has his orders. Manuel has made a song already. And do you know its burden, Señor? Killing is its burden. I would the devil had all these Improvisadores. They gape round him while he twangs and screeches, the wind-bag! And he knows what words to sing to them, too. He has talent. Maladetta!"

“Well, and what do you advise?”

“I advise the señor to keep, now, within the Casa. No songs can give that vermin the audacity to seek the señor here. The gate remains barred; the firearms are always loaded; and Cesar is a sagacious African. But methinks this moon would fall out of the heaven first before they would dare... Keep to the Casa, I say — I, Tomas Castro.”

He flung the corner of his cloak over his left shoulder, and preceded me to the door of my room; then, after a “God guard you, Señor,” continued along the colonnade. Before I had shut my door it occurred to me that he was going on towards the part of the gallery on which Seraphina’s apartments opened. Why? What could he want there?

I am not so much ashamed of my sudden suspicion of him — one did not know whom to trust — but I am a little ashamed to confess that, kicking off my shoes, I crept out instantly to spy upon him.

This part of the house was dark in the inky flood of shadow; and before I had come to a recess in the wall, I heard the discreet scratching of a finger-nail on a door. A streak of light darted and disappeared, like a signal for the murmurs of two voices.

I recognized the woman’s at once. It belonged to one of Seraphina’s maids, a pretty little quadron — a favourite of hers — called La Chica. She had slipped out, and her twitter-like whispering reached me in the still solemnity of the quadrangle. She addressed Castro as “His Worship” at every second word, for the saturnine little man, in his unbrushed cloak and battered hat, was immensely respected by the household. Had he not been sent to Europe to fetch Don Carlos? He was in the confidence of the masters — their humble friend. The little tire-woman twittered of her mistress. The senorita had been most anxious all day — ever since she had heard the friar had come. Castro muttered:

“Tell the Excellency that her orders have been obeyed. The English caballero has been warned. I have been sleepless in my watchfulness over the guest of the house, as the senorita has desired — for the honour of the Riegos. Let her set her mind at ease.”

The girl then whispered to him with great animation. Did not his worship think that it was the senorita’s heart which was not at ease?

Then the quadrangle became dumb in its immobility, half sheen, half night, with its arcades, the soothing plash of water, with its expiring lights, in a suggestion of Castilian severity, enveloped by the exotic softness of the air.

“What folly!” uttered Castro’s sombre voice. “You women do not mind how many corpses come into your imaginings of love. The mere whisper of such a thing — — —”

She murmured swiftly. He interrupted her.

“Thine eyes, La Chica — thine eyes see only the silliness of thine own heart. Think of thine own lovers, nina. Por Dios!” — he changed to a tone of severe appreciation — “thy foolish face looks well by moonlight.”

I believe he was chucking her gravely under the chin. I heard her soft, gratified cooing in answer to the compliment; the streak of light flashed on the polished shaft

of a pillar; and Castro went on, going round to the staircase, evidently so as not to pass again before my open door.

I forgot to shut it. I did not stop until I was in the middle of my room; and then I stood still for a long time in a self-forgetful ecstasy, while the many wax candles of the high candelabrum burned without a flicker in a rich cluster of flames, as if lighted to throw the splendour of a celebration upon the pageant of my thoughts.

For the honour of the Riegos!

I came to myself. Well, it was sweet to be the object of her anxiety and care, even on these terms — on any terms. And I felt a sort of profound, inexpressible, grateful emotion, as though no one, never, on no day, on no occasion, had taken thought of me before.

I should not be able to sleep. I went to the window, and leaned my forehead on the iron bar. There was no glass; the heavy shutter was thrown open; and, under the faint crescent of the moon I saw a small part of the beach, very white, the long streak of light lying mistily on the bay, and two black shapes, cloaked, moving and stopping all of a piece like pillars, their immensely long shadows running away from their feet, with the points of the hats touching the wall of the Casa Riego. Another, a shorter, thicker shape, appeared, walking with dignity. It was Castro. The other two had a movement of recoil, then took off their hats.

“Buenas noches, caballeros,” his voice said, with grim politeness. “You are out late.”

“So is your worship. Vaya, Señor, con Dios. We are taking the air.”

They walked away, while Castro remained looking after them. But I, from my elevation, noticed that they had suddenly crouched behind some scrubby bushes growing on the edge of the sand. Then Castro, too, passed out of my sight in the opposite direction, muttering angrily.

I forgot them all. Everything on earth was still, and I seemed to be looking through a casement out of an enchanted castle standing in the dreamland of romance. I breathed out the name of Seraphina into the moonlight in an increasing transport. “Seraphina! Seraphina! Seraphina!” The repeated beauty of the sound intoxicated me. “Seraphina!” I cried aloud, and stopped, astounded at myself. And the moonlight of romance seemed to whisper spitefully from below:

“Death to the traitor! Vengeance for our brothers dead on the English gallows!”
“Come away, Manuel.”

“No. I am an artist. It is necessary for my soul...”

“Be quiet!”

Their hissing ascended along the wall from under the window. The two Lugarenos had stolen in unnoticed by me. There was a stifled metallic ringing, as of a guitar carried under a cloak.

“Vengeance on the heretic Ingles!”

“Come away! They may suddenly open the gate and fall upon us with sticks.”

“My gentle spirit is roused to the accomplishment of great things. I feel in me a valiance, an inspiration. I am no vulgar seller of aguardiente, like Domingo. I was born to be the capataz of the Lugarenos.”

“We shall be set upon and beaten, oh, thou Manuel. Come away!”

There were no footsteps, only a noiseless flitting of two shadows, and a distant voice crying:

“Woe, woe, woe to the traitor!”

I had not needed Castro’s warning to understand the meaning of this. O’Brien was setting his power to work, only this Manuel’s restless vanity had taught me exactly how the thing was to be done. The friar had been exciting the minds of this rabble against me; awakening their suspicions, their hatred, their fears.

I remained at the casement, lost in rather sombre reflections. I was now a prisoner within the walls of the Casa. After all, it mattered little. I did not want to go away unless I could carry off Seraphina with me. What a dream! What an impossible dream! Alone, without friends, with no place to go to, without means of going; without, by Heaven, the right of even as much as speaking of it to her. Carlos — Carlos dreamed — a dream of his dying hours. England was so far, the enemy so near; and — Providence itself seemed to have forgotten me.

A sound of panting made me turn my head. Father Antonio was mopping his brow in the doorway. Though a heavy man, he was noiseless of foot. A wheezing would be heard along the dark galleries some time before his black bulk approached you with a gliding motion. He had the outward placidity of corpulent people, a natural artlessness of demeanour which was amusing and attractive, and there was something shrewd in his simplicity. Indeed, he must have displayed much tact and shrewdness to have defeated all O’Brien’s efforts to oust him from his position of confessor to the household. What had helped him to hold his ground was that, as he said to me once, “I, too, my son, am a legacy of that truly pious and noble lady, the wife of Don Riego. I was made her spiritual director soon after her marriage, and I may say that she showed more discretion in the choice of her confessor than in that of her man of affairs. But what would you have? The best of us, except for Divine grace, is liable to err; and, poor woman, let us hope that, in her blessed state, she is spared the knowledge of the iniquities going on here below in the Casa.”

He used to talk to me in that strain, coming in almost every evening on his way from the sick room. He, too, had his own perplexities, which made him wipe his forehead repeatedly; afterwards he used to spread his red bandanna handkerchief over his knees.

He sympathized with Carlos, his beloved penitent, with Seraphina, his dear daughter, whom he had baptized and instructed in the mysteries of “our holy religion,” and he allowed himself often to drop the remark that his “illustrious spiritual son,” Don Balthasar, after a stormy life of which men knew only too much, had attained to a state of truly childlike and God-fearing innocence — a sign, no doubt, of Heaven’s forgiveness for those excesses. He ended, always, by sighing heartily, to sit with his gaze on the floor.

That night he came in silently, and after shutting the door with care, took his habitual seat, a broad wooden armchair.

“How did your reverence leave Don Carlos?” I asked.

“Very low,” he said. “The disease is making terrible ravages, and my ministrations — — — I ought to be used to the sight of human misery, but — — —” He raised his hands; a genuine emotion overpowered him; then, uncovering his face to stare at me, “He is lost, Don Juan,” he exclaimed.

“Indeed, I fear we are about to lose him, your reverence,” I said, surprised at this display. It seemed inconceivable that he should have been in doubt up to this very moment.

He rolled his eyes painfully. I was forgetting the infinite might of God. Still, nothing short of a miracle — — — But what had we done to deserve miracles?

“Where is the ancient piety of our forefathers which made Spain so great?” he apostrophized the empty air, a little wildly, as if in distraction. “No, Don Juan; even I, a true servant of our faith, am conscious of not having had enough grace for my humble ministrations to poor sailors and soldiers — men naturally inclined to sin, but simple. And now — there are two great nobles, the fortune of a great house..”

I looked at him and wondered, for he was, in a manner, wringing his hands, as if in immense distress.

“We are all thinking of that poor child — mas que, Don Juan, imagine all that wealth devoted to the iniquitous purposes of that man. Her happiness sacrificed.”

“I cannot imagine this — I will not,” I interrupted, so violently that he hushed me with both hands uplifted.

“To these wild enterprises against your own country,” he went on vehemently, disregarding my exasperated and contemptuous laugh. “And she herself, the niña I have baptized her; I have instructed her; and a more noble disposition, more naturally inclined to the virtues and proprieties of her sex — — — But, Don Juan, she has pride, which doubtless is a gift of God, too, but it is made a snare of by Satan, the roaring lion, the thief of souls. And what if her feminine rashness — women are rash, my son,” he interjected with unction — “and her pride were to lead her into — I am horrified at the thought — into an act of mortal sin for which there is no repentance?”

“Enough!” I shouted at him.

“No repentance,” he repeated, rising to his feet excitedly, and I stood before him, my arms down my sides, with my fists clenched.

Why did the stupid priest come to talk like this to me, as if I had not enough of my own unbearable thoughts?

He sat down and began to flourish his handkerchief. There was depicted on his broad face — depicted simply and even touchingly — the inward conflict of his benevolence and of his doubts.

“I observe your emotion, my son,” he said. I must have been as pale as death. And, after a pause, he meditated aloud, “And, after all, you English are a reverent nation. You, a scion of the nobility, have been brought up in deplorable rebellion against the

authority of God on this earth; but you are not a scoffer — not a scoffer. I, a humble priest — — — But, after all, the Holy Father himself, in his inspired wisdom — — — I have prayed to be enlightened...”

He spread the square of his damp handkerchief on his knees, and bowed his head. I had regained command over myself, but I did not understand in the least. I had passed from my exasperation into a careworn fatigue of mind that was like utter darkness.

“After all,” he said, looking up naively, “the business of us priests is to save souls. It is a solemn time when death approaches. The affairs of this world should be cast aside. And yet God surely does not mean us to abandon the living to the mercy of the wicked.”

A sadness came upon his face, his eyes; all the world seemed asleep. He made an effort. “My son,” he said with decision, “I call you to follow me to the bedside of Don Carlos at this very hour of night. I, a humble priest, the unworthy instrument of God’s grace, call upon you to bring him a peace which my ministrations cannot give. His time is near.”

I rose up, startled by his solemnity, by the hint of hidden significance in these words. “Is he dying now?” I cried.

“He ought to detach his thoughts from this earth; and if there is no other way — — —”

“What way? What am I expected to do?”

“My son, I had observed your emotion. We, the appointed confidants of men’s frailties, are quick to discern the signs of their innermost feelings. Let me tell you that my cherished daughter in God, Señorita Dona Seraphina Riego, is with Don Carlos, the virtual head of the family, since his Excellency Don Balthasar is in a state of, I may say, infantile innocence.”

“What do you mean, father?” I faltered.

“She is waiting for you with him,” he pronounced, looking up. And as his solemnity seemed to have deprived me of my power to move, he added, with his ordinary simplicity, “Why, my son, she is, I may say, not wholly indifferent to your person.”

I could not have dropped more suddenly into the chair had the good padre discharged a pistol into my breast. He went away; and when I leapt up, I saw a young man in black velvet and white ruffles staring at me out of the large mirror set frameless into the wall, like the apparition of a Spanish ghost with my own English face.

When I ran out, the moon had sunk below the ridge of the roof; the whole quadrangle of the Casa had turned black under the stars, with only a yellow glimmer of light falling into the well of the court from the lamp under the vaulted gateway. The form of the priest had gone out of sight, and a far-away knocking, mingling with my footfalls, seemed to be part of the tumult within my heart. Below, a voice at the gate challenged, “Who goes there?” I ran on. Two tiny flames burned before Carlos’ door at the end of the long vista, and two of Seraphina’s maids shrank away from the great mahogany panels at my approach. The candlesticks trembled askew in their hands; the wax guttered down, and the taller of the two girls, with an uncovered long neck, gazed at me out

of big sleepy eyes in a sort of dumb wonder. The teeth of the plump little one — La Chica — rattled violently like castanets. She moved aside with a hysterical little laugh, and glanced upwards at me.

I stopped, as if I had intruded; of all the persons in the sick-room, not one turned a head. The stillness of the lights, of things, of the air, seemed to have passed into Seraphina's face. She stood with a stiff carriage under the heavy hangings of the bed, looking very Spanish and romantic in her short black skirt, a black lace shawl enveloping her head, her shoulders, her arms, as low as the waist. Her bare feet, thrust into high-heeled slippers, lent to her presence an air of flight, as if she had run into that room in distress or fear. Carlos, sitting up amongst the snowy pillows of eider-down at his back, was not speaking to her. He had done; and the flush on his cheek, the eager lustre of his eyes, gave him an appearance of animation, almost of joy, a sort of consuming, flame-like brilliance. They were waiting for me. With all his eagerness and air of life, all he could do was to lift his white hand an inch or two off the silk coverlet that spread over his limbs smoothly, like a vast crimson pall. There was something joyous and cruel in the shimmer of this piece of colour, contrasted with the dead white of the linen, the duskiness of the wasted face, the dark head with no visible body, symbolically motionless. The confused shadows and the tarnished splendour of emblazoned draperies, looped up high under the ceiling, fell in heavy and unstirring folds right down to the polished floor, that reflected the lights like a sheet of water, or rather like ice.

I felt it slippery under my feet. I, alone, had to move, in this great chamber, with its festive patches of colour amongst the funereal shadows, with the expectant, still figures of priest and nun, servants of passionless eternity, as if immobilized and made mute by hostile wonder before the perishable triumph of life and love. And only the impatient tapping of the sick man's hand on the stiff silk of the coverlet was heard.

It called to me. Seraphina's unstirring head was lighted strongly by a two-branched sconce on the wall; and when I stood by her side, not even the shadow of the eyelashes on her cheek trembled. Carlos' lips moved; his voice was almost extinct; but for all his emaciation, the profundity of his eyes, the sunken cheeks, the hollow temples, he remained attractive, with the charm of his gallant and romantic temper worn away to an almost unearthly fineness.

He was going to have his desire because, on the threshold of his spiritual inheritance, he refused, or was unable, to turn his gaze away from this world. Father Antonio's business was to save this soul; and with a sort of simple and sacerdotal shrewdness, in which there was much love for his most noble penitent, he would try to appease its trouble by a romantic satisfaction. His voice, very grave and profound, addressed me:

“Approach, my son — nearer. We trust the natural feelings of pity which are implanted in every human breast, the nobility of your extraction, the honour of your hidalgüidad, and that inextinguishable courage which, as by the unwearied mercy of God, distinguishes the sons of your fortunate and unhappy nation.” His bass voice, deepened in solemn utterance, vibrated huskily. There was a rustic dignity in his un-

couth form, in his broad face, in the gesture of the raised hand. "You shall promise to respect the dictates of our conscience, guided by the authority of our faith; to defer to our scruples, and to the procedure of our Church in matters which we believe touch the welfare of our souls... You promise?"

He waited. Carlos' eyes burned darkly on my face. What were they asking of me? This was nothing. Of course I would respect her scruples — her scruples — if my heart should break. I felt her living intensely by my side; she could be brought no nearer to me by anything they could do, or I could promise. She had already all the devotion of my love and youth, the unreasoning and potent devotion, without a thought or hope of reward. I was almost ashamed to pronounce the two words they expected. "I promise."

And suddenly the meaning pervading this scene, something that was in my mind already, and that I had hardly dared to look at till now, became clear to me in its awful futility against the dangers, in all its remote consequences. It was a betrothal. The priest — Carlos, too — must have known that it had no binding power. To Carlos it was symbolic of his wishes. Father Antonio was thinking of the papal dispensation. I was a heretic. What if it were refused? But what was that risk to me, who had never dared to hope? Moreover, they had brought her there, had persuaded her; she had been influenced by her fears, impressed by Carlos. What could she care for me? And I repeated:

"I promise. I promise, even at the cost of suffering and unhappiness, never to demand anything from her against her conscience."

Carlos' voice sounded weak. "I answer for him, good father." Then he seemed to wander in a whisper, which we two caught faintly, "He resembles his sister, O Divine — — —"

And on this ghostly sigh, on this breath, with the feeble click of beads in the nun's hands, a silence fell upon the room, vast as the stillness of a world of unknown faiths, loves, beliefs, of silent illusions, of unexpressed passions and secret motives that live in our unfathomable hearts.

Seraphina had given me a quick glance — the first glance — which I had rather felt than seen. Carlos made an effort, and, raising himself, put her hand in mine.

Father Antonio, trying to pronounce a short allocution, broke down, naïve in his emotion, as he had been in his dignity. I could at first catch only the words, "Beloved child — Holy Father — poor priest..." He had taken this upon himself; and he would attest the purity of our intentions, the necessity of the case, the assent of the head of the family, my excellent disposition. All the Englishmen had excellent dispositions. He would, personally, go to the foot of the Holy See — on his knees, if necessary. Meantime, a document — he should at once prepare a justificative document. The archbishop, it is true, did not like him on account of the calumnies of that man O'Brien. But there was, beyond the seas, the supreme authority of the Church, unerring and inaccessible to calumnies.

All that time Seraphina's hand was lying passive in my palm — warm, soft, living; all the life, all the world, all the happiness, the only desire — and I dared not close

my grasp, afraid of the vanity of my hopes, shrinking from the intense felicity in the audacious act. Father Antonio — I must say the word — blubbered. He was now only a tender-hearted, simple old man, nothing more.

“Before God now, Don Juan... I am only a poor priest, but invested with a sacred office, an enormous power. Tremble, Señor, it is a young girl... I have loved her like my own; for, indeed, I have in baptism given her the spiritual life. You owe her protection; it is for that, before God, Señor — — — ”

It was as if Carlos had swooned; his eyes were closed, his face like a carving. But gradually the suggestion of a tender and ironic smile appeared on his lips. With a slow effort he raised his arm and his eyelids, in an appeal of all his weariness for my ear. I made a movement to stoop over him, and the floor, the great bed, the whole room, seemed to heave and sway. I felt a slight, a fleeting pressure of Seraphina’s hand before it slipped out of mine; I thought, in the beating rush of blood to my temples, that I was going mad.

He had thrown his arm over my neck; there was the calming austerity of death on his lips, that just touched my ear and departed, together with the far-away sound of the words, losing themselves in the remoteness of another world:

“Like an Englishman, Juan.”

“On my honour, Carlos.”

His arm, releasing my neck, fell stretched out on the coverlet. Father Antonio had mastered his emotion; with the trail of undried tears on his face, he had become a priest again, exalted above the reach of his earthly sorrow by the august concern of his sacerdotal duty.

“Don Carlos, my son, is your mind at ease, now?”

Carlos closed his eyes slowly.

“Then turn all your thoughts to heaven.” Father Antonio’s bass voice rose, aloud, with an extraordinary authority. “You have done with the earth.”

The arm of the nun touched the cords of the curtains» and the massive folds shook and fell expanded, hiding from us the priest and the penitent.

Chapter 4

Seraphina and I moved towards the door sadly, as if under the oppression of a memory, as people go back from the side of a grave to the cares of life. No exultation possessed me. Nothing had happened. It had been a sick man's whim.

"Señorita," I said low, with my hand on the wrought bronze of the door-handle, "Don Carlos might have died in full trust of my devotion to you — without this."

"I know it," she answered, hanging her head.

"It was his wish," I said. "And I deferred."

"It was his wish," she repeated.

"Remember he had asked you for no promise."

"Yes, it is you only he has asked. You have remembered it very well, Señor. And you — you ask for nothing."

"No," I said; "neither from your heart nor from your conscience — nor from your gratitude. Gratitude from you! As if it were not I that owe you gratitude for having condescended to stand with your hand in mine — if only for a moment — if only to bring peace to a dying man; for giving me the felicity, the illusion of this wonderful instant, that, all my life, I shall remember as those who are suddenly stricken blind remember the great glory of the sun. I shall live with it, I shall cherish it in my heart to my dying day; and I promise never to mention it to you again."

Her lips were slightly parted, her eyes remained downcast, her head drooped as if in extreme attention.

"I asked for no promise," she murmured coldly.

My heart was heavy. "Thank you for that proof of your confidence," I said. "I am yours without any promises. Wholly yours. But what can I offer? What help? What refuge? What protection? What can I do? I can only die for you. Ah, but this was cruel of Carlos, when he knew that I had nothing else but my poor life to give."

"I accept that," she said unexpectedly. "Señorita, it is generous of you to accept so worthless a gift — a life I value not at all save for one unique memory which I owe to you."

I knew she was looking at me while I swung open the door with a low bow. I did not trust myself to look at her. An unreasonable disenchantment, like the awakening from a happy dream, oppressed me. I felt an almost angry desire to seize her in my arms — to go back to my dream. If I had looked at her then, I believed I could not have controlled myself.

She passed out; and when I looked up there was O'Brien booted and spurred, but otherwise in his lawyer's black, inclining his dapper figure profoundly before her in

the dim gallery. She had stopped short. The two maids, huddled together behind her, stared with terrified eyes. The flames of their candles vacillated very much.

I closed the door quietly. Carlos was done with the earth. This had become my affair; and the necessity of coming to an immediate decision almost deprived me of my power of thinking. The necessity had arisen too swiftly; the arrival of that man acted like the sudden apparition of a phantom. It had been expected, however; only, from the moment we had turned away from Carlos' bedside, we had thought of nothing but ourselves; we had dwelt alone in our emotions, as if there had been no inhabitant of flesh and blood on the earth but we two. Our danger had been present, no doubt, in our minds, because we drew it in with every breath. It was the indispensable condition of our contact, of our words, of our thoughts; it was the atmosphere of our feelings; a something as all-pervading and impalpable as the air we drew into our lungs. And suddenly this danger, this breath of our life, had taken this material form. It was material and expected, and yet it had the effect of an evil spectre, inasmuch as one did not know where and how it was vulnerable, what precisely it would do, how one should defend one's self.

His bow was courtly; his gravity was all in his bearing, which was quiet and confident: the manner of a capable man, the sort of man the great of this earth find invaluable and are inclined to trust. His full-shaven face had a good-natured, almost a good-humored expression, which I have come to think must have depended on the cast of his features, on the setting of his eyes — on some peculiarity not under his control, or else he could not have preserved it so well. On certain occasions, as this one, for instance, it affected me as a refinement of cynicism; and, generally, it was startling, like the assumption of a mask inappropriate to the action and the speeches of the part.

He had journeyed in his customary manner overland from Havana, arriving unexpectedly at night, as he had often done before; only this time he had found the little door, cut out in one of the sides of the big gate, bolted fast. It was his knocking I had heard, as I hurried after the priest. The major-domo, who had been called up to let him in, told me afterwards that the *senor intendente* had put no question whatever to him as to this, and had gone on, as usual, towards his own room. Nobody knew what was going on in Carlos' chamber, but, of course, he came upon the two girls at the door. He said nothing to them either, only just stopped there and waited, leaning with one elbow on the balustrade with his good-tempered, gray eyes fixed on the door. He had fully expected to see Seraphina come out presently, but I think he did not count on seeing me as well. When he straightened himself up after the bow, we two were standing side by side.

I had stepped quickly towards her, asking myself what he would do. He did not seem to be armed; neither had I any weapon about me. Would he fly at my throat? I was the bigger, and the younger man. I wished he would. But he found a way of making me feel all his other advantages. He did not recognize my existence. He appeared not to see me at all. He seemed not to be aware of Seraphina's startled immobility, of my

firm attitude; but turning his good-humoured face towards the two girls, who appeared ready to sink through the floor before his gaze, he shook his fore-finger at them slightly.

This was all. He was not menacing; he was almost playful; and this gesture, marvellous in its economy of effort, disclosed all the might and insolence of his power. It had the unerring efficacy of an act of instinct. It was instinct. He could not know how he dismayed us by that shake of the finger. The tall girl dropped her candlestick with a clatter, and fled along the gallery like a shadow. La Chica cowered under the wall. The light of her candle just touched dimly the form of a negro boy, waiting passively in the background with O'Brien's saddle-bags over his shoulder.

"You see," said Seraphina to me, in a swift, desolate murmur. "They are all like this — all, all."

Without a change of countenance, without emphasis, he said to her in French:

"Votre père dort sans doute, Señorita."

And she intrepidly replied, "You know very well, Señor Intendente, that nothing can make him open his eyes."

"So it seems," he muttered between his teeth, stooping to pick up the dropped candlestick. It was lying at my feet. I could have taken him at a disadvantage, then; I could have felled him with one blow, thrown myself upon his back. Thus may an athletic prisoner set upon a jailer coming into his cell, if there were not the prison, the locks, the bars, the heavy gates! the walls, all the apparatus of captivity, and the superior weight of the idea chaining down the will, if not the courage.

It might have been his knowledge of this, or his absolute disdain of me. The unconcerned manner in which he busied himself — his head within striking distance of my fist — in lighting the extinguished candle from the trembling Chica's humiliated me beyond expression. He had some difficulty with that, till he said to her just audibly, "Calm thyself, niña," and she became rigid in her appearance of excessive terror.

He turned then towards Seraphina, candlestick in hand, courteously saying in Spanish:

"May I be allowed to help light you to your door, since that silly Juanita — I think it was Juanita — has taken leave of her senses? She is not fit to remain in your service — any more than this one here."

With a gasp of desolation, La Chica began to sob limply against the wall. I made one step forward; and, holding the candle well up, as though for the purpose of examining my face carefully, he never looked my way, while he and Seraphina were exchanging a few phrases in French which I did not understand well enough to follow.

He was politely interrogatory, it seemed to me. The natural, good-humoured expression never left his face, as though he had a fund of inexhaustible patience for dealing with the unaccountable trifles of a woman's conduct. Seraphina's shawl had slipped off her head. La Chica sidled towards her, sobbing a deep sob now and then, without any sign of tears; and with their scattered hair, their bare arms, the disorder of their attire, they looked like two women discovered in a secret flight for life. Only the mistress stood her ground firmly; her voice was decided; there was resolution in the way one little

white hand clutched the black lace on her bosom. Only once she seemed to hesitate in her replies. Then, after a pause he gave her for reflection, he appeared to repeat his question. She glanced at me apprehensively, as I thought, before she confirmed the previous answer by a slow inclination of her head.

Had he allowed himself to make a provoking movement, a dubious gesture of any sort, I would have flung myself upon him at once; but the nonchalant manner in which he looked away, while he extended to me his hand with the candlestick, amazed me. I simply took it from him. He stepped back, with a ceremonious bow for Seraphina. La Chica ran up close to her elbow. I heard her voice saying sadly, "You need fear nothing for yourself, child"; and they moved away slowly. I remained facing O'Brien, with a vague notion of protecting their retreat.

This time it was I who was holding the light before his face. It was calm and colourless; his eyes were fixed on the ground reflectively, with the appearance of profound and quiet absorption. But suddenly I perceived the convulsive clutch of his hand on the skirt of his coat. It was as if accidentally I had looked inside the man — upon the strength of his illusions, on his desire, on his passion. Now he will fly at me, I thought, with a tremendously convincing certitude. Now — — — All my muscles, stiffening, answered the appeal of that thought of battle.

He said, "Won't you give me that light?"

And I understood he demanded a surrender.

"I would see you die first where you stand," was my answer.

This object in my hand had become endowed with moral meaning — significant, like a symbol — only to be torn from me with my life.

He lifted his head; the light twinkled in his eyes. "Oh, I won't die," he said, with that bizarre suggestion of humour in his face, in his subdued voice. "But it is a small thing; and you are young; it may be yet worth your while to try and please me — this time."

Before I could answer, Seraphina, from some little distance, called out hurriedly:

"Don Juan, your arm."

Her voice, sounding a little unsteady, made me forget O'Brien, and, turning my back on him, I ran up to her. She needed my support; and before us La Chica tottered and stumbled along with the lights, moaning:

"Madré de Dios! What will become of us now! Oh, what will become of us now!"

"You know what he had asked me to let him do," Seraphina talked rapidly. "I made answer, 'No; give the light to my cousin.' Then he said, 'Do you really wish it, Señorita? I am the older friend.' I repeated, 'Give the light to my cousin, Señor.' He, then, cruelly, 'For the young man's own sake, reflect, Señorita.' And he waited before he asked me again, 'Shall I surrender it to him?' I felt death upon my heart, and all my fear for you — there." She touched her beautiful throat with a swift movement of a hand that disappeared at once under the lace. "And because I could not speak, I — — — Don Juan, you have just offered me your life — I — — — Misericordia! What else was possible? I made with my head the sign 'Yes.'"

In the stress, hurry, and rapture encompassing my immense gratitude, I pressed her hand to my side familiarly, as if we had been two lovers walking in a lane on a serene evening.

"If you had not made that sign, it would have been worse than death — in my heart," I said. "He had allied me, too, to renounce my trust, my light."

We walked on slowly, accompanied in our sudden silence by the splash of the fountain at the bottom of the great square of darkness on our left, and by the piteous moans of La Chica.

"That is what he meant," said the enchanting voice by my side. "And you refused. That is your valour."

"From no selfish motives," I said, troubled, as if all the great incertitude of my mind had been awakened by the sound that brought so much delight to my heart. "My valour is nothing."

"It has given me a new courage," she said.

"You did not want more," I said earnestly.

"Ah! I was very much alone. It is difficult to — — —"

She hesitated.

"To live alone," I finished.

"More so to die," she whispered, with a new note of timidity. "It is frightful. Be cautious, Don Juan, for the love of God, because I could not — — —"

We stopped. La Chica, silent, as if exhausted, drooped lamentably, with her shoulder against the wall, by Seraphina's door; and the pure crystalline sound of the fountain below, enveloping the parting pause, seemed to wind its coldness round my heart.

"Poor Don Carlos!" she said. "I had a great affection for him. I was afraid they would want me to marry him. He loved your sister."

"He never told her," I murmured. "I wonder if she ever guessed."

"He was poor, homeless, ill already, in a foreign land."

"We all loved him at home," I said.

"He never asked her," she breathed out. "And, perhaps — but he never asked her."

"I have no more force," sighed La Chica, suddenly, and sank down at the foot of the wall, putting the candlesticks on the floor.

"You have been very good to him," I said; "only he need not have demanded this from you. Of course, I understood perfectly... I hope you understand, too, that I — — —"

"Señor, my cousin," she flashed out suddenly, "do you think that I would have consented only from my affection for him?"

"Señorita," I cried, "I am poor, homeless, in a foreign land. How can I believe? How can I dare to dream? — unless your own voice — — —"

"Then you are permitted to ask. Ask, Don Juan."

I dropped on one knee, and, suddenly extending her arm, she pressed her hand to my lips. Lighted up from below, the picturesque aspect of her figure took on something of a transcendental grace; the unusual upward shadows invested her beauty with a new

mystery of fascination. A minute passed. I could hear her rapid breathing above, and I stood up before her, holding both her hands.

“How very few days have we been together,” she whispered. “Juan, I am ashamed.”

“I did not count the days. I have known you always. I have dreamed of you since I can remember — for days, for months, a year, all my life.”

The crash of a heavy door flung to, exploded, filling the galleries all round the patio with the sonorous reminder of our peril.

“Ah! We had forgotten.”

I heard her voice, and felt her form in my arms. Her lips at my ear pronounced:

“Remember, Juan. Two lives, but one death only.”

And she was gone so quickly that it was as though she had passed through the wood of the massive panels.

La Chica crouched on her knees. The lights on the floor burned before her empty stare, and with her bare shoulders the tone of old ivory emerging from the white linen, with wisps of raven hair hanging down her cheeks, the abandonment of her whole person embodied every outward mark and line of desolation.

“What do you fear from him?” I asked.

She looked up; moved nearer to me on her knees. “I have a lover outside.”

She seized her hair wildly, drew it across her face, tried to stuff handfuls of it into her mouth, as if to stop herself from shrieking.

“He shook his finger at me,” she moaned.

Her terror, as incomprehensible as the emotion of an animal, was gaining upon me. I said sternly:

“What can he do, then?”

“I don’t know.”

She did not know. She was like me. She feared for her love. Like myself! Was there anything in the way of our undoing which it was not in his power to achieve?

“Try to be faithful to your mistress,” I said, “and all may be well yet.”

She made no answer, but staggered to her feet, and went away blindly through the door, which opened just wide enough to let her through. There were clouds on the sky. The patio, in its blackness, was like the rectangular mouth of a bottomless pit. I picked up the candlesticks, and lighted myself to my room, walking upon air, upon tempestuous air, in a feeling of insecurity and exultation.

The lights of my candelabrum had gone out. I stood the two candlesticks on a table, and the shadows of the room, uplifted above the two flames as high as the ceiling, filled the corners heavily like gathered draperies, descended to the foot of the four walls in the shape of a military tent, in which warlike objects vaguely gleamed: a trophy of ancient arquebuses and conquering swords, arranged with bows, spears, the stick and stone weapons of an extinct race, a war collar of shells or pebbles, a round wicker-work shield in a halo of arrows, with a matchlock piece on each side — of the sort that had to be served by two men.

I had left the door of my room open on purpose, so that he should know I was back there, and ready for him. I took down a long straight blade, like a rapier, with a basket hilt. It was a cumbrous weapon, and with a blunt edge; still, it had a point, and I was ready to thrust and parry against the world. I called upon my foes. No enemy appeared, and by the light of two candles, with a sword in my hand, I lost myself in the foreshadowings of the future.

It was positive and uncertain. I wandered in it like a soul outside the gates of paradise, with an anticipation of bliss, and the pain of my exclusion. There was only one man in the way. I was certain he had been watching us across the blackness of the patio. He must have seen the dimly-lit dumb show of our parting at Sera-phina's door. I hoped he had understood, and that my shadow, bearing the two lights, had struck him as triumphant and undismayed, walking upon air. I strained my ears. I had heard...

Somebody was coming towards me along the silent galleries. It was he; I knew it. He was coming nearer and nearer. In the profound, tomb-like stillness of the great house, I had heard the sound of his footsteps on the tessellated pavement from afar. Now he had turned the corner, and the calm, strolling pace of his approach was enough to strike awe into an adversary's heart. It never hesitated, not once; never hurried; never slowed till it stopped. He stood in the doorway.

I suppose, in that big room, by the light of two candles, I must have presented an impressive picture of a menacing youth all in black, with a tense face, and holding a naked, long rapier in his hand. At any rate, he stood still, eyeing me from the doorway, the picture of a dapper Spanish lawyer in a lofty frame; all in black, also, with a fair head and a well-turned leg advanced in a black silk stocking. He had taken off his riding boots. For the rest, I had never seen him dressed otherwise. There was no weapon in his hand, or at his side.

I lowered the point, and, seeing he remained on the doorstep, as if not willing to trust himself within, I said disdainfully:

"You don't suppose I would murder a defenceless man."

"Am I defenceless?" He had a slight lift of the eyebrows. "That is news, indeed. It is you who are supposing. I have been a very certain man for this many a year."

"How can you know how an English gentleman would feel and act? I am neither a murderer nor yet an intriguer."

He walked right in rapidly, and, getting round to the other side of the table, drew a small pistol out of his breeches pocket.

"You see — I am not trusting too much to your English generosity."

He laid the pistol negligently on the table. I had turned about on my heels. As we stood, by lunging between the two candlesticks, I should have been able to run him through the body before he could cry out.

I laid the sword on the table.

"Would you trust a damned Irish rebel?" he asked.

“You are wrong in your surmise. I would have nothing to do with a rebel, even in my thoughts and suppositions. I think that the Intendente of Don Balthasar Riego would look twice before murdering in a bedroom the guest of the house — a relation, a friend of the family.”

“That’s sensible,” he said, with that unalterable air of good nature, which sometimes was like the most cruel mockery of humour. “And do you think that even a relation of the Riegos would escape the scaffold for killing Don Patricio O’Brien, one of the Royal Judges of the Marine Court, member of the Council, Procurator to the Chapter...”

“Intendente of the Casa,” I threw in.

“That’s my gratitude,” he said gravely. “So you see...”

“Supreme chief of thieves and picaroons,” I suggested again.

He answered this by a gesture of disdainful superiority.

“I wonder if you — if any of you English — would have the courage to risk your all — ambition, pride, position, wealth, peace of mind, your dearest hope, your self-respect — like this. For an idea.”

His tone, that revealed something exalted and sad behind everything that was sordid and base in the acts of that man’s villainous tools, struck me with astonishment. I beheld, as an inseparable whole, the contemptible result, the childishness of his imagination, the danger of his recklessness, and something like loftiness in his pitiful illusion.

“Nothing’s too hot, too dirty, too heavy. Any way to get at you English; any means. To strike! That’s the thing. I would die happy if I knew I had helped to detach from you one island — one little island of all the earth you have filched away, stolen, taken by force, got by lying... Don’t taunt me with your taunts of thieves. What weapons better worthy of you could I use? Oh, I am modest. I am modest. This is a little thing, this Jamaica. What do I care for the Separationist blatherskite more than for the loyal fools? You are all English to me. If I had my way, your Empire would die of pin-pricks all over its big, overgrown body. Let only one bit drop off. If robbing your ships may help it, then, as you see me standing here, I am ready to go myself in a leaky boat. I tell you Jamaica’s gone. And that may be the beginning of the end.”

He lifted his arm not at me, but at England, if I may judge from his burning stare. It was not to me he was speaking. There we were, Irish and English, face to face, as it had been ever since we had met in the narrow way of the world that had never been big enough for the tribes, the nations, the races of man.

“Now, Mr. O’Brien, I don’t know what you may do to me, but I won’t listen to any of this,” I said, very red in the face.

“Who wants you to listen?” he muttered absently, and went away from the table to look out of the loophole, leaving me there with the sword and the pistol.

Whatever he might have said of the scaffold, this was very imprudent of him. It was characteristic of the man — of that impulsiveness which existed in him side by side with his sagacity, with his coolness in intrigue, with his unmerciful and revengeful temper. By my own feelings I understood what an imprudence it was. But he was

turning his back on me, and how could I?... His imprudence was so complete that it made for security. He did not, I am sure, remember my existence. I would just as soon have jumped with a dagger upon a man in the dark.

He was really stirred to his depths — to the depths of his hate, and of his love — by seeing me, an insignificant youth (I was no more), surge up suddenly in his path. He turned where he stood at last, and contemplated me with a sort of thoughtful surprise, as though he had tried to account to himself for my existence.

“No,” he said, to himself really, “I wonder when I look at you. How did you manage to get that pretty reputation over there? Ramon’s a fool. He shall know it to his cost. But the craftiness of that Carlos! Or is it only my confounded willingness to believe?”

He was putting his finger nearly on the very spot. I said nothing.

“Why,” he exclaimed, “when it’s all boiled down, you are only an English beggar boy.”

“I’ve come to a man’s estate since we met last,” I said meaningly.

He seemed to meditate over this. His face never changed, except, perhaps, to an even more amused benignity of expression.

“You have lived very fast by that account,” he remarked artlessly. “Is it possible now? Well, life, as you know, can’t last forever; and, indeed, taking a better look at you in this poor light, you do seem to be very near death.”

I did not flinch; and, with a very dry mouth, I uttered defiantly:

“Such talk means nothing.”

“Bravely said. But this is not talk. You’ve gone too fast. I am giving you a chance to turn back.”

“Not an inch,” I said fiercely. “Neither in thought, in deed; not even in semblance.”

He seemed as though he wanted to swallow a bone in his throat.

“Believe me, there is more in life than you think. There is at your age, more than...” he had a strange contortion of the body, as though in a sudden access of internal pain; that humorous smile, that abode in the form of his lips, changed into a ghastly, forced grin... “than one love in a life — more than one woman.”

I believe he tried to leer at me, because his voice was absolutely dying in his throat. My indignation was boundless. I cried out with the fire of deathless conviction:

“It is not true. You know it is not true.”

He was speechless for a time; then, shaking and stammering with that inward rage that seemed to heave like molten lava in his breast, without ever coming to the surface of his face:

“What! Is it I, then, who have to go back? For — for you — -a boy — come from devil knows where — an English, beggarly... For a girl’s whim... I — a man.”

He calmed down. “No; you are mad. You are dreaming. You don’t know. You can’t — you! You don’t know what a man is; you with your calf-love a day old. How dare you look at me who have breathed for years in the very air? You fool — you little, wretched fool! For years sleeping, and waking, and working...”

“And intriguing,” I broke in, “and plotting, and deceiving — for years.”

This calmed him altogether. "I am a man; you are but a boy; or else I would not have to tell you that your love" — he choked at the word — "is to mine like — like —"

His eyes fell on a cut-glass water-ewer, and, with a convulsive sweep of his arm, he sent it flying far away from the table. It fell heavily, shattering itself with the unringing thud of a piece of ice. "Like this." He remained for some time with his eyes fixed on the table, and when he looked up at me it was with a sort of amused incredulity. His tone was not resentful. He spoke in a business-like manner, a little contemptuously. I had only Don Carlos to thank for the position in which I found myself. What the "poor devil over there" expected from me, he, O'Brien, would not inquire. It was a ridiculous boy-and-girl affair. If those two — meaning Carlos and Seraphina — had not been so mighty clever, I should have been safe now in Jamaica jail, on a charge of treasonable practices. He seemed to find the idea funny. Well, anyhow, he had meant no worse by me than my own dear countrymen. When he, O'Brien, had found how absurdly he had been hoodwinked by Don Carlos — the poor devil — and misled by Ramon — he would make him smart for it, yet — all he had intended to do was to lodge me in Havana jail. On his word of honour...

"Me in jail!" I cried angrily. "You — you would dare! On what charge? You could not..."

"You don't know what Pat O'Brien can do in Cuba."

The little country solicitor came out in a flash from under the Spanish lawyer. Then he frowned slightly at me. "You being an Englishman, I would have had you taken up on a charge of stealing."

Blood rushed to my face. I lost control over myself. "Mr. O'Brien," I said, "I dare say you could have trumped up anything against me. You are a very great scoundrel."

"Why? Because I don't lie about my motives, as you all do? I would wish you to know that I would scorn to lie either to myself or to you."

I touched the haft of the sword on the table. It was lying with the point his way.

"I had been thinking," said I, in great heat, "to propose to you that we should fight it out between us two, man to man, rebel and traitor as you have been."

"The devil you have!" he muttered.

"But really you are too much of a Picaroon. I think the gallows should be your end."

I gave rein to my exasperation, because I felt myself hopelessly in his power. What he was driving at, I could not tell. I had an intolerable sense of being as much at his mercy as though I had been lying bound hand and foot on the floor. It gave me pleasure to tell him what I thought. And, perhaps, I was not quite candid, either. Suppose I provoked him enough to fire his pistol at me. He had been fingering the butt, absently, as we talked. He might have missed me, and then... Or he might have shot me dead. But surely there was some justice in Cuba. It was clear enough that he did not wish to kill me himself. Well, this was a desperate strait; to force him to do something he did not wish to do, even at the cost of my own life, was the only step left open to me to thwart his purpose; the only thing I could do just then for the furtherance of

my mission to save Seraphina from his intrigues. I was oppressed by the misery of it all. As to killing him as he stood — if I could do it by being very quick with the old rapier — my bringing up, my ideas, my very being, recoiled from it. I had never taken a life. I was very young. I was not used to scenes of violence; and to begin like this in cold blood! Not only my conscience, but my very courage faltered. Truth to tell, I was afraid; not for myself — I had the courage to die; but I was afraid of the act. It was the unknown for me — for my nerve — for my conscience. And then the Spanish gallows! That, too, revolted me. To kill him, and then kill myself... No, I must live. “Two lives, one death,” she had said.... For a second or two my brain reeled with horror; I was certainly losing my self-possession. His voice broke upon that nightmare.

“It may be your lot, yet,” it said. I burst into a nervous laugh. For a moment I could not stop myself.

“I won’t murder you,” I cried.

To this he said astonishingly, “Will you go to Mexico?”

It sounded like a joke. He was very serious. “I shall send one of the schooners there on a little affair of mine. I can make use of you. I give you this chance.” It was as though he had thrown a bucketful of water over me. I had an inward shiver, and became quite cool. It was his turn now to let himself go.

It was a matter of delivering certain papers to the Spanish commandant in Tamaulipas. There would be some employment found for me with the Royal troops. I was a relation of the Riegos. And there came upon his voice a strange ardour; a swiftness into his utterance. He walked away from the table; came back, and gazed into my face in a marked, expectant manner. He was not prompted by any love for me, he said, and gave an uncertain laugh.

My wits had returned to me wholly; and as he repeated “No love for you — no love for you,” I had the intuition that what influenced him was his love for Seraphina. I saw it. I read it in the workings of his face. His eyes retained his good-humoured twinkle. He did not attach any importance to a boy-and-girl affair; not at all — pah! The lady, naturally young, warmhearted, full of kindness. I mustn’t think... Ha, ha! A man of his age, of course, understood... No importance at all.

He walked away from the table trying to snap his fingers, and, suddenly, he reeled; he reeled, as though he had been overcome by the poison of his jealousy — as though a thought had stabbed him to the heart. There was an instant when the sight of that man moved me more than anything I had seen of passionate suffering before (and that was nothing), or since. He longed to kill me — I felt it in the very air of the room; and he loved her too much to dare. He laughed at me across the table. I had ridiculously misunderstood a very proper and natural kindness of a girl with not much worldly experience. He had known her from the earliest childhood.

“Take my word for it,” he stammered.

It seemed to me that there were tears in his eyes. A stiff smile was parting his lips. He took up the pistol, and evidently not knowing anything about it, looked with an air of curiosity into the barrel.

It was time to think of making my career. That's what I ought to be thinking of at my age. "At your age — at your age," he repeated aimlessly. I was an Englishman. He hated me — and it was easy to believe this, though he neither glared nor grimaced. He smiled.

He smiled continuously and rather pitifully. But his devotion to a — a — person who... His devotion was great enough to overcome even that, even that. Did I understand? I owed it to the lady's regard, which, for the rest, I had misunderstood — stupidly misunderstood.

"Well, at your age it's excusable!" he mumbled. "A career that..."

"I see," I said slowly. Young as I was, it was impossible to mistake his motives. Only a man of mature years, and really possessed by a great passion — by a passion that had grown slowly, till it was exactly as big as his soul — could have acted like this — with that profound simplicity, with such resignation, with such horrible moderation — But I wanted to find out more. "And when would you want me to go?" I asked, with a dissimulation of which I would not have suspected myself capable a moment before. I was maturing in the fire of love, of danger; in the lurid light of life piercing through my youthful innocence.

"Ah," he said, banging the pistol on to the table hurriedly. "At once. To-night. Now."

"Without seeing anybody?"

"Without seeing... Oh, of course. In your own interest."

He was very quiet now. "I thought you looked intelligent enough," he said, appearing suddenly very tired. "I am glad you see your position. You shall go far in the Royal service, on the faith of Pat O'Brien, English as you are. I will make it my own business for the sake of — the Riego family. There is only one little condition."

He pulled out of his pocket a piece of paper, a pen, a travelling inkstand. He looked the lawyer to the life; the Spanish family lawyer grafted on an Irish attorney.

"You can't see anybody. But you ought to write. Dona Seraphina naturally would be interested. A cousin and... I shall explain to Don Balthasar, of course... I will dictate: 'Out of regard for your future, and the desire for active life, of your own will, you accept eagerly Señor O'Brien's proposition.' She'll understand."

"Oh, yes, she'll understand," I said.

"Yes. And that you will write of your safe arrival in Tamaulipas. You must promise to write. Your word..."

"By heavens, Señor O'Brien!" I burst out with inexpressible scorn, "I thought you meant your villains to cut my throat on the passage. I should have deserved no better fate."

He started. I shook with rage. A change had come upon both of us as sudden as if we had been awakened by a violent noise. For a time we did not speak a word. One look at me was enough for him. He passed his hand over his forehead.

"What devil's in you, boy?" he said. "I seem to make nothing but mistakes."

He went to the loophole window, and, advancing his head, cried out:

"The schooner does not sail to-night."

He had some of his cut-throats posted under the window. I could not make out the reply he got; but after a while he said distinctly, so as to be heard below:

“I give up that spy to you.” Then he came back, put the pistol in his pocket, and said to me, “Fool! I’ll make you long for death yet.”

“You’ve given yourself away pretty well,” I said. “Some day I shall unmask you. It will be my revenge on you for daring to propose to me...”

“What?” he interrupted, over his shoulder. “You? Not you — and I’ll tell you why. It’s because dead men tell no tales.”

He passed through the door — a back view of a dapper Spanish lawyer, all in black, in a lofty frame. The calm, strolling footsteps went away along the gallery. He turned the corner. The tapping of his heels echoed in the patio, into whose blackness filtered the first suggestion of the dawn.

Chapter 5

I remember walking about the room, and thinking to myself, "This is bad, this is very bad; what shall I do now?" A sort of mad meditation that in this meaningless way became so tense as positively to frighten me. Then it occurred to me that I could do nothing whatever at present, and I was soothed by this sense of powerlessness, which, one would think, ought to have driven me to distraction. I went to sleep ultimately, just as a man sentenced to death goes to sleep, lulled in a sort of ghastly way by the finality of his doom. Even when I awoke it kept me steady, in a way. I washed, dressed, walked, ate, said "Good-morning, Cesar," to the old major-domo I met in the gallery; exchanged grins with the negro boys under the gateway, and watched the mules being ridden out barebacked by other nearly naked negro boys into the sea, with great splashing of water and a noise of voices. A small knot of men, unmistakably Lugareños, stood on the beach, also, watching the mules, and exchanging loud jocular shouts with the blacks. Rio Medio, the dead, forsaken, and desecrated city, was lying, as bare as a skeleton, on the sands. They were yellow; the bay was very blue, the wooded hills very green.

After the mules had been ridden uproariously back to the stables, wet and capering, and shaking their long ears, all the life of the land seemed to take refuge in this vivid colouring. As I looked at it from the outer balcony above the great gate, the small group of Lugareños turned about to look at the Casa Riego.

They recognized me, no doubt, and one of them flourished, threateningly, an arm from under his cloak. I retreated indoors.

This was the only menacing sign, absolutely the only sign that marked this day. It was a day of pause. Seraphina did not leave her apartments; Don Balthasar did not show himself; Father Antonio, hurrying towards the sick room, greeted me with only a wave of the hand. I was not admitted to see Carlos; the nun came to the door, shook her head at me, and closed it gently in my face. Castro, sitting on the floor not very far away, seemed unaware of me in so marked a manner that it inspired me with the idea of not taking the slightest notice of him. Now and then the figure of a maid in white linen and bright petticoat flitted in the upper gallery, and once I fancied I saw the black, rigid carriage of the duenna disappearing behind a pillar.

Señor O'Brien, old Cesar whispered, without looking at me, was extremely occupied in the Cancillería. His midday meal was served him there. I had mine all alone, and then the sunny, heat-laden stillness of siesta-time fell upon the Castilian dignity of the house.

I sank into a kind of reposeful belief in the work of accident. Something would happen. I did not know how soon and how atrociously my belief was to be justified. I exercised my ingenuity in the most approved lover-fashion — in devising means how to get secret speech with Seraphina. The confounded silly maids fled from my most distant appearance, as though I had the pest. I was wondering whether I should not go simply and audaciously and knock at her door, when I fancied I heard a scratching at mine. It was a very stealthy sound, quite capable of awakening my dormant emotions.

I went to the door and listened. Then, opening it the merest crack, I saw the inexplicable emptiness of the gallery. Castro, on his hands and knees, startled me by whispering at my feet:

“Stand aside, Señor.”

He entered my room on all-fours, and waited till I got the door closed before he stood up.

“Even he may sleep sometimes,” he said. “And the balustrade has hidden me.”

To see this little saturnine bandit, who generally stalked about haughtily, as if the whole Casa belonged to him by right of fidelity, crawl into my room like this was inexpressibly startling. He shook the folds of his cloak, and dropped his hat on the floor.

“Still, it is better so. The very women of the house are not safe,” he said. “Señor, I have no mind to be delivered to the English for hanging. But I have not been admitted to see Don Carlos, and, therefore, I must make my report to you. These are Don Carlos’ orders. ‘Serve him, Castro, when I am dead, as if my soul had passed into his body.’”

He nodded sadly. “Si! But Don Carlos is a friend to me and you — you.” He shook his head, and drew me away from the door. “Two Lugareños,” he said, “Manuel and another one, did go last night, as directed by the friar” — he supposed — “to meet the Juez in the bush outside Rio Medio.”

I had guessed that much, and told him of Manuel’s behaviour under my window. How did they know my chamber?

“Bad, bad,” muttered Castro. “La Chica told her lover, no doubt.” He hissed, and stamped his foot.

She was pretty, but flighty. The lover was a silly boy of decent, Christian parents, who was always hanging about in the low villages. No matter.

What he could not understand was why some boats should have been held in readiness till nearly the morning to tow a schooner outside. Manuel came along at dawn, and dismissed the crews. They had separated, making a great noise on the beach, and yelling, “Death to the Ingles!”

I cleared up that point for him. He told me that O’Brien had the duenna called to his room that morning. Nothing had been heard outside, but the woman came out staggering, with her hand on the wall. He had terrified her. God knows what he had said to her. The widow — as Castro called her — had a son, an *escrivano* in one of the Courts of Justice. No doubt it was that.

“There it is, Señor,” murmured Castro, scowling all round, as if every wall of the room was an enemy. “He holds all the people in his hand in some way. Even I must be cautious, though I am a humble, trusted friend of the Casa!”

“What harm could he do you?” I asked.

“He is civil to me. Amigo Castro here, and Amigo Castro there. Bah! The devil, alone, is his friend! He could deliver me to justice, and get my life sworn away. He could — — — Quien sabe? What need he care what he does — a man that can get absolution from the archbishop himself if he likes.”

He meditated. “No! there is only one remedy for him.” He tiptoed to my ear. “The knife!”

He made a pass in the air with his blade, and I remembered vividly the cockroach he had impaled with such accuracy on board the Thames. His baneful glance reminded me of his murderous capering in the steerage, when he had thought that the only remedy for me was the knife.

He went to the loop-hole, and passed the steel thoughtfully on the stone edge. I had not moved.

“The knife; but what would you have? Before, when I talked of this to Don Carlos, he only laughed at me. That was his way in matters of importance. Now they will not let me come in to him. He is too near God — and the Señorita — why, she is too near the saints for all the great nobility of her spirit. But, que dia-bleria, when I — in my devotion — opened my mouth to her I saw some of that spirit in her eyes...”

There was a slight irony in his voice. “No! Me — Castro! to be told that an English Señora would have dismissed me forever from her presence for such a hint. ‘Your Excellency,’ I said, ‘deign, then, to find it good that I should avoid giving offence to that man. It is not my desire to run my neck into the iron collar.’”

He looked at me fixedly, as if expecting me to make a sign, then shrugged his shoulders.

“Bueno. You see this? Then look to it yourself, Señor. You are to me even as Don Carlos — all except for the love. No English body is big enough to receive his soul. No friend will be left that would risk his very honour of a noble for a man like Tomas Castro. Let me warn you not to leave the Casa, even if a shining angel stood outside the gate and called you by name. The gate is barred, now, night and day. I have dropped a hint to Cesar, and that old African knows more than the Señor would suppose. I cannot tell how soon I may have the opportunity to talk to you again.”

He peeped through the crack of the door, then slipped out, suddenly falling at once on his hands and knees, so as to be hidden by the stone balustrade from anybody in the patio. He, too, did not think himself safe.

Early in the evening I descended into the court, and Father Antonio, walking up and down the patio with his eyes on his breviary, muttered to me:

“Sit on this chair,” and went on without stopping.

I took a chair near the marble rim of the basin with its border of English flowers, its splashing thread of water. The goldfishes that had been lying motionless, with their

heads pointing different ways, glided into a bunch to the fall of my shadow, waiting for crumbs of bread.

Father Antonio, his head down, and the open breviary under his nose, brushed my foot with the skirt of his cassock.

“Have you any plan?”

When he came back, walking very slowly, I said, “None.”

At this next turn I pronounced rapidly, “I should like to see Carlos.”

He frowned over the edge of the book. I understood that he refused to let me in. And, after all, why should I disturb that dying man? The news about him was that he felt stronger that day. But he was preparing for eternity. Father Antonio’s business was to save souls. I felt horribly crushed and alone. The priest asked, hardly moving his lips: “What do you trust to?”

I had the time to meditate my reply. “Tell Carlos I think of escape by sea.”

He made a little sign of assent, turned off towards the staircase, and went back to the sick room.

“The folly of it,” I thought. How could I think of it? Escape where? I dared not even show myself outside the Casa. My safety within depended on old Cesar more than on anybody else. He had the key of the gate, and the gate was practically the only thing between me and a miserable death at the hands of the first ruffian I met outside. And with the thought I seemed to stifle in that patio open to the sky.

That gate seemed to cut off the breath of life from me. I was there, as if in a trap. Should I — I asked myself — try to enlighten Don Balthasar? Why not? He would understand me. I would tell him that in his own town, as he always called Rio Medio, there lurked assassination for his guest. That would move him if anything could.

He was then walking with O’Brien after dinner, as he had walked with me on the day of my arrival. Only Seraphina had not appeared, and we three men had sat out the silent meal alone.

They stopped as I approached, and Don Balthasar listened to me benignantly. “Ah, yes, yes! Times have changed.” But there was no reason for alarm. There were some undesirable persons. Had they not arrived lately? He turned to O’Brien, who stood by, in readiness to resume the walk, and answered, “Yes, quite lately. Very undesirable,” in a matter-of-fact tone. The excellent Don Patricio would take measures to have them removed, the old man soothed me. But it was not really dangerous for any one to go out. Again he addressed O’Brien, who only smiled gently, as much as to say, “What an absurdity!” I must not forget, continued the old man, the veneration for the very name of Riego that still, thank Heaven, survived in these godless and revolutionary times in the Riegos’ own town. He straightened his back a little, looking at me with dignity, and then glanced at the other, who inclined his head affirmatively. The utter and complete hopelessness of the position appalled me for a moment. The old man had not put foot outside his door for years, not even to go to church. Father Antonio said Mass for him every day in the little chapel next the dining room. When O’Brien — for his own purposes, and the better to conceal his own connection with the Rio Medio

piracies — had persuaded him to go to Jamaica officially, he had been rowed in state to the ship waiting outside. For many years now it had been impossible to enlighten him as to the true condition of affairs. He listened to people's talk as though it had been children's prattle. I have related how he received Carlos' denunciations. If one insisted, he would draw himself up in displeasure. But in his decay he had preserved a great dignity, a grave firmness that intimidated me a little.

I did not, of course, insist that evening, and, after giving me my dismissal in a gesture of blessing, he resumed his engrossing conversation with O'Brien. It related to the services commemorating his wife's death, those services that, once every twelve months, draped in black all the churches in Havana. A hundred masses, no less, had to be said that day; a distribution of alms had to be made. O'Brien was charged with all the arrangements, and I caught, as they crept past me up and down the patio, snatches of phrases relating to this mournful function, when all the capital was invited to pray for the soul of the illustrious lady. The priest of the church of San Antonio had said this and that; the grand vicar of the diocese had made difficulties about something; however, by the archbishop's special grace, no less than three altars would be draped in the cathedral.

I saw Don Balthasar smile with an ineffable satisfaction; he thanked O'Brien for his zeal, and seemed to lean more familiarly on his arm. His voice trembled with eagerness. "And now, my excellent Don Patricio, as to the number of candles..."

I stood for a while as if rooted to the spot, overwhelmed by my insignificance. O'Brien never once looked my way. Then, hanging my head, I went slowly up the white staircase towards my room.

Cesar, going his rounds along the gallery, shuffled his silk-clad shanks smartly between two young negroes balancing lanterns suspended on the shafts of their halberds. That little group had a mediaeval and outlandish aspect. Cesar carried a bunch of keys in one hand, his staff of office in the other. He stood aside, in his maroon velvet and gold lace, holding the three-cornered hat under his arm, bowing his gray, woolly head — the most venerable and deferential of majordomos. His attendants, backing against the wall, grounded their halberds heavily at my approach.

He stepped out to intercept me, and, with great discretion, "Señor, a word," he said in his subdued voice. "A moment ago I have been called within the door of our senorita's apartments. She has given me this for your worship, together with many compliments. It is a seal. The Señor will understand."

I took it; it was a tiny seal with her monogram on it. "Yes," I said.

"And Señorita Dona Seraphina has charged me to repeat" — he made a stealthy sign, as if to counteract an evil influence — "the words, 'Two lives — one death.' The Señor will understand."

"Yes," I said, looking away with a pang at my heart. He touched my elbow. "And to trust Cesar. Señor, I dandled her when she was quite little. Let me most earnestly urge upon your worship not to go near the windows, especially if there is light in your worship's room. Evil men are gazing upon the house, and I have seen myself the glint

of a musket at the end of the street. The moon grows fast, too. The senorita begs you to trust Cesar.”

“Are there many men?” I asked.

“Not many in sight; I have seen only one. But by signs, open to a man of my experience, I suspect many more to be about.” Then, as I looked down on the ground, he added parenthetically, “They are poor shots, one and all, lacking the very firmness of manhood necessary to discharge a piece with a good aim. Still, Señor, I am ordered to entreat you to be cautious. Strange it is that to-night, from the great revelry at the Aldea Bajo, one might think they had just visited an English ship outside.”

A ship! a ship! of any sort. But how to get out of the Casa? Murder forbade me even as much as to look out of the windows. Was there a ship outside? Cesar was positive there was not — not since I had arrived. Besides, the empty sea itself was unattainable, it seemed. I pressed the seal to my lips. “Tell the senorita how I received her gift,” I said; and the old negro inclined his head lower still. “Tell her that as the letters of her name are graved on this, so are all the words she has spoken graven on my heart.”

They went away busily, the lanthorns swinging about the ax-heads of the halberds, Cesar’s staff tapping the stones.

I shut my door, and buried my face in the pillows of the state bed. My mental anguish was excessive; action, alone, could relieve it. I had been battling with my thoughts like a man fighting with shadows. I could see no issue to such a struggle, and I prayed for something tangible to encounter — something that one could overcome or go under to. I must have fallen suddenly asleep, because there was a lion in front of me. It lashed its tail, and beyond the indistinct agitation of the brute I saw Seraphina. I tried to shout to her; no voice came out of my throat. And the lion produced a strange noise; he opened his jaws like a door. I sat up. It was like a change of dream. A glare filled my eyes. In the wide doorway of my room, in a group of attendants, I saw a figure in a short black cloak standing, hat on head, and an arm outstretched. It was Don Balthasar. He held himself more erect than I had ever seen him before. Stifled sounds of weeping, a vast, confused rumour of lamentations, running feet and flammng doors, came from behind him; his aged, dry voice, much firmer and very distinct, was speaking to me.

“You are summoned to attend the bedside of Don Carlos Riego at the hour of death, to help his soul struggling on the threshold of eternity, with your prayers — as a kinsman and a friend.”

A great draught swayed the lights about that black and courtly figure. All the windows and doors of the palace had been flung open for the departure of the struggling soul. Don Balthasar turned; the group of attendants was gone in a moment, with a tramp of feet and jostling of lights in the long gallery.

I ran out after them. A wavering glare came from under the arch, and, through the open gate, I saw the bulky shape of the bishop’s coach waiting outside in the moonlight. A strip of cloth fell from step to step down the middle of the broad white stairs. The staircase was brilliantly lighted, and quite empty. The household was crowding the

upper galleries; the sobbing murmurs of their voices fell into the deserted patio. The strip of crimson cloth laid for the bishop ran across it from the arch of the stairway to the entrance.

The door of Carlos' room stood wide open; I saw the many candles on a table covered with white linen, the side of the big bed, surpliced figures moving within the room. There was the ringing of small bells, and sighing groans from the kneeling forms in the gallery through which I was making my way slowly.

Castro appeared at my side suddenly. "Señor," he began, with saturnine stoicism, "he is dead. I have seen battlefields — — —" His voice broke.

I saw, through the large portal of the death-chamber, Don Balthasar and Seraphina standing at the foot of the bed; the bowed heads of two priests; the bishop, a tiny old man, in his vestments; and Father Antonio, burly and motionless, with his chin in his hand, as if left behind after leading that soul to the very gate of Eternity. All about me, women and men were crossing themselves; and Castro, who for a moment had covered his eyes with his hand, touched my elbow.

"And you live," he said, with sombre emphasis; then, warningly, "You are in great danger now."

I looked around, as if expecting to see an uplifted knife. I saw only a lot of people — household negroes and the women — rising from their knees. Below, the patio was empty.

"The house is defenceless," Castro continued. We heard tumultuous voices under the gate. O'Brien appeared in the doorway of Carlos' room with an attentive and dismayed expression on his face. I do not really think he had anything to do with what then took place. He meant to have me killed outside; but the rabble, excited by Manuel's inflammatory speeches, had that night started from the villages below with the intention of clamouring for my life. Many of their women were with them. Some of the Lugareños carried torches, others had pikes; most of them, however, had nothing but their long knives. They came in a disorderly, shouting mob along the beach, intending this not for an attack, but as a simple demonstration.

The sight of the open gate struck them with wonder. The bishop's coach blocked the entrance, and for a time they hesitated, awed by the mystery of the house and by the rites going on in there. Then two or three bolder spirits stole closer. The bishop's people, of course, did not think of offering any resistance. The very defencelessness of the house restrained the mob for a while. A few more men from outside ran in. Several women began to clamour scoldingly to them to bring the Inglez out. Then the men, encouraging each other in their audacity, advanced further under the arch.

A solitary black, the only guard left at the gate, shouted at them, "Arria! Go back!" It had no effect. More of them crowded in, though, of course, the greater part of that mob remained outside. The black rolled big eyes. He could not stop them; he did not like to leave his post; he dared not fire. "Go back! Go back!" he repeated.

"Not without the Inglez," they answered.

The tumult we had heard arose when the Lugareños suddenly fell upon the sentry, and wrenched his musket from him.

This man, when disarmed, ran away. I saw him running across the patio, on the crimson pathway, to the foot of the staircase. His shouting, "The Lugareños have risen!" broke upon the hush of mourning. Father Antonio made a brusque movement, and Seraphina sent a startled glance in my direction.

The cloistered court, with its marble basin and a jet of water in the centre, remained empty for a moment after the negro had run across; a growing clamour penetrated into it. In the midst of it I heard O'Brien's voice saying, "Why don't they shut the gate?" Immediately afterwards a woman in the gallery cried out in surprise, and I saw the Lugareños pour into the patio.

For a time that motley group of bandits stood in the light, as if intimidated by the great dignity of the house, by the mysterious prestige of the Casa whose interior, probably, none of them had ever seen before. They gazed about silently, as if surprised to find themselves there.

It looked as if they would have retired if they had not caught sight of me. A murmur of "the Inglez" arose at once. By that time the household negroes had occupied the staircase with what weapons they could find upstairs.

Father Antonio pushed past O'Brien out of the room, and shook his arms over the balustrade.

"Impious men," he cried, "begone from this house of death." His eyes flashed at the ruffians, who stared stupidly from below.

"Give us the Inglez," they growled. Seraphina, from within, cried, "Juan." I was then near the door, but not within the room.

"The Inglez! The heretic! The traitor!" came in sullen, subdued mutter. A hoarse, reckless voice shouted, "Give him to us, and we shall go!"

"You are putting in danger all the lives in this house!" O'Brien hissed at me. "Señorita, pray do not." He stood in the way of Seraphina, who wished to come out.

"It is you!" she cried. "It is you! It is your voice, it is your hand, it is your iniquity!" He was confounded by her vehemence.

"Who brought him here?" he stammered. "Am I to find one of that accursed brood forever in my way? I take him to witness that for your sake — — —"

A formidable roar, "Throw us down the Inglez!" filled the patio. They were gaining assurance down there; and the ferocious clamouring of the mob outside came faintly upon our ears.

O'Brien barred the way. Don Balthasar leaned on his daughter's arm — she very straight, with tears still on her face and indignation in her eye, he bowed, and with his immovable fine features set in the calmness of age. Behind that group there were two priests, one with a scared, white face, another, black-browed, with an exalted and fanatical aspect. The light of the candles from the improvised altar fell on the bishop's small, bald head, emerging with a patient droop from the wide spread of his cope, as though he had been inclosed in a portable gold shrine. He was ready to go.

Don Balthasar, who seemed to have heard nothing, as if suddenly waking up to his duty, left his daughter, and muttering to O'Brien, "Let me precede the bishop," came out, bare-headed, into the gallery. Father Antonio had turned away, and his heavy hand fell on O'Brien's shoulder.

"Have you no heart, no reverence, no decency?" he said. "In the name of everything you respect, I call upon you to stop this sacrilegious outbreak."

O'Brien shook off the priestly hand, and fixed his eyes upon Seraphina. I happened to be looking at his face; he seemed to be ready to go out of his mind. His jealousy, the awful torment of soul and body, made him motionless and speechless.

Seeing Don Balthasar appear by the balustrade, the ruffians below had become silent for a while. His aged, mechanical voice was heard asking distinctly:

"What do these people want?"

Seraphina, from within the room, said aloud, "They are clamouring for the life of our guest." She looked at O'Brien contemptuously, "They are doing this to please you."

"Before God, I have nothing to do with this."

It was true enough, he had nothing to do with this outbreak; and I believe he would have interfered, but, in his dismay at having lost himself in the eyes of Seraphina, in his rage against myself, he did not know how to act. No doubt he had been deceiving himself as to his position with Seraphina. He was a man who in his wishes. His desire of revenge on me, the downfall of his hopes (he could no longer deceive himself), a desperate striving of thought for their regaining, his impulse towards the impossible — all these emotions paralyzed his will.

Don Balthasar beckoned to me.

"Don't go near him," said O'Brien, in a thick, mumbling voice. "I shall — — — I must — — —"

I put him aside. Don Balthasar took my arm. "Misguided populace," he whispered. "They have been a source of sorrow to me lately. But this wicked folly is incredible. I shall call upon them to come to their senses. My voice — — —"

The court below was strongly lighted, so that I saw the bearded, bronzed, wild faces of the Lugareños looking up. We, also, were strongly shown by the light of the doorway behind us, and by the torches burning in the gallery.

That morning, in my helplessness, I had come to put my trust in accident — in some accident — I hardly knew of what nature — my own death, perhaps — that would find a solution for my responsibilities, put an end to my tormenting thoughts. And now the accident came with a terrible swiftness, at which I shudder to this day.

We were looking down into the patio. Don Balthasar had just said, "You are nowhere as safe as by my side," when I noticed a Lugareño withdrawing himself from the throng about the basin. His face came to me familiarly. He was the pirate with the broken nose, who had had a taste of my fist. He had the sentry's musket on his shoulder, and was slinking away towards the gate.

Don Balthasar extended his hand over the balustrade, and there was a general movement of recoil below. I wondered why the slaves on the stairs did not charge and

clear the patio; but I suppose with such a mob outside there was a natural hesitation in bringing the position to an issue. The Lugareños were muttering, "Look at the Inglez!" then cried out together, "Excellency, give up this Inglez!"

Don Balthazar seemed ten years younger suddenly. I had never seen him so imposingly erect.

"Insensate!" he began, without any anger.

"He is going to fire!" yelled Castro's voice somewhere in the gallery.

I saw a red dart in the shadow of the gate. The broken-nosed pirate had fired at me. The report, deadened in the vault, hardly reached my ears. Don Balthazar's arm seemed to swing me back. Then I felt him lean heavily on my shoulder. I did not know what had happened till I heard him say:

"Pray for me, gentlemen."

Father Antonio received him in his arms.

For a second after the shot, the most dead silence prevailed in the court. It was broken by an affrighted howl below: and Seraphina's voice cried piercingly:

"Father!"

The priest, dropping on one knee, sustained the silvery head, with its thin features already calm in death. Don Balthazar had saved my life; and his daughter flung herself upon the body. O'Brien pressed his hands to his temples, and remained motionless.

I saw the bishop, in his stiff cope, creep up to the group with the motion of a tortoise. And, for a moment, his quavering voice pronouncing the absolution was the only sound in the house.

Then a most fiendish noise broke out below. The negroes had charged, and the Lugareños, struck with terror at the unforeseen catastrophe, were rushing helter-skelter through the gate. The screaming of the maids was frightful. They ran up and down the galleries with their hair streaming. O'Brien passed me by swiftly, muttering like a madman.

I, also, got down into the courtyard in time to strike some heavy blows under the gateway; but I don't know who it was that thrust into my hands the musket which I used as a club. The sudden burst of shrieks, the cries of terror under the vault of the gate, yells of rage and consternation, silenced the mob outside. The Lugareños, appalled at what had happened, shouted most pitifully. They squeaked like the vermin they were. I brought down the clubbed musket; two went down. Of two I am sure. The rush of flying feet swept through between the walls, bearing me along. For a time a black stream of men eddied in the moonlight round the bishop's coach, like a torrent breaking round a boulder. The great heavy machine rocked, mules plunged, torches swayed.

The archway had been cleared. Outside, the slaves were forming in the open space before the Casa, while Cesar, with a few others, laboured to swing the heavy gates to. Hats, torn cloaks, knives strewed the flagstones, and the dim light of the lamps, fastened high up on the walls, fell on the faces of three men stretched out on their backs. Another, lying huddled up in a heap, got up suddenly and rushed out.

The thought of Seraphina clinging to the lifeless body of her father upstairs came to me; it came over me in horror, and I let the musket fall out of my hand. A silence like the silence of despair reigned in the house. She would hate me now. I felt as if I could walk out and give myself up, had it not been for the sight of O'Brien.

He was leaning his shoulders against the wall in the posture of a man suddenly overcome by a deadly disease. No one was looking at us. It came to me that he could not have many illusions left to him now. He looked up wearily, saw me, and, waking up at once, thrust his hands into the pockets of his breeches. I thought of his pistol. No wild hope of love would prevent him, now, from killing me outright. The fatal shot that had put an end to Don Balthasar's life must have brought to him an awakening worse than death. I made one stride, caught him by both arms swiftly, and pinned him to the wall with all my strength. We struggled in silence.

I found him much more vigorous than I had expected; but, at the same time, I felt at once that I was more than a match for him. We did not say a word. We made no noise. But, in our struggle, we got away from the wall into the middle of the gateway I dared not let go of his arms to take him by the throat. He only tried to jerk and wrench himself away. Had he succeeded, it would have been death for me. We never moved our feet from the spot, fairly in the middle of the archway but nearer to the gate than to the patio. The slaves, formed outside, guarded the bishop's coach, and I do not know that there was anybody else actually with us under the vault of the entrance. We glared into each other's faces, and the world seemed very still around us. I felt in me a passion — not of hate, but of determination to be done with him; and from his face it was impossible to guess his suffering, his despair, or his rage.

In the midst of our straining I heard a sibilant sound. I detached my eyes from his; his struggles redoubled, and, behind him, stealing in towards us from the court, black on the strip of crimson cloth, I saw Tomas Castro. He flung his cloak back. The light of the lanthorn under the keystone of the arch glimmered feebly on the blade of his maimed arm. He made a discreet and bloodcurdling gesture to me with the other.

How could I hold a man so that he should be stabbed from behind in my arms? Castro was running up swiftly, his cloak opening like a pair of sable wings. Collecting all my strength, I forced O'Brien round, and we swung about in a flash. Now he had his back to the gate. My effort seemed to have uprooted him. I felt him give way all over.

As soon as our position had changed, Castro checked himself, and stepped aside into the shadow of the guardroom doorway. I don't think O'Brien had been aware of what had been going on. His strength was overborne by mine. I drove him backwards. His eyes blinked wildly. He bared his teeth. He resisted, as though I had been forcing him over the brink of perdition. His feet clung to the flagstones. I shook him till his head rolled.

"Viper brood!" he spluttered.

"Out you go!" I hissed.

I had found nothing heroic, nothing romantic to say — nothing that would express my desperate resolve to rid the world of his presence. All I could do was to fling him out. The Casa Riego was all my world — a World full of great pain, great mourning, and love. I saw him pitch headlong under the wheels of the bishop's enormous carriage. The black coachman who had sat aloft, unmoved through all the tumult, in his white stockings and three-cornered hat, glanced down from his high box. And the two parts of the gate came together with a clang of ironwork and a heavy crash that seemed as loud as thunder under that vault.

Chapter 6

Not even in memory am I willing to live over again those three days when Father Antonio, the old major-domo, and myself would meet each other in the galleries, in the patio, in the empty rooms, moving in the stillness of the house with heavy hearts and desolate eyes, which seemed to demand, "What is there to do?"

Of course, precautions were taken against the Lugareños. They were besieging the Casa from afar. They had established a sort of camp at the end of the street, and they prowled about amongst the old, barricaded houses in their pointed hats, in their rags and finery; women, with food, passed constantly between the villages and the panic-stricken town; there were groups on the beach; and one of the schooners had been towed down the bay, and was lying, now, moored stem and stern opposite the great gate. They did nothing whatever active against us. They lay around and watched, as if in pursuance of a plan traced by a superior authority. They were watching for me. But when, by some mischance, they burnt the roof off the outbuildings that were at some distance from the Casa, their chiefs sent up a deputation of three, with apologies. Those men came unarmed, and, as it were, under Castro's protection, and absolutely whimpered with regrets before Father Antonio. "Would his reverence kindly intercede with the most noble senorita?..."

"Silence! Dare not pronounce her name!" thundered the good priest, snatching away his hand, which they attempted to grab and kiss.

I, in the background, noted their black looks at me even as they cringed. The man who had fired the shot, they said, had expired of his wounds after great torments. Their other dead had been thrust out of the gate before. A long fellow, with slanting eyebrows and a scar on his cheek, called El Rechado, tried to inform Cesar, confidentially, that Manuel, his friend, had been opposed to any encroachment of the Casa's offices, only: "That Domingo — — —"

As soon as we discovered what was their object (their apparent object, at any rate), they were pushed out of the gate unceremoniously, — still protesting their love and respect — by the Riego negroes. Castro followed them out again, after exchanging a meaning look with Father Antonio. To live in the two camps, as it were, was a triumph of Castro's diplomacy, of his saturnine mysteriousness. He kept us in touch with the outer world, coming in under all sorts of pretences, mostly with messages from the bishop, or escorting the priests that came in relays to pray by the bodies of the two last Riegos lying in state, side by side, rigid in black velvet and white lace ruffles, on the great bed dragged out into the middle of the room.

Two enormous wax torches in iron stands flamed and guttered at the door; a black cloth draped the emblazoned shields; and the wind from the sea, blowing through the open casement, inclined all together the flames of a hundred candles, pale in the sunlight, extremely ardent in the night. The murmur of prayers for these souls went on incessantly; I have it in my ears now. There would be always some figure of the household kneeling in prayer at the door; or the old major-domo would come in to stand at the foot, motionless for a time; or, through the open door, I would see the cassock of Father Antonio, flung on his knees, with his forehead resting on the edge of the bed, his hands clasped above his tonsure.

Apart from what was necessary for defence, all the life of the house seemed stopped. Not a woman appeared; all the doors were closed; and the numbing desolation of a great bereavement was symbolized by Don Bal-thasar's chair in the patio, which had remained lying overturned in full view of every part of the house, till I could bear the sight no longer, and asked Cesar to have it put away. "Si, Señor," he said deferentially, and a few tears ran suddenly down his withered cheeks. The English flowers had been trampled down; an unclean hat floated on the basin, now here, now there, frightening the goldfish from one side to the other.

And Seraphina. It seems not fitting that I should write of her in these days. I hardly dared let my thoughts approach her, but I had to think of her all the time. Her sorrow was the very soul of the house.

Shortly after I had thrown O'Brien out the bishop had left, and then I learned from Father Antonio that Seraphina had been carried away to her own apartments in a fainting condition. The excellent man was almost incoherent with distress and trouble of mind, and walked up and down, his big head drooping on his capacious chest, the joints of his entwined fingers cracking. I had met him in the gallery, as I was making my way back to Carlos' room in anxiety and fear, and we had stepped aside into a large saloon, seldom used, above the gateway. I shall never forget the restless, swift pacing of that burly figure, while, feeling utterly crushed, now the excitement was over, I leaned against a console. Three long bands of moonlight fell, chilly bluish, into the vast room, with its French Empire furniture stiffly arranged about the white walls.

"And that man?" he asked me at last.

"I could have killed him with my own hands," I said. "I was the stronger. He had his pistols on him, I am certain, only I could not be a party to an assassination..."

"Oh, my son, it would have been no sin to have exerted the strength which God had blessed you with," he interrupted. "We are allowed to kill venomous snakes, wild beasts; we are given our strength for that, our intelligence..." And all the time he walked about, wringing his hands.

"Yes, your reverence," I said, feeling the most miserable and helpless of lovers on earth; "but there was no time. If I had not thrown him out, Castro would have stabbed him in the back in my very hands. And that would have been — — —" Words failed me.

I had been obliged not only to desist myself, but to save his life from Castro. I had been obliged! There had been no option. Murderous enemy as he was, it seemed to me I should never have slept a wink all the rest of my life.

“Yes, it is just, it is just. What else? Alas!” Father Antonio repeated disconnectedly. “Those feelings implanted in your breast — — I have served my king, as you know, in my sacred calling, but in the midst of war, which is the outcome of the wickedness natural to our fallen state. I understand; I understand. It may be that God, in his mercy, did not wish the death of that evil man — not yet, perhaps. Let us submit. He may repent.” He snuffled aloud. “I think of that poor child,” he said through his handkerchief. Then, pressing my arm with his vigorous fingers, he murmured, “I fear for her reason.”

It may be imagined in what state I spent the rest of that sleepless night. At times, the thought that I was the cause of her bereavement nearly drove me mad.

And there was the danger, too.

But what else could I have done? My whole soul had recoiled from the horrible help Castro was bringing us at the point of his blade. No love could demand from me such a sacrifice.

Next day Father Antonio was calmer. To my trembling inquiries he said something consolatory as to the blessed relief of tears. When not praying fervently in the mortuary chamber, he could be seen pacing the gallery in a severe aloofness of meditation. In the evening he took me by the arm, and, without a word, led me up a narrow and winding staircase. He pushed a small door, and we stepped out on a flat part of the roof, flooded in moonlight.

The points of land dark with the shadows of trees and broken ground clasped the waters of the bay, with a body of shining white mists in the centre; and, beyond, the vast level of the open sea, touched with glitter, appeared infinitely sombre under the luminous sky.

We stood back from the parapet, and Father Antonio threw out a thick arm at the splendid trail of the moon upon the dark water.

“This is the only way,” he said.

He had a warm heart under his black robe, a simple and courageous comprehension of life, this priest who was very much of a man; a certain grandeur of resolution when it was a matter of what he regarded as his principal office.

“This is the way,” he repeated.

Never before had I been struck so much by the gloom, the vastness, the emptiness of the open sea, as on that moonlight night. And Father Antonio’s deep voice went on:

“My son, since God has made use of the nobility of your heart to save that sinner from an unshriven death — — — ”

He paused to mutter, “Inscrutable! inscrutable!” to himself, sighed, and then:

“Let us rejoice,” he continued, with a completely unconcealed resignation, “that you have been the chosen instrument to afford him an opportunity to repent.”

His tone changed suddenly.

“He will never repent,” he said with great force. “He has sold his soul and body to the devil, like those magicians of old of whom we have records.”

He clicked his tongue with compunction, and regretted his want of charity. It was proper for me, however, as a man having to deal with a world of wickedness and error, to act as though I did not believe in his repentance.

“The hardness of the human heart is incredible; I have seen the most appalling examples.” And the priest meditated. “He is not a common criminal, however,” he added profoundly.

It was true. He was a man of illusions, ministering to passions that uplifted him above the fear of consequences, Young as I was, I understood that, too. There was no safety for us in Cuba while he lived. Father Antonio nodded dismally.

“Where to go?” I asked. “Where to turn? Whom can we trust? In whom can we repose the slightest confidence? Where can we look for hope?”

Again the padre pointed to the sea. The hopeless aspect of its moonlit and darkling calm struck me so forcibly that I did not even ask how he proposed to get us out there. I only made a gesture of discouragement. Outside the Casa, my life was not worth ten minutes’ purchase. And how could I risk her there? How could I propose to her to follow me to an almost certain death? What could be the issue of such an adventure? How could we hope to devise such secret means of getting away as would prevent the *Lugareños* pursuing us? I should perish, then, and she...

Father Antonio seemed to lose his self-control suddenly.

“Yes,” he cried. “The sea is a perfidious element, but what is it to the blind malevolence of men?” He gripped my shoulder. “The risk to her life,” he cried; “the risk of drowning, of hunger, of thirst — that is all the sea can do. I do not think of that. I love her too much. She is my very own spiritual child; and I tell you, Señor, that the unholy intrigue of that man endangers not her happiness, not her fortune alone — it endangers her innocent soul itself.”

A profound silence ensued. I remembered that his business was to save souls. This old man loved that young girl whom he had watched growing up, defenceless in her own home; he loved her with a great strength of paternal instinct that no vow of celibacy can extinguish, and with a heroic sense of his priestly duty. And I was not to say him nay. The sea — so be it. It was easier to think of her dead than to think of her immured; it was better that she should be the victim of the sea than of evil men; that she should be lost with me than to me.

Father Antonio, with that naïve sense of the poetry of the sky he possessed, apostrophized the moon, the “gentle orb,” as he called it, which ought to be weary of looking at the miseries of the earth. His immense shadow on the leads seemed to fling two vast fists over the parapet, as if to strike at the enemies below, and without discussing any specific plan we descended. It was understood that Seraphina and I should try to escape — I won’t say by sea, but to the sea. At best, to ask the charitable help of some passing ship, at worst to go out of the world together.

I had her confidence. I will not tell of my interview with her; but I shall never forget my sensations of awe, as if entering a temple, the melancholy and soothing intimacy of our meeting, the dimly lit loftiness of the room, the vague form of La Chica in the background, and the frail, girlish figure in black with a very pale, delicate face. Father Antonio was the only other person present, and chided her for giving way to grief. "It is like rebellion — like rebellion," he denounced, turning away his head to wipe a tear hastily; and I wondered and thanked God that I should be a comfort to that tender young girl, whose lot on earth had been difficult, whose sorrow was great but could not overwhelm her indomitable spirit, which held a promise of sweetness and love.

Her courage was manifest to me in the gentle and sad tones of her voice. I made her sit in a vast armchair of tapestry, in which she looked lost like a little child, and I took a stool at her feet. This is an unforgettable hour in my life in which not a word of love was spoken, which is not to be written of. The burly shadow of the priest lay motionless from the window right across the room; the flickering flame of a silver lamp made an unsteady white circle of light on the lofty ceiling above her head. A clock was beating gravely somewhere in the distant gloom, like the unperturbed heart of that silence, in which our understanding of each other was growing, even into a strength fit to withstand every tempest.

"Escape by the sea," I said aloud. "It would be, at least, like two lovers leaping hand in hand off a high rock, and nothing else."

Father Antonio's bass voice spoke behind us.

"It is better to jeopardize the sinful body that returns to the dust of which it is made than the redeemed soul, whose awful lot is eternity. Reflect."

Seraphina hung her head, but her hand did not tremble in mine.

"My daughter," the old man continued, "you have to confide your fate to a noble youth of elevated sentiments, and of a truly chivalrous heart..."

"I trust him," said Seraphina.

And, as I heard her say this, it seemed really to me as if, in very truth, my sentiments were noble and my heart chivalrous. Such is the power of a girl's voice. The door closed on us, and I felt very humble.

But in the gallery Father Antonio leaned heavily on my shoulder.

"I shall be a lonely old man," he whispered faintly. "After all these years! Two great nobles; the end of a great house — a child I had seen grow up... But I am less afraid for her now."

I shall not relate all the plans we made and rejected. Everything seemed impossible. We knew from Castro that O'Brien had gone to Havana, either to take the news of Don Balthasar's death himself, or else to prevent the news spreading there too soon. Whatever his motive for leaving Rio Medio, he had left orders that the house should be respected under the most awful penalties, and that it should be watched so that no one left it. The Englishman was to be killed at sight. Not a hair on anybody else's head was to be touched.

To escape seemed impossible; then on the third day the thing came to pass. The way was found. Castro, who served me as if Carlos' soul had passed into my body, but looked at me with a saturnine disdain, had arranged it all with Father Antonio.

It was the day of the burial of Carlos and Don Balthasar. That same day Castro had heard that a ship had been seen becalmed a long way out to sea. It was a great opportunity; and the funeral procession would give the occasion for my escape. There was in Rio Medio, as in all Spanish towns amongst the respectable part of the population, a confraternity for burying the dead, "The Brothers of Pity," who, clothed in black robes and cowls, with only two holes for the eyes, carried the dead to their resting-place, unrecognizable and unrecognized in that pious work. A "Brother of Pity" dress would be brought for me into Father Antonio's room. Castro was confident as to his ability of getting a boat. It would be a very small and dangerous one, but what would I have, if I neither killed my enemy, nor let any one else kill him for me, he commented with sombre sarcasm.

A truce of God had been called, and the burial was to take place in the evening when the mortal remains of the last of the Riegos would be laid in the vault of the cathedral of what had been known as their own province, and had, in fact, been so for a time under a grant from Charles V.

Early in the day I had a short interview with Seraphina. She was resolute. Then, long before dark, I slipped into Father Antonio's room, where I was to stay until the moment to come out and mingle with the throng of other Brothers of Pity. Once with the bodies in the crypt of the cathedral, I was to await Seraphina there, and, together, we should slip through a side door on to the shore. Cesar, to throw any observer off the scent (three Lugareños were to be admitted to see the bodies put in their coffins), posted two of the Riego negroes with loaded muskets on guard before the door of my empty room, as if to protect me.

Then, just as dusk fell, Father Antonio, who had been praying silently in a corner, got up, blew his nose, sighed, and suddenly enfolded me in his powerful arms for an instant.

"I am an old man — a poor priest," he whispered jerkily into my ear, "and the sea is very perfidious. And yet it favours the sons of your nation. But, remember — the child has no one but you. Spare her."

He went off; stopped. "Inscrutable! inscrutable!" he murmured, lifting upwards his eyes. He raised his hand with a solemn slowness. "An old man's blessing can do no harm," he said humbly. I bowed my head. My heart was too full for speech, and the door closed. I never saw him again, except later on in his surplice for a moment at the gate, his great bass voice distinct in the chanting of the priests conducting the bodies.

The Lugareños would respect the truce arranged by the bishop.

No man of them but the three had entered the Casa. Already, early in the night, their black-haired women, with coarse faces and melancholy eyes, were kneeling in rows under the black mantillas on the stone floor of the cathedral, praying for the repose of the soul of Seraphina's father, of that old man who had lived among them,

unapproachable, almost invisible, and as if infinitely removed. They had venerated him, and many of them had never set eyes on his person.

It strikes me, now, as strange and significant of a mysterious human need, the need to look upwards towards a superiority inexpressibly remote, the need of something to idealize in life. They had only that and, maybe, a sort of love as idealized and as personal for the mother of God, whom, also, they had never seen, to whom they trusted to save them from a devil as real. And they had, moreover, a fear even more real of O'Brien.

And, when one comes to think of it, in putting on the long spectacled robe of a Brother of Pity, in walking before the staggering bearers of the great coffin with a tall crucifix in my hand, in thus taking advantage of their truce of God, I was, also, taking advantage of what was undoubtedly their honour — a thing that handicapped them quite as much as had mine when I found myself unable to strike down O'Brien. At that time, I was a great deal too excited to consider this, however. I had many things to think of, and the immense necessity of keeping a cool head.

It was, after all, Tomas Castro to whom all the credit of the thing belonged. Just after it had fallen very dark, he brought me the black robes, a pair of heavy pistols to gird on under them, and the heavy staff topped by a crucifix. He had an air of sarcastic protest in the dim light of my room, and he explained with exaggeratedly plain words precisely what I was to do — which, as a matter of fact, was neither more nor less than merely following in his own footsteps.

“And, oh, Señor,” he said sardonically, “if you desire again to pillow your head upon the breast of your mother; if you would again see your sister, who, alas! by bewitching my Carlos, is at the heart of all our troubles; if you desire again to see that dismal land of yours, which politeness forbids me to curse, I would beg of you not to let the mad fury of your nation break loose in the midst of these thieves and scoundrels.”

He peered intently into the spectacled eyeholes of my cowl, and laid his hand on his sword-hilt. His small figure, tightly clothed in black velvet from chin to knee, swayed gently backwards and forwards in the light of the dim candle, and his grotesque shadow flitted over the ghostly walls of the great room. He stood gazing silently for a minute, then turned smartly on his heels, and, with a gesture of sardonic respect, threw open the door for me.

“Pray, Señor,” he said, “that the moon may not rise too soon.”

We went swiftly down the colonnades for the last time, in the pitch darkness and into the blackness of the vast archway. The clumping staff of my heavy crucifix drew hollow echoes from the flagstones. In the deep sort of cave behind us, lit by a dim lantern, the negroes waited to unbar the doors. Castro himself began to mutter over his beads. Suddenly he said:

“It is the last time I shall stand here. Now, there is not any more a place for me on the earth.”

Great flashes of light began to make suddenly visible the tall pillars of the immense mournful palace, and after a long time, absolutely without a sound, save the sputter of

enormous torches, an incredibly ghostly body of figures, black-robed from head to foot, with large eyeholes peering fantastically, swayed into the great arch of the hall. Above them was the enormous black coffin. It was a sight so appalling and unexpected that I stood gazing at them without any power to move, until I remembered that I, too, was such a figure. And then, with an ejaculation of impatience, Tomas Castro caught at my hand, and whirled me round.

The great doors had swung noiselessly open, and the black night, bespangled with little flames, was framed in front of me. He suddenly unsheathed his portentous sword, and, hanging his great hat upon his maimed arm, stalked, a pathetic and sinister figure of grief, down the great steps. I followed him in the vivid and extraordinary compulsion of the sinister body that, like one fabulous and enormous monster, swayed impenetrably after me.

My heart beat till my head was in a tumultuous whirl, when thus, at last, I stepped out of that house — but I suppose my grim robes cloaked my emotions — though, seeing very clearly through the eyeholes, it was almost incredible to me that I was not myself seen. But these Brothers of Pity were a secret society, known to no man except their spiritual head, who chose them in turn, and not knowing even each other. Their good deeds of charity were, in that way, done by pure stealth. And it happened that their spiritual director was the Father Antonio himself. At that foot of the palace steps, drawn back out of our way, stood the great glass coach of state, containing, even then, the woman who was all the world to me, invisible to me, unattainable to me, not to be comforted by me, even as her great griefs were to me invisible and unassuageable. And there between us, in the great coffin, held on high by the grim, shadowy beings, was all that she loved, invisible, unattainable, too, and beyond all human comfort. Standing there, in the midst of the whispering, bare-headed, kneeling, and villainous crowd, I had a vivid vision of her pale, dim, pitiful face. Ah, poor thing! she was going away for good from all that state, from all that seclusion, from all that peace, mutely, and with a noble pride of quietness, into a world of dangers, with no head but mine to think for her, no arm but mine to ward off all the great terrors, the immense and dangerous weight of a new world.

In the twinkle of innumerable candles, the priceless harness of the white mules, waiting to draw the great coach after us, shone like streaks of ore in an infinitely rich silver mine. A double line of tapers kept the road to the cathedral, and a crowd of our negroes, the bell muzzles of their guns suggested in the twinkling light, massed themselves round the coach. Outside the lines were the crowd of rapsallions in red jackets, their women and children — all the population of the Aldea Bajo, groaning. The whole crowd got into motion round us, the white mules plunging frantically, the coach swaying. Ahead of me inarched the sardonic, gallantly grotesque figure of true Tomas, his sword point up, his motions always jaunty. Ahead of him, again, were the white robes of many priests, a cluster of tall candles, a great jewelled cross, and a tall saint's figure swaying, more than shoulder high, and disappearing up above into the darkness. For me, under my cowl, it was suffocatingly hot; but I seemed to

move forward, following, swept along without any volition of my own. It appeared an immensely long journey; and then, as we went at last up the cathedral steps, a voice cried harshly, "Death to the heretic!" My heart stood still. I clutched frantically at the handle of a pistol that I could not disengage from folds of black cloth. But, as a matter of fact, the cry was purely a general one; I was supposed to be shut up in the palace still.

The sudden glow, the hush, the warm breath of incense, and the blaze of light turned me suddenly faint; my ears buzzed, and I heard strange sounds.

The cathedral was a mass of heads. Everyone in Rio Medio was present, or came trooping in behind us. The better class was clustered near the blaze of gilding, mottled marble, wax flowers, and black and purple drapery that vaulted over the two black coffins in the choir. Down in the unlit body of the church the riff-raff of O'Brien kept the doors.

I followed the silent figure of Tomas Castro to the bishop's own stall, right up in the choir, and we became hidden from the rest by the forest of candles round the catafalque. Up the centre of the great church, and high over the heads of the kneeling people, came the great coffin, swaying, its bearers robbed of half their grimness by the blaze of lights. Tomas Castro suddenly caught at my sleeve whilst they were letting the coffin down on to the bier. He drew me unnoticed into the shadow behind the bishop's stall. In the swift transit, I had a momentary glance of a small, black figure, infinitely tiny in that quiet place, and infinitely solitary, veiled in black from head to foot, coming alone up the centre of the nave.

I stood hidden there beside the bishop's stall for a long time, and then suddenly I saw the black figure alone in the gallery, looking down upon me — from the loggia of the Riegos. I felt suddenly an immense calm; she was looking at me with unseeing eyes, but I knew and felt that she would follow me now to the end of the world. I had no more any doubts as to the issue of our enterprise; it was open to no unsuccess with a figure so steadfast engaged in it; it was impossible that blind fate should be insensible to her charm, impossible that any man could strike at or thwart her.

Monks began to sing; a great brass instrument grunted lamentably; in the body of the building there was silence. The bishop and his supporters moved about, as if aimlessly, in front of the altar; the chains of the gold censers clicked ceaselessly. Seraphina's head had sunk forward out of my sight. All the heads of the cathedral bowed down, and suddenly, from round the side of the stall, a hand touched mine, and a voice said, "It is time." Very softly, as if it were part of the rite, I was drawn round the stall through a door in the side of the screen. As we went out, in his turnings, the old bishop gave us the benediction. Then the door closed on the glory of his robes, and in a minute, in the darkness we were rustling down a circular narrow staircase into the dimness of a crypt, lit by the little blue flame of an oil lamp. From above came sounds like thunder, immense, vibrating; we were immediately under the choir. Through the cracks round a large stone showed a parallelogram of light.

In the dimness I had a glimpse of the face of my conductor — a thin, wonderfully hollow-cheeked lay brother. He began, with great gentleness, to assist me out of my black robes, and then he said:

“The *senorita* will be here very soon with the *Señor Tomas*,” and then added, with an infinitely sad and tender, dim smile:

“Will not the *Señor Caballero*, if it is not repugnant, say a prayer for the repose of...” He pointed gently upwards to the great flagstone above which was the coffin of Don Balthasar and Carlos. The priest himself was one of those very holy, very touching — perhaps, very stupid — men that one finds in such places. With his dim, wistful face he is very present in my memory. He added: “And that the good God of us all may keep it in the *Señor Caballero*’s heart to care well for the soul of the dear *senorita*.”

“I am a very old man,” he whispered, after a pause. He was indeed an old man, quite worn out, quite without hope on earth. “I have loved the *senorita* since she was a child. The *Señor Caballero* takes her from us. I would have him pray — to be made worthy.”

Whilst I was doing it, the place began to be alive with whispers of garments, of hushed footsteps, a small exclamation in a gruff voice. Then the stone above moved out of its place, and a blaze of light fell down from the choir above.

I saw beside me *Seraphina*’s face, brilliantly lit, looking upwards. *Tomas Castro* said:

“Come quickly... come quickly... the prayers are ending; there will be people in the street.” And from above an enormous voice intoned:

“Tu.. u.. ba mi.. i.. i.rum...” And the serpent groaned discordantly. The end of a great box covered with black velvet glided forward above our heads; ropes were fastened round it. The priest had opened a door in the shadowy distance, beside a white marble tablet in the thick walls. The coffin up above moved forward a little again; the ropes were readjusted with a rattling, wooden sound. A dry, formal voice intoned from above:

“Èrit... Justus Ab auditione...”

From the open door the priest rattled his keys, and said, “Come, come,” impatiently.

I was horribly afraid that *Seraphina* would shriek or faint, or refuse to move. There was very little time. The pirates might stream out of the front of the cathedral as we came from the back; the bishop had promised to accentuate the length of the service. But *Seraphina* glided towards the open door; a breath of fresh air reached us. She looked back once. The coffin was swinging right over the hole, shutting out the light. *Tomas Castro* took her hand and said, “Come... come,” with infinite tenderness.

He had been sobbing convulsedly. We went up some steps, and the door shut behind us with a sound like a sigh of relief.

We walked fast, in perfect blackness and solitude, on the deserted beach between the old town and the village. Every soul was near the cathedral. A boat lay half afloat. To the left in the distance the light of the schooner opposite the *Casa Riego* wavered on the still water.

Suddenly *Tomas Castro* said:

“The *senorita* never before set foot to the open ground.”

At once I lifted her into the boat. "Shove off, Tomas," I said, with a beating heart.

Part 4 — Blade and Guitar

Chapter 1

There was a slight, almost imperceptible jar, a faint grating noise, a whispering sound of sand — and the boat, without a splash, floated.

The earth, slipping as it were away from under the keel, left us borne upon the waters of the bay, which were as still as the windless night itself. The pushing off of that boat was like a launching into space, as a bird opens its wings on the brow of a cliff, and remains poised in the air. A sense of freedom came to me, the unreasonable feeling of exultation — as if I had been really a bird essaying its flight for the first time. Everything, sudden and evil and most fortunate, had been arranged for me, as though I had been a lay figure on which Romance had been wreaking its bewildering unexpectedness; but with the floating clear of the boat, I felt somehow that this escape I had to manage myself.

It was dark. Dipping cautiously the blade of the oar, I gave another push against the shelving shore. Seraphina sat, cloaked and motionless, and Tomas Castro, in the bows, made no sound. I didn't even hear him breathe. Everything was left to me. The boat, impelled afresh, made a slight ripple, and my elation was replaced in a moment by all the torments of the most acute anxiety.

I gave another push, and then lost the bottom. Success depended upon my resource, readiness, and courage. And what was this success? Immediately, it meant getting out of the bay, and into the open sea in a twelve-foot dinghy looted from some ship years ago by the Rio Medio pirates, if that miserable population of sordid and ragged outcasts of the Antilles deserved such a romantic name. They were sea-thieves.

Already the wooded shoulder of a mountain was thrown out intensely black by the glow in the sky behind. The moon was about to rise. A great anguish took my heart as if in a vice. The stillness of the dark shore struck me as unnatural. I imagined the yell of the discovery breaking it, and the fancy caused me a greater emotion than the thing itself, I flatter myself, could possibly have done. The unusual silence in which, through the open portals, the altar of the cathedral alone blazed with many flames upon the bay, seemed to enter my very heart violently, like a sudden access of anguish. The two in the boat with me were silent, too. I could not bear it.

“Seraphina,” I murmured, and heard a stifled sob.

“It is time to take the oars, Señor,” whispered Castro suddenly, as though he had fallen asleep as soon as he had scrambled into the bows, and only had awaked that instant. “The mists in the middle of the bay will hide us when the moon rises.”

It was time — if we were to escape. Escape where? Into the open sea? With that silent, sorrowing girl by my side! In this miserable cockleshell, and without any refuge

open to us? It was not really a hesitation; she could not be left at the mercy of O'Brien. It was as though I had for the first time perceived how vast the world was; how dangerous; how unsafe. And there was no alternative. There could be no going back.

Perhaps, if I had known what was before us, my heart would have failed me utterly out of sheer pity. Suddenly my eyes caught sight of the moon making like the glow of a bush fire on the black slope of the mountain. In a moment it would flood the bay with light, and the schooner anchored off the beach before the Casa Riego was not eighty yards away. I dipped my oar without a splash. Castro pulled with his one hand.

The mists rising on the lowlands never filled the bay, and I could see them lying in moonlight across the outlet like a silvery white ghost of a wall. We penetrated it, and instantly became lost to view from the shore.

Castro, pulling quickly, turned his head, and grunted at a red blur very low in the mist. A fire was burning on the low point of land where Nichols — the Nova Scotian — had planted the battery which had worked such havoc with Admiral Rowley's boats. It was a mere earthwork and some of the guns had been removed. The fire, however, warned us that there were some people on the point. We ceased rowing for a moment, and Castro explained to me that a fire was always lit when any of these thieves' boats were stirring. There would be three or four men to keep it up. On this very night Manuel-del-Popolo was outside with a good many rowboats, waiting on the Indiaman. The ship had been seen nearing the shore since noon. She was becalmed now. Perhaps they were looting her already.

This fact had so far favoured our escape. There had been no strollers on the beach that night. Since the investment of the Casa Riego, Castro had lived amongst the besiegers on his prestige of a superior person, of a caballero skilled in war and diplomacy. No one knew how much the tubby, saturnine little man was in the confidence of the Juez O'Brien; and there was no doubt that he was a good Catholic. He was a very grave, a very silent caballero. In reality his heart had been broken by the death of Carlos, and he did not care what happened to him. His action was actuated by his scorn and hate of the Rio Medio population, rather than by any friendly feeling towards myself.

On that night Domingo's partisans were watching the Casa Riego, while Manuel (who was more of a seaman) had taken most of his personal friends, and all the larger boats that would float, to do a bit of "outside work," as they called it, upon the becalmed West Indiaman.

This had facilitated Castro's plan, and it also accounted for the smallness of the boat, which was the only one of the refuse lot left on the beach that did not gape at every seam. She was not tight by any means, though. I could hear the water washing above the bottom-boards, and I remember how concern about keeping Seraphina's feet dry mingled with the grave apprehensions of our enterprise.

We had been paddling an easy stroke. The red blurr of the fire on the point was growing larger, while the diminished blaze of lights on the high altar of the cathedral pierced the mist with an orange ray.

“The boat should be baled out,” I remarked in a whisper.

Castro laid his oar in and made his way to the thwart. It shows how well we were prepared for our flight, that there was not even a half-cocoanut shell in the boat. A gallon earthenware jar, stoppered with a bunch of grass, contained all our provision of fresh water. Castro displaced it, and, bending low, tried to bale with his big, soft hat. I should imagine that he found it impracticable, because, suddenly, he tore off one of his square-toed shoes with a steel buckle. He used it as a scoop, blaspheming at the necessity, but in a very low mutter, out of respect for Seraphina.

Standing up in the stern-sheets by her side, I kept on sculling gently. Once before I had gone desperately to sea — escaping the gallows, perhaps — in a very small boat, with the drunken song of Rangsley’s uncle heralding the fascination of the unknown to a very callow youth. That night had been as dark, but the danger had been less great. The boat, it is true, had actually sunk under us, but then it was only the sea that might have swallowed me who knew nothing of life, and was as much a stranger to fate as the animals on our farm. But now the world of men stood ready to devour us, and the Gulf of Mexico was of no more account than a puddle on a road infested by robbers. What were the dangers of the sea to the passions amongst which I was launched — with my high fortunes in my hand, and, like all those who live and love, with a sword suspended above my head?

The danger had been less great on that old night, when I had heard behind me the soft crash of the smugglers’ feet on the shingle. It had been less great, and, if it had had a touch of the sordid, it had led me to this second and more desperate escape — in a cockleshell, carrying off a silent and cloaked figure, which quickened my heart-beats at each look. I was carrying her off from the evil spells of the Casa Riego, as a knight a princess from an enchanted castle. But she was more to me than any princess to any knight.

There was never anything like that in the world. Lovers might have gone, in their passion, to a certain death; but never, it seemed to me, in the history of youth, had they gone in such an atmosphere of cautious stillness upon such a reckless adventure. Everything depended upon slipping out through the gullet of the bay without a sound. The men on the point had no means of pursuit, but, if they heard or saw anything, they could shout a warning to the boats outside. These were the real dangers — my first concern. Afterwards... I did not want to think of afterwards. There were only the open sea and the perilous coast. Perhaps, if I thought of them, I should give up.

I thought only of gaining each successive moment and concentrated all my faculties into an effort of stealthiness. I handled the boat with a deliberation full of tense prudence, as if the oar had been a stalk of straw, as if the water of the bay had been the film of a glass bubble an unguarded movement could have shivered to atoms. I hardly breathed, for the feeling that a deeper breath would have blown away the mist that was our sole protection now.

It was not blown away. On the contrary, it clung closer to us, with the enveloping chill of a cloud wreathing a mountain crag. The vague shadows and dim outlines that

had hung around us began, at last, to vanish utterly in an impenetrable and luminous whiteness. And through the jumble of my thoughts darted the sudden knowledge that there was a sea-fog outside — a thing quite different from the nightly mists of the bay. It was rolling into the passage inexplicably, for no stir of air reached us. It was possible to watch its endless drift by the glow of the fire on the point, now much nearer us. Its edges seemed to melt away in the flight of the water-dust. It was a sea-fog coming in. Was it disastrous to us, or favourable? It, at least, answered our immediate need for concealment, and this was enough for me, when all our future hung upon every passing minute.

The Rio picaroons, when engaged in thieving from some ship becalmed on the coast, began by towing one of their schooners as far as the entrance. They left her there as a rallying point for the boats, and to receive the booty.

One of these schooners, as I knew, was moored opposite the Casa Riego. The other might be lying at anchor somewhere right in the fairway ahead, within a few yards. I strained my ears for some revealing sound from her, if she were there — a cough, a voice, the creak of a block, or the fall of something on her deck. Nothing came. I began to fear lest I should run stem on into her side without a moment's warning. I could see no further than the length of our twelve-foot boat.

To make certain of avoiding that danger, I decided to shave close the spit of sand that tipped the narrow strip of lowland to the south. I set my teeth, and sheered in resolutely.

Castro remained on the after-thwart, with his elbows on his knees. His head nearly touched my leg. I could distinguish the woeful, bent back, the broken swaying of the plume in his hat. Seraphina's perfect immobility gave me the measure of her courage, and the silence was so profoundly pellucid that the flutter of the flames that we were nearing began to come loud out of the blur of the glow. Then I heard the very crackling of the wood, like a fusillade from a great distance. Even then Castro did not deign to turn his head.

Such as he was — a born vagabond, contrabandista, spy in armed camps, sutler at the tail of the Grande Armée (escaped, God only knows how, from the snows of Russia), beggar, guerrillero, bandit, sceptically murderous, draping his rags in saturnine dignity — he had ended by becoming the sinister and grotesque squire of our quixotic Carlos. There was something romantically sombre in his devotion. He disdained to turn round at the danger, because he had left his heart on the coffin as a lesser affection would have laid a wreath. I looked down at Seraphina. She too, had left a heart in the vaults of the cathedral. The edge of the heavy cloak drawn over her head concealed her face from me, and, with her face, her ignorance, her great doubts, her great fears.

I heard, above the crackling of dry wood, a husky exclamation of surprise, and then a startled voice exclaiming:

“Look! Santissima Madre! What is this?”

Sheer instinct altered at once the motion of my hand so as to incline the bows of the dinghy away from the shore; but a sort of stupefying amazement seized upon my soul. We had been seen. It was all over. Was it possible? All over, already?

In my anxiety to keep clear of the schooner which, for all I know to this day, may not have been there at all, I had come too close to the sand, so close that I heard soft, rapid footfalls stop short in the fog. A voice seemed to be asking me in a whisper:

“Where, oh, where?”

Another cried out irresistibly, “I see it.”

It was a subdued cry, as if hushed in sudden awe.

My arm swung to and fro; the turn of my wrist went on imparting the propelling motion of the oar. All the rest of my body was gripped helplessly in the dead expectation of the end, as if in the benumbing seconds of a fall from a towering height. And it was swift, too. I felt a draught at the back of my neck — a breath of wind. And instantly, as if a battering-ram had been let swing past me at many layers of stretched gauze, I beheld, through a tattered deep hole in the fog, a roaring vision of flames, borne down and springing up again; a dance of purple gleams on the strip of unveiled water, and three coal-black figures in the light.

One of them stood high on lank black legs, with long black arms thrown up stiffly above the black shape of a hat. The two others crouched low on the very edge of the water, peering as if from an ambush.

The clearness of this vision was contained by a thick and fiery atmosphere, into which a soft white rush and swirl of fog fell like a sudden whirl of snow. It closed down and overwhelmed at once the tall flutter of the flames, the black figures, the purple gleams playing round my oar. The hot glare had struck my eyeballs once, and had melted away again into the old, fiery stain on the mended fabric of the fog. But the attitudes of the crouching men left no room for doubt that we had been seen. I expected a sudden uplifting of voices on the shore, answered by cries from the sea, and I screamed excitedly at Castro to lay hold of his oar.

He did not stir, and after my shout, which must have fallen on the scared ears with a weird and unearthly note, a profound silence attended us — the silence of a superstitious fear. And, instead of howls, I heard, before the boat had travelled its own short length, a voice that seemed to be the voice of fear itself asking, “Did you hear that?” and a trembling mutter of an invocation to all the saints. Then a strangled throat trying to pronounce firmly, “The souls of the dead Inglez. Crying from pain.”

Admiral Rowley’s seamen, so miserably thrown away in the ill-conceived attack on the bay, were making a ghostly escort for our escape. Those dead boats’-crews were supposed to haunt the fatal spot, after the manner of spectres that linger in remorse, regret, or revenge, about the gates of departure. I had blundered; the fog, breaking apart, had betrayed us. But my obscure and vanquished countrymen held possession of the outlet by the memory of their courage. In this critical moment it was they, I may say, who stood by us.

We, on our part, must have been disclosed, dark, indistinct, utterly inexplicable; completely unexpected; an apparition of stealthy shades. The painful voice in the fog said:

“Let them be. Answer not. They shall pass on, for none of them died on the shore — all in the water. Yes, all in the water.”

I suppose the man was trying to reassure himself and his companions. His meaning, no doubt, was that, being on shore, they were safe from the ghosts of those Ingles who had never achieved a landing. From the enlarging and sudden deepening of the glow, I knew that they were throwing more brushwood on the fire.

I kept on sculling, and gradually the sharp fusillade of dry twigs grew more distant, more muffled in the fog. At last it ceased altogether. Then a weakness came over me, and, hauling my oar in, I sat down by Sera-phina’s side. I longed for the sound of her voice, for some tender word, for the caress of a murmur upon my perplexed soul. I was sure of her, as of a conquered and rare treasure, whose possession simplifies life into a sort of adoring guardianship — and I felt so much at her mercy that an overwhelming sense of guilt made me afraid to speak to her. The slight heave of the open sea swung the boat up and down.

Suddenly Castro let out a sort of lugubrious chuckle, and, in low tones, I began to upbraid him with his apathy. Even with his one arm he should have obeyed my call to the oar. It was incomprehensible to me that we had not been fired at. Castro enlightened me, in a few moody and scornful words. The Rio Medio people, he commented upon the incident, were fools, of bestial nature, afraid of they knew not what.

“Castro, the valour of these dead countrymen of mine was not wasted; they have stood by us like true friends,” I whispered in the excitement of our escape.

“These insensate English,” he grumbled...

“A dead enemy would have served the turn better. If the caballero had none other than dead friends...”

His harsh, bitter mumble stopped. Then Sera-phina’s voice said softly:

“It is you who are the friend, Tomas Castro. To you shall come a friend’s reward.”

“Alas, Señorita!” he sighed. “What remains for me in this world — for me who have given for two masses for the souls of that illustrious man, and of your cousin Don Carlos, my last piece of silver?”

“We shall make you very rich, Tomas Castro,” she said with decision, as if there had been bags of gold in the boat.

He returned a high-flown phrase of thanks in a bitter, absent whisper. I knew well enough that the help he had given me was not for money, not for love — not even for loyalty to the Riegos. It was obedience to the last recommendation of Carlos. He ran risks for my safety, but gave me none of his allegiance.

He was still the same tubby, murderous little man, with a steel blade screwed to the wooden stump of his forearm, as when, swelling his breast, he had stepped on his toes before me like a bloodthirsty pigeon, in the steerage of the ship that had brought us from home. I heard him mumble, with almost incredible, sardonic contempt, that,

indeed, the senor would soon have none but dead friends if he refrained from striking at his enemies. Had the senor taken the very excellent opportunity afforded by Providence, and that any sane Christian man would have taken — to let him stab the Juez O'Brien — we should not then be wandering in a little boat. What folly! What folly! One little thrust of a knife, and we should all have been now safe in our beds...

His tone was one of weary superiority, and I remained appalled by that truth, stripped of all chivalrous pretence. It was clear, in sparing that defenceless life, I had been guilty of cruelty for the sake of my conscience. There was Seraphina by my side; it was she who had to suffer. I had let her enemy go free, because he had happened to be near me, disarmed. Had I acted like an Englishman and a gentleman, or only like a fool satisfying his sentiment at other people's expense? Innocent people, too, like the Riego servants, Castro himself; like Seraphina, on whom my high-minded forbearance had brought all these dangers, these hardships, and this uncertain fate.

She gave no sign of having heard Castro's words. The silence of women is very impenetrable, and it was as if my hold upon the world — since she was the whole world for me — had been weakened by that shade of decency of feeling which makes a distinction between killing and murder. But suddenly I felt, without her cloaked figure having stirred, her small hand slip into mine. Its soft warmth seemed to go straight to my heart soothing, invigorating — as it she had slipped into my palm a weapon of extraordinary and inspiring potency.

"Ah, you are generous," I whispered close to the edge of the cloak overshadowing her face.

"You must now think of yourself, Juan," she said.

"Of myself," I echoed sadly. "I have only you to think of, and you are so far away — out of my reach. There are your dead — all your loss, between you and me."

She touched my arm.

"It is I who must think of my dead," she whispered. "But you, you must think of yourself, because I have nothing of mine in this world now."

Her words affected me like the whisper of remorse. It was true. There were her wealth, her lands, her palaces; but her only refuge was that little boat. Her father's long aloofness from life had created such an isolation round his closing years that his daughter had no one but me to turn to for protection against the plots of her own Intendente. And, at the thought of our desperate plight, of the suffering awaiting us in that small boat, with the possibility of a lingering death for an end, I wavered for a moment. Was it not my duty to return to the bay and give myself up? In that case, as Castro expressed it, our throats would be cut for love of the Juez.

But Seraphina, the rabble would carry to the Casa on the palms of their hands — out of veneration for the family, and for fear of O'Brien.

"So, Señor," he mumbled, "if to you to-morrow's sun is as little as to me let us pull the boat's head, round."

"Let us set our hands to the side and overturn it, rather," Seraphina said, with an indignation of high command.

I said no more. If I could have taken O'Brien with me into the other world, I would have died to save her the pain of so much as a pinprick. But because I could not, she must even go with me; must suffer because I clung to her as men cling to their hope of highest good — with an exalted and selfish devotion.

Castro had moved forward, as if to show his readiness to pull round. Meantime I heard a click. A feeble gleam fell on his misty hands under the black halo of the hat rim. Again the flint and blade clicked, and a large red spark winked rapidly in the bows. He had lighted a cigarette.

Chapter 2

Silence, stillness, breathless caution were the absolute conditions of our existence. But I hadn't the heart to remonstrate with him for the danger he caused Seraphina and myself. The fog was so thick now that I could not make out his outline, but I could smell the tobacco very plainly.

The acrid odour of picadura seemed to knit the events of three years into one uninterrupted adventure. I remembered the shingle beach; the deck of the old Thames. It brought to my mind my first vision of Seraphina, and the emblazoned magnificence of Carlos' sick bed. It all came and went in a whiff of smoke; for of all the power and charm that had made Carlos so seductive there remained no such deep trace in the world as in the heart of the little grizzled bandit who, like a philosopher, or a desperado, puffed his cigarette in the face of the very spirit of murder hovering round us, under the mask and cloak of the fog. And by the serene heaven of my life's evening, the spirit of murder became actually audible to us in hasty and rhythmical knocks, accompanied by a cheerful tinkling.

These sounds, growing swiftly louder, at last induced Castro to throw away his cigarette. Seraphina clutched my arm. The noise of oars rowing fast, to the precipitated jingling of a guitar, swooped down upon us with a gallant ferocity.

"Caramba," Castro muttered; "it is the fool Manuel himself!"

I said, then: "We have eight shots between us two, Tomas."

He thrust his brace of pistols upon my knees.

"Dispose of them as your worship pleases," he muttered.

"You mustn't give up, yet," I whispered.

"What is it that I give up?" he mumbled wearily. "Besides, there grows from my forearm a blade. If I shall find myself indisposed to quit this world alone... Listen to the singing of that imbecile."

A carolling falsetto seemed to hang muffled in upper space, above the fog that settled low on the water, like a dense and milky sediment of the air. The moonlight fell into it strangely. We seemed to breathe at the bottom of a shallow sea, white as snow, shining like silver, and impenetrably opaque everywhere, except overhead, where the yellow disc of the moon glittered through a thin cloud of steam. The gay truculence of the hollow knocking, the metallic jingle, the shrill trolling, went on crescendo to a burst of babbling voices, a mad speed of tinkling, a thundering shout, "Altro, Amigos!" followed by a great clatter of oars flung in. The sudden silence pulsated with the ponderous strokes of my heart.

To escape now seemed impossible. At least it seemed impossible while they talked. A dark spot in the shining expanse of fog swam into view. It shifted its place after I had first made it out, and then remained motionless, astern of the dinghy. It was the shadow of a big boat full of men, but when they were silent, I was not sure that I saw anything at all. I made no doubt, had they been aware of our nearness, there were amongst them eyes that could have detected us in the same elusive way. But how could they even dream of anything of the kind? They talked noisily, and there must have been a round dozen of them, at the least.

Sometimes they would fall a-shouting all together, and then keep quiet as if listening. By-and-by I began to hear answering yells, that seemed to converge upon us from all directions.

We were in the thick of it. It was Manuel's boat, as Castro had guessed, and the other boats were rallying upon it gropingly, keeping up a succession of yells:

"Ohe! Ohe! Where, where?"

And the people in Manuel's boat howled back at them, "Ohe! Ohe...e! This way; here!"

Suddenly he struck the guitar a mighty blow, and chanted in an inspired and grandiose strain:

"Steer — for — the — song."

His fingers ran riot among the strings, and above the jingling his voice, forced to the highest pitch, declaimed, as in the midst of a tempest:

"I adore the saints in the glory of heaven

And, on the dust of the earth,

The print of her footsteps."

He was improvising. Sometimes he gasped; the rill of softened tinkle ran on, and, glaring watchfully, I fancied I could detect his shape in the white vapour, like a shadow thrown from afar by a tallow dip upon a snowy sheet — the lank droop of his posturing, the greasy locks, the attentive poise of his head, the sentimental rolling of his lustrous and enormous eyes.

I had not forgotten his astonishing display in the cabin of the schooner when, after the confiding of his woes and his ambitions, he had favoured me with a sample of his art. As at that time, when he had been nursing his truculent conceit, he sang, and the unsteady twanging of his guitar lurched and staggered far behind his voice, like a drunken slave in the footsteps of a raving master. Tinkle, tinkle, twang! A headlong rush of muddled fingering; a sudden bang, like a heavy stumble.

"She is the proud daughter of the old Castile! Olà! Olà!" he chanted mysteriously at the beginning of every stanza in a rapturous and soft ecstasy, and then would shriek, as though he had been suddenly cast up on the rock. The poet of Rio Medio was rallying his crew of thieves to a rhapsody of secret and unrequited passion. Twang, ping, tinkle tinkle. He was the Capataz of the valiant Lugareños! The true Capataz! The only Capataz. Olà! Olà! Twang, twang. But he was the slave of her charms, the

captive of her eyes, of her lips, of her hair, of her eyebrows, which, he proclaimed in a soaring shriek, were like rainbows arched over stars.

It was a love-song, a mournful parody, the odious grimacing of an ape to the true sorrow of the human face. I could have fled from it, as from an intolerable humiliation. And it would have been easy to pull away unheard while he sang, but I had a plan, the beginning of a plan, something like the beginning of a hope. And for that I should have to use the fog for the purpose of remaining within earshot.

Would the fog last long enough to serve my turn? That was the only question, and I believed it would, for it settled lower; it settled down denser, almost too heavy to be stirred by the fitful efforts of the breeze. It was a true night fog of the tropics, that, born after sunset, tries to creep back into the warm bosom of the sea before sunrise. Once in Rio Medio, taking a walk in the early morning along the sand-dunes, I had stood watching below me the heads of some people, fishing from a boat, emerge strangely in the dawn out of such a fog. It concealed their very shoulders more completely than water could have done. I trusted it would not come so soon to our heads, emerging, though it seemed to me that already, by merely clambering on Castro's shoulders, I could attain to clear moonlight; see the highlands of the coast, the masts of the English ship. She could not be very far off if only one could tell the direction. But an unsteady little dinghy was not the platform for acrobatic exercises, and Castro not exactly the man.

The slightest noise would have betrayed us, and moreover, the thing was no good, for even supposing I had got a hurried sight of the ship's spars, I should have to get down into the fog to pull, and there would be nothing visible to keep us from going astray, unless at every dozen strokes I clambered on Castro's shoulders again to rectify the direction — an obviously impracticable and absurd proceeding.

"She is the proud daughter of old Castile, Olà, Olà," Manuel sang confidentially with a subdued and gallant lilt... Obviously impracticable. But I had another idea.

"Tinkle tinkle pinnng... Brrroum. Brrroum.

My soul yearns for the alms of a smile.

For a forgiving glance yearns my lofty soul..."

he sang. Ah, if one could have added another four feet to one's stature. Four or five feet only. There seemed to be nothing but a thin veil between me and the moon. No more than a thin haze. But at the level of my eyes everything was hidden. From behind the white veil came the crying of the strings, a screeching, lugubrious and fierce in its artificial transport, as if it were mocking my sad and ardent conviction of unworthiness, the crowning torment, and the inward pride of pure love. In the breathless pauses I could hear the hollow bumping of gunwales knocking against each other; faint splashings of oars; the distant hail of some laggards groping their way on the shrouded sea.

The note of cruel passion that runs in the blood held these cut-throats profoundly silent in their boats, as at home I could imagine a party of smugglers (they would not stick at a murder or two, either) listening, with pensive faces, to a sentimental ditty

of some “sweet Nancy,” howled dismally within the walls of a wayside taproom in the smoke of pipes. I seemed to understand profoundly the difference of races that brings with it the feeling of romance or awakens hate. My gorge rose at Manuel’s song. I hated his lamentations. “Alas, alas; in vain, in vain.” He strummed with vertiginous speed, with fury, and the distracted clamour of his voice, wrestling madly with the ringing madness of the strings, ended in a piercing and supreme shriek.

“Finished. It is finished.” A low and applauding murmur flowed to my ears, the austere acclamations of connoisseurs. “Viva, viva, Manuele!” — a squeak of fervid admiration. “Ah, our Manuelito.”... But a gruff voice discoursed jovially, “Care not, Manuel. What of Paquita with the broken tooth? Is she not left to thee? And por Dios, hombres, in the dark all women are alike.”

“I will cram thy unclean mouth with live coals,” Manuel drawled spitefully.

They roared with laughter at this sally. I depicted to myself their shapes, their fierce gesticulations, their earrings, bound heads, rags, and weapons, the vile scowls on their swarthy, grimacing faces. My anxiety beheld them as plainly as anything seen with the eyes of the body. And, with my sharpened hearing catching every word with preternatural distinctness, I felt as if, the ring of Gyges on my finger, I had sat invisible at the council of my enemies.

It was noisy, animated, with an issue of supreme interest for us. The ship, seen at midday standing inshore with a light wind, had not approached the bay near enough to be conveniently attacked till just after dusk. They had waited for her all the afternoon, sleeping and gambling on the spit of sand. But something heavy in her appearance had excited their craven suspicions, and checked their ardour. She appeared to them dangerous. What if she were an English man-of-war disguised? Some even pretended to recognize in her positively one of the lighter frigates of Rowley’s squadron. Night had fallen whilst they squabbled, and their flotilla hung under the land, the men in a conflict of rapacity and fear, arguing among themselves as to the ship’s character, but all unanimously goading Manuel — since he would call himself their only Capataz — to go boldly and find out.

It seems he had just been doing this with the help of a few choicer spirits, and under cover of the fog. They had managed to steal near enough to hear Englishmen conversing on board, orders given, and the yo-hoing of invisible sailors, trimming the yards of the ship to the fitful airs. This last, of course, was decisive. Such sounds are not heard on a man-of-war. She was a merchant ship: she would be an easy prey. And Manuel, in a state of exaltation at his venturesome bravery, had pulled back inshore, to rally all the boats round his own, and lead them to certain plunder. They would soon find out, he declaimed, what it was to have at their head their own valiant Manuel, instead of that vagabond, that stranger, that Andalusian starveling; that traitor, that infidel, that Castro. Hidden away, he seemed to spout all this for our ears alone, as though he could see us in our boat... Patience; patience! Some day he would cut off that interloper’s eyelids, and lay him on his back under a nice clear sun. Castro made a brusque movement; a little shudder of disgust escaped Seraphina... Meantime, Manuel

declared, by his audacity, that ship was as good as theirs already. "Viva el Capataz!" they cheered.

The cloud-like vapours resting on the sea muffled the short roar; we heard grim laughter, excited cries. He began to make a set speech, and his voice, haranguing with vehement inflections in the shining whiteness of a cloud, had an amazing and uncorporeal character; the quality of abstract surprise; of phenomenal emotion shouted into empty space. And for me it had, also, the fascination of a revealed depth.

It was like the oration of an ambitious leader in a farce; he held his hearers with his eloquence, as much as he had done with the song of his grotesque and desecrating love. He vaunted his sagacity and his valour, and overwhelmed with invective all sorts of names — my own and Castro's among them. He revealed the unholy ideals of all that band of scoundrels — ideals that he said should find fruition under his captaincy. He boasted of secret conferences with O'Brien. There were murmurs of satisfaction.

I don't wonder at Seraphina's shudder of horror, of disgust, of dismay, and indignation. Robbed of the inexpugnable shelter of the Casa Riego, she, too, was made to look into the depths; upon the animalism, the lusts, and the reveries of that sordid, vermin-haunted crowd. I felt for her a profound and shamed sorrow. It was like a profaning touch on the sacredness of her mourning for the dead, and on her clear and passionate vision of life.

"Hombres de Rio Medio! Amigos! Valientes!..." Manuel was beginning his peroration. He would lead them, now, against the English ship. The terrified heretics would surrender. There was always gold in English ships. He stopped his speech, and then called loudly, "Let the boats keep touch with each other, and not stray in that fog."

"The dog," grunted Castro. We heard a resolute bustle of preparation; oars were being shipped.

"Make ready, Tomas," I whispered.

"Ready for what?" he grumbled. "Where shall your worship run from these swine?"

"We must follow them," I answered.

"The madness of the senor's countrymen descends upon him," he whispered with sardonic politeness. "Wherefore follow?"

"To find the English ship," I answered swiftly.

This, from the moment we had heard Manuel's guitar, had been my idea. Since the fog that concealed us from their sight made us, too, hopelessly blind, those wretches must guide us themselves out of their own clutches, as it were. I don't put this forward as an inspired conception. It was a most risky and almost hopeless expedient; but the position was so critical that there was no other alternative to sitting still and waiting with folded hands for discovery. Castro seemed more inclined for the latter.

Fortunately, the bandits wasted some time in blasphemous bickerings as to the order of the boats in the procession of attack. I urged my views upon Castro in hurried whispers. His assent was of importance, since he could use an oar very well, and, if left to myself, I could not hope to scull fast enough to keep within hearing of the flotilla.

“Of what use to us would be a ship in Manuel’s power?” he argued morosely. On the other hand, if we waited near her till she had been plundered and released, neither the fog nor the night would last forever.

“My countrymen will beat them off,” I affirmed confidently. “At any rate, let us be on the spot. We may take a hand. And remember, Tomas, they are not led by you, this time.”

“True,” he said, mollified. “But one thing more deserves the consideration of your worship... If we follow this plan, we take the *senorita* among flying bullets. And lead, alas! unlike steel, is blind, or that illustrious man would not now be dead. If we wait here, the *senorita*, at least, shall take no harm from these ruffians, as I have said.”

“Are you afraid of the bullets?” I asked Seraphina.

Before she had answered, Castro hissed at me:

“Oh, you unspeakable English. Would you sacrifice the daughter, too, only because she is brave?”

His sinister allusion made my blood boil with rage, and suddenly run cold in my veins. Swathed in the brilliant cloud, we heard the sounds of quarrelling and scrambling die away; cries of “Ready! ready!” an unexpected and brutal laugh. Seraphina leaned forward.

“Tomas, I wish this thing. I command it,” she whispered imperiously. “We shall help these English on the ship. We must; I command it. For these are now my people.”

I heard him mutter to himself, “h, dear shade of my Carlos. Her people. Where are now mine?” But he shipped his oar, and sat waiting.

In the moment before the picaroons actually started, I became the prey of the most intense anxiety. I knew we were to seaward of the cluster. But of our position relatively to the boats, and to the English ship they would make for, I was profoundly ignorant. The dinghy might be lying right in the way. Before I could master the sort of disorder I was thrown into by that thought — which, strange to say, had not occurred to me till then — with a shrill whistle Manuel led off.

We are always incited to trust, our eyes rather than our ears; and such is the conventional temper in which we receive the impression of our senses that I had no idea they were so near us. The destruction of my illusory feeling of distance was the most startling thing in the world. Instantly, it seemed, with the second swing and plash of the oars, the boats were right upon us. They went clear. It was like being grazed by a fall of rocks. I seemed to feel the wind of the rush.

The rapid clatter of rowing, the excited hum of voices, the violent commotion of the water, passed by us with an impetuosity that took my breath away. They had started in a bunch. There must have been amongst them at least one crew of negroes, because somebody was beating a tambourine smartly, and the rowers chorused in a quick, panting undertone, “Ho, ho, talibambo... Ho, ho, talibambo.” One of the boats silhouetted herself for an instant, a row of heads swaying back and forth, towered over astern by a full-length figure as straight as an arrow. A retreating voice thundered, “Silence!” The sounds and the forms faded together in the fog with amazing swiftness.

Seraphina, her cloak off, her head bare, stared forward after the fleeting murmurs and shadows we were pursuing. Sometimes she warned us, "More to the left"; or, "Faster!" We had to put forth our best, for Manuel, as if in the very wantonness of confidence, had set a tremendous pace.

I suppose he took his first direction by the light on the point. I cannot tell what guided him after that feeble sheen had become buried in the fog; but there was no check in the speed, no sign of hesitation. We followed in the track of the sound, and, for the most part, kept in sight of the elusive shadow of the sternmost boat. Often, in a denser belt of fog, the sounds of rowing became muffled almost to extinction; or we seemed to hear them all round and, startled, checked our speed. Dark apparitions of boats would surge up on all sides in a most inexplicable way; to the right; to the left; even coming from behind. They appeared real, unmistakable, and, before we had time to dodge them, vanished utterly. Then we had to spurt desperately after the grind of the oars, caught, just in time, in an unexpected direction.

And then we lost them. We pulled frantically. Seraphina had been urging us, "Faster! faster!" From time to time I would ask her, "Can you see them?" "Not yet," she answered curtly. The perspiration poured down my face. Castro's panting was like the wheezing of bellows at my back. Suddenly, in a despairing tone, she said:

"Stop! I can neither see nor hear anything now."

We feathered our oars at once, and fell to listening with lowered heads. The ripple of the boat's way expired slowly. A great white stillness hung slumbrously over the sea.

It was inconceivable. We pulled once or twice with extreme energy for a few minutes after imaginary whistles or shouts. Once I heard them passing our bows. But it was useless; we stopped, and the moon, from within the mistiness of an immense halo, looked dreamily upon our heads.

Castro grunted, "Here is an end of your plan, Señor Don Juan."

The peculiar and ghastly hopelessness of our position could not be better illustrated than by this fresh difficulty. We had lost touch — with a murderous gang that had every inducement not to spare our lives. And positively it was a misfortune; an abandonment. I refused to admit to myself its finality, as if it had reflected upon the devotion of tried friends. I repeated to Castro that we should become aware of them directly — probably even nearer than we wished. And, at any rate, we were certain of a mighty loud noise when the attack on the ship began. She, at least, could not be very far now. "Unless, indeed," I admitted with exasperation, "we are to suppose that your imbecile Lugareños have missed their prey and got themselves as utterly lost as we ourselves."

I was irritated — by his nodding plume; by his cold, perfunctory, as if sleepy mutters, "Possibly, possibly, puede ser." He retorted: "Your English generosity could wish your countrymen no better luck than that my Lugareños, as your worship pleases to call them, should miss their way. They are hungry for loot — with much fasting. And it is hunger that makes your wolf fly straight at the throat."

All the time Seraphina breathed no word. But when I raised my voice, she put out a hushing hand to my arm. And, from her intent pose, from the turn of her shadowy head, I knew that she was peering and listening loyally.

Minutes passed — very few, I dare say — and brought no sound. The restlessness of waiting made us dip our oars in a haphazard stroke, without aim, without the means of judging whether we pulled to seaward, inshore, north, or south, or only in a circle. Once we went excitedly in chase of some splashing that must have been a leaping fish. I was hanging my head over my idle oar when Seraphina touched me.

“I see!” she said, pointing over the bows.

Both Castro and I, peering horizontally over the water, did not see anything. Not a shadow. Moreover, if they were so near, we ought to have heard something.

“I believe it is land!” she murmured. “You are looking too low, Juan.”

As soon as I looked up I saw it, too, dark and beetling, like the overhang of a low cliff. Where on earth had we blundered to? For a moment I was confounded. Fiery reflections from a light played faintly above that shape. Then I recognized what I was looking at. We had found the ship.

The fog was so shallow that up there the upper bulk of a heavy, square stern, the very rails and stanchions crowning it like a balustrade, jutted out in the misty sheen like the balcony of an invisible edifice, for the lines of her run, the sides of her hull, were plunged in the dense white layer below. And, throwing back my head, I traced even her becalmed sails, pearly gray pinnacles of shadow uprising, tall and motionless, towards the moon.

A redness wavered over her, as from a blaze on her deck. Could she be on fire? And she was silent as a tomb. Could she be abandoned? I had promised myself to dash alongside, but there was a weirdness in that fragment of a dumb ship hanging out of a fog. We pulled only a stroke or two nearer to the stern, and stopped. I remembered Castro’s warning — the blindness of flying lead; but it was the profound stillness that checked me. It seemed to portend something inconceivable. I hailed, tentatively, as if I had not expected to be answered, “Ship, ahoy!”

Neither was I answered by the instantaneous, “Hallo,” of usual watchfulness, though she was not abandoned. Indeed, my hail made a good many men jump, to judge by the sounds and the words that came to me from above. “What? What? A hail?” “Boat near?” “In English, sir.”

“Dive for the captain, one of you,” an authoritative voice directed. “He’s just run below for a minute. Don’t frighten the missus. Call him out quietly.”

Talking, in confidential undertones, followed.

“See him?” “Can’t, sir.” “What’s the dodge, I wonder.” “Astern, I think, sir.” “D — — n this fog, it lies as thick as pea-soup on the water.”

I waited, and after a perplexed sort of pause, heard a stern “Keep off.”

Chapter 3

They did not suspect how close I was to them. And their temper struck me at once as unsafe. They seemed very much on the alert, and, as I imagined, disposed to precipitate action. I called out, deadening my voice warily:

“I am an Englishman, escaping from the pirates here. We want your help.”

To this no answer was made, but by that time the captain had come on deck. The dinghy must have drifted in a little closer, for I made out behind the shadowy rail one, two, three figures in a row, looming bulkily above my head, as men appear enlarged in mist.

“‘Englishman,’ he says.” “That’s very likely,” pronounced a new voice. They held a hurried consultation up there, of which I caught only detached sentences, and the general tone of concern. “It’s perfectly well known that there is an Englishman here... Aye, a runaway second mate... Killed a man in a Bristol ship... What was his name, now?”

“Won’t you answer me?” I called out.

“Aye, we will answer you as soon as we see you... Keep your eyes skinned fore and aft on deck there... Ready, boys?”

“All ready, sir”; voices came from further off.

“Listen to me,” I entreated.

Someone called out briskly, “This is a bad place for pretty tales of Englishmen in distress. We know very well where we are.”

“You are off Rio Medio,” I began anxiously; “and I — — — -”

“Speaks the truth like a Briton, anyhow,” commented a lazy drawl.

“I would send another man to the pump,” a reflective voice suggested. “To make sure of the force, Mr. Sebright, you know.”

“Certainly, sir... Another hand to the brakes, bo’sun.”

“I have been held captive on shore,” I said. “I escaped this evening, three hours ago.”

“And found this ship in the fog? You made a good shot at it, didn’t you?”

“It’s no time for trifling, I swear to you,” I continued. “They are out looking for you, in force. I’ve heard them. I was with them when they started.”

“I believe you.”

“They seem to have missed the ship.”

“So you came to have a friendly chat meantime. That’s kind. Beastly weather, aint it?”

“I want to come aboard,” I shouted. “You must be crazy not to believe me.”

“But we do believe every single word you say,” bantered the Sebright voice with serenity.

Suddenly another struck in, “Nichols, I call to mind, sir.”

“Of course, of course. This is the man.”

“My name’s not Nichols,” I protested.

“Now, now. You mustn’t begin to lie,” remonstrated Sebright. Somebody laughed discreetly.

“You are mistaken, on my honour,” I said. “Nichols left Rio Medio some time ago.”

“About three hours, eh?” came the drawl of insufferable folly in these precious minutes.

It was clear that Manuel had gone astray, but I feared not for long. They would spread out in search. And now I had found this hopeless ship, it seemed impossible that anybody else could miss her.

“You may be boarded any moment by more than a dozen boats. I warn you solemnly. Will you let me come?”

A low whistle was heard on board. They were impressed, “Why should he tell us this?” an undertone inquired.

“Why the devil shouldn’t he? It’s no great news, is it? Some scoundrelly trick. This man’s up to any dodge. Why, the ‘Jane’ was taken in broad day by two boats that pretended they were going to sell vegetables.”

“Look out, or by heavens you’ll be taken by surprise. There’s a lot of them,” I said as impressively as I could.

“Look out, look out. There’s a lot of them,” someone yelled in a sort of panic.

“Oh, that’s your game,” Sebright’s voice said to me. “Frighten us, eh? Never you mind what this skunk says, men. Stand fast. We shall take a lot of killing.” He was answered by a sort of pugnacious uproar, a clash of cutlasses and laughter, as if at some joke.

“That’s right, boys; mind and send them away with clean faces, you gunners. Jack, you keep a good lookout for that poor distressed Englishman. What’s that? a noise in the fog? Stand by. Now then, cook!...”

“All ready to dish up, sir,” a voice answered him.

It was like a sort of madness. Were they thinking of eating? Even at that the English talk made my heart expand — the homeliness of it. I seemed to know all their voices, as if I had talked to each man before. It brought back memories, like the voices of friends.

But there was the strange irrelevancy, levity, the enmity — the irrational, baffling nature of the anguishing conversation, as if with the unapproachable men we meet in nightmares.

We in the dinghy, as well as those on board, were listening anxiously. A profound silence reigned for a time.

“I don’t care for myself,” I tried once more, speaking distinctly. “But a lady in the boat here is in great danger, too. Won’t you do something for a woman?”

I perceived, from the sort of stir on board, that this caused some sensation.

“Or is the whole ship’s company afraid to let one little boat come alongside?” I added, after waiting for an answer.

A throat was cleared on board mildly, “Hem... you see, we don’t know who you are.”

“I’ve told you who I am. The lady is Spanish.”

“Just so. But there are Englishmen and Englishmen in these days. Some of them keep very bad company ashore, and others afloat. I couldn’t think of taking you on board, unless I know something more of you.”

I seemed to detect an intention of malice in the mild voice. The more so that I overheard a rapid interchange of mutterings up there. “See him yet?” “Not a thing, sir.” “Wait, I say.”

Nothing could overcome the fixed idea of these men, who seemed to enjoy so much the cleverness of their suspicions. It was the most dangerous of tempers to deal with. It made them as untrustworthy as so many lunatics. They were capable of anything, of decoying us alongside, and stoving the bottom out of the boat, and drowning us before they discovered their mistake, if they ever did. Even as it was, there was danger; and yet I was extremely loath to give her up. It was impossible to give her up. But what were we to do? What to say? How to act?

“Castro, this is horrible,” I said blankly. That he was beginning to chafe, to fret, and shuffle his feet only added to my dismay. He might begin at any moment to swear in Spanish, and that was sure to bring a shower of lead, blind, fired blindly. “We have nothing to expect from the people of that ship. We cannot even get on board.”

“Not without Manuel’s help, it seems,” he said bitterly. “Strange, is it not, Señor? Your countrymen — your excellent and virtuous countrymen. Generous and courageous and perspicacious.”

Seraphina said suddenly, “They have reason. It is well for them to be suspicious of us in this place.” She had a tone of calm reproof, and of faith.

“They shall be of more use when they are dead,” Castro muttered. “The señor’s other dead countrymen served us well.”

“I shall give you great, very great sums of money,” Seraphina suddenly cried towards the ship. “I am the Señorita Seraphina Riego.”

“There is a woman — that’s a woman’s voice, I’ll swear,” I heard them exclaim on board, and I cried again:

“Yes, yes. There is a woman.”

“I dare say. But where do you come in? You are a distressed Englishman, aren’t you?” a voice came back.

“You shall let us come up on your ship,” Seraphina said. “I shall come myself, alone — Seraphina Riego.”

“Eh, what?” the voice asked.

I felt a little wind on the back of my head. There was desperate hurry.

“We are escaping to get married,” I called out. They were beginning to shout orders on the ship. “Oh, you’ve come to the wrong shop. A church is what you want for that

trouble," the voice called back brutally, through the other cries of orders to square the yards.

I shouted again, but my voice must have been drowned in the creaking of blocks and yards. They were alert enough for every chance of getting away — for every flaw of wind. Already the ship was less distinct, as if my eyes had grown dim. By the time a voice on board her cried, "Belay," faintly, she had gone from my sight. Then the puff of wind passed away, too, and left us more alone than ever, with only the small disk of the moon poised vertically above the mists.

"Listen," said Tomas Castro, after what seemed an eternity of crestfallen silence.

He need not have spoken; there could be no doubt that Manuel had lost himself, and my belief is that the ship had sailed right into the midst of the flotilla. There was an unmistakable character of surprise in the distant tumult that arose suddenly, and as suddenly ceased for a space of a breath or two. "Now, Castro," I shouted. "Ha! bueno!"

We gave way with a vigour that seemed to lift the dinghy out of the water. The uproar gathered volume and fierceness.

From the first it was a hand-to-hand contest, engaged in suddenly, as if the assailants had at once managed to board in a body, and, as it were, in one unanimous spring. No shots had been fired. Too far to hear the blows, and seeing nothing as yet of the ship, we seemed to be hastening towards a deadly struggle of voices, of shadows with leathern throats; every cry heard in battle was there — rage, encouragement, fury, hate, and pain. And those of pain were amazingly distinct. They were yells; they were howls. And suddenly, as we approached the ship, but before we could make out any sign of her, we came upon a boat. We had to swerve to clear her. She seemed to have dropped out of the fight in utter disarray; she lay with no oars out, and full of men who writhed and tumbled over each other, shrieking as if they had been flayed. Above the writhing figures in the middle of the boat, a tall man, upright in the stern-sheets, raved awful imprecations and shook his fists above his head.

The blunt dinghy foamed past that vision within an oar's length, no more, making straight for the clamour of the fight. The last puff of wind must have thinned the fog in the ship's track; for, standing up, face forward to pull stroke, I saw her come out, stern-on to us, from truck to water-line, mistily tall and motionless, but resounding with the most fierce and desperate noises. A cluster of empty boats clung low to her port side, raft-like and vague on the water.

We heard now, mingled with the fury and hate of shouts reverberating from the placid sails, mighty thuds and crashes, as though it had been a combat with clubs and battle-axes.

Evidently, in the surprise and haste of the unexpected coming together, they had been obliged to board all on the same side. As I headed for the other a big boat, full of men, with many oars, shot across our bows, and vanished round the ship's counter in the twinkling of an eye. The defenders, engaged on the port side, were going to be taken in the rear. We were then so close to the counter that the cries of "Death, death," rang over our heads. A voice on the poop said furiously in English, "Stand fast, men."

Next moment, we, too, rounded the quarter only twenty feet behind the big boat, but with a slightly wider sweep.

I said, "Have the pistols ready, Seraphina." And she answered quite steadily:

"They are ready, Juan."

I could not have believed that any handiwork of man afloat could have got so much way through the water. To this very day I am not rid of the absurd impression that, at that particular moment, the dinghy was travelling with us as fast as a cannon-ball. No sooner round than we were upon them. We were upon them so fast that I had barely the time to fling away my oar, and close my grip on the butt of the pistols Seraphina pressed into my hand from behind. Castro, too, had dropped his oar, and, turning as swift as a cat, crouched in the bows. I saw his good arm darting out towards their boat.

They had cast a grapnel cleverly, and, swung abreast of the main chains, were grimly busied in boarding the undefended side in silence. One had already his leg over the ship's rail, and below him three more were clambering resolutely, one above the other. The rest of them, standing up in a body with their faces to the ship, were so oblivious of everything in their purpose, that they staggered all together to the shock of the dinghy, heavily, as if the earth had reeled under them.

Castro knew what he was doing. I saw his only hand hop along the gunwale, dragging our cockle-shell forward very swiftly. The tottering Spaniards turned their heads, and for a moment we looked at each other in silence.

I was too excited to shout; the surprise seemed to have deprived them of their senses, and they all had the same grin of teeth closed upon the naked blades of their knives, the same stupid stare fastened upon my eyes. I pulled the trigger in the nearest face, and the terrific din of the fight going on above us was overpowered by the report of the pistol, as if by a clap of thunder. The man's gaping mouth dropped the knife, and he stood stiffly long enough for the thought, "I've missed him," to flash through my mind before he tumbled clean out of the boat without touching anything, like a wooden dummy tipped by the heels. His headlong fall sent the water flying high over the stern of the dinghy. With the second barrel I took a long shot at the man sitting amazed, astride of the rail above. I saw him double up suddenly, and fall inboard sideways, but the fellow following him made a convulsive effort, and leapt out of sight on to the deck of the ship. I dropped the discharged weapon, and fired the first barrel of the other at the upper of the two men clinging halfway up the ship's side. To that one shot they both vanished as if by enchantment, the fellow I had hit knocking off his friend below. The crash of their fall was followed by a great yell.

These had been all nearly point-blank shots, and, anyhow, I had had a good deal of pistol practice. Macdonald had a little gallery at Horton Pen. The Lugareños, huddled together in the boat, were only able to moan with terror. They made soft, pitiful, complaining noises. Two or three took headers overboard, like so many frogs, and then one began to squeak exactly like a rat.

By that time, Castro, with his fixed blade, had cut their grapnel rope close to the ring. As the ship kept forging ahead all the time, the boat of the pirate bumped away lightly from between the vessel and our dinghy, and we remained alongside, holding to the end of the severed line. I sent my fourth shot after them and got in exchange a scream and a howl of "Mercy! mercy! we surrender!" She swung clear of the quarter, all hushed, and faded into the mist and moonlight, with the head and arms of a motionless man hanging grotesquely over the bows.

Leaving Seraphina with Castro, and sticking the remaining pair of pistols in my belt, I swarmed up the rope. The moon, the lights of several lanthorns, the glare from the open doors, mingled violently in the steamy fog between the high bulwarks of the ship. But the character of the contest was changing, even as I paused on the rail to get my bearings. The fellow who had leapt on board to escape my shot had bolted across the deck to his friends on the other side, yelling:

"Fly, fly! The heretics are coming, shooting from the sea. All is lost. Fly, oh fly!"

He had jumped straight overboard, but the infection of his panic was already visible. The cries of "Muerte, muerte! Death, death!" had ceased, and the Englishmen were cheering ferociously. In a moment, under my eyes, the seamen, who had been holding their own with difficulty in a shower of defensive blows, began to dart forward, striking out with their fists, catching with their hands. I jumped upon the main hatch, and found myself in the skirt of the final rush.

A tall Lugareño had possessed himself of one of the ship's capstan bars, and, less craven than the others, was flourishing it on high, aiming at the head of a sailor engaged in throttling a negro whom he held at the full length of his immense arms. I fired, and the Lugareño tumbled down with all the appearance of having knocked himself over with the bar he had that moment uplifted. It rested across his neck as he lay stretched at my feet.

I was not able to effect anything more after this, because the sailor, after rushing his limp antagonist overboard with terrific force, turned raging for more, caught sight of me — an evident stranger — and flew at my throat. He was English, but as he squeezed my windpipe so hard that I couldn't utter a word I brought the butt of my pistol upon his thick skull without the slightest compunction, for, indeed, I had to deal with a powerful man, well able to strangle me with his bare hands, and very determined to achieve the feat. He grunted under the blow, reeled away a few steps, then, charging back at once, gripped me round the body, and tried to lift me off my feet. We fell together into a warm puddle.

I had no idea spilt blood kept its warmth so much. And the quantity of it was appalling; the deck seemed to swim with gore, and we simply weltered in it. We rolled rapidly along the reeking scuppers, amongst the feet of a lot of men who were hopping about us in the greatest excitement, the hearty thuds of blows, aimed with all sorts of weapons, just missing my head. The pistol was kicked out of my hand.

The horror of my position was very great. Must I kill the man? must I die myself in this miserable and senseless manner? I tried to shout, "Drag this maniac off me."

He was pinning my arms to my body. I saw the furious faces bending over me, the many hands murderously uplifted. They, of course, couldn't tell that I wasn't one of the men who had boarded them, and my life had never been in such jeopardy. I felt all the fury of rage and mortification. Was I to die like this, villainously trodden underfoot, on the threshold of safety, of liberty, of love? And, in those moments of violent struggle I saw, as one sees in moments of wisdom and meditation, my soul — all life, lying under the shadow of a perfidious destiny. And Seraphina was there in the boat, waiting for me. The sea! The boat! They were in another land, and I, I should no more... never any more... A sharp voice called, "Back there, men. Steady. Take him alive." They dragged me up.

I needn't relate by what steps, from being terribly handled as a captive, I was promoted to having my arms shaken off in the character of a saviour. But I got any amount of praise at last, though I was terribly out of breath — at the very last gasp, as you might say. A man, smooth-faced, well-knit, very elated and buoyant, began talking to me endlessly. He was mighty happy, and anyhow he could talk to me, because I was past doing anything but taking a moment's rest. He said I had come in the nick of time, and was quite the best of fellows.

"If you had a fancy to be called the Archbishop of Canterbury, we'd 'your Grace' you. I am the mate, Sebright. The captain's gone in to show himself to the missus; she wouldn't like to have him too much chipped... Wonderful is the love of woman. She sat up a bit later to-night with her fancy-sewing to see what might turn up. I told her at tea-time she had better go in early and shut her stateroom door, because if any of the Dagos chanced to come aboard, I couldn't be responsible for the language of my crowd. We are supposed to keep clear of profanity this trip, she being a niece of Mr. Perkins of Bristol, our owner, and a Methodist. But, hang it all, there's reason in all things. You can't have a ship like a chapel — though she would. Oh, bless you, she would, even when we're beating off these picaroons."

I was sitting on the afterhatch, and leaning my head on my arms.

"Feel bad? Do you? Handled you like a bag of shavings. Well, the boys got their monkey up, hammering the Dagos. Here you, Mike, go look along the deck, for a double-barrelled pistol. Move yourself a bit. Feel along under the spars."

There was something authoritative and knowing in his personality; boyishly elated and full of business.

"We must put the ship to rights. You don't think they'd come back for another taste? The blessed old deck's afloat. That's my little dodge, boiling water for these Dagos, if they come. So I got the cook to fire up, and we put the suction-hose of the fire pump into the boiler, and we filled the coppers and the kettles. Not a bad notion, eh? But ten times as much wouldn't have been enough, and the hose burst at the third stroke, so that only one boat got anything to speak of. But Lord, she dropped out of the ruck as if she'd been swept with langridge. Squealed like a litter of pigs, didn't they?"

What I had taken for blood had been the water from the burst hose. I must say I was relieved. My new friend babbled any amount of joyous information into me before I quite got my wind back. He rubbed his hands and clapped me on the shoulder. But his heart was kind, and he became concerned at my collapsed state.

“I say, you don’t think my chaps broke some of your ribs, do you? Let me feel.”

And then I managed to tell him something of Seraphina that he would listen to.

“What, what?” he said. “Oh, heavens and earth! there’s your girl. Of course... Hey, bo’sun, rig a whip and chair on the yardarm to take a lady on board. Bear a hand. A lady! yes, a lady. Confound it, don’t lose your wits, man. Look over the starboard rail, and you will see a lady alongside with a Dago in a small boat. Let the Dago come on board, too; the gentleman here says he’s a good sort. Now, do you understand?”

He talked to me a good deal more; told me that they had made a prisoner — ”a tall, comical chap; wears his hair like an old aunt of mine, a bunch of curls flapping on each side of his face” — and then said that he must go and report to Captain Williams, who had gone into his wife’s stateroom. The name struck me. I said:

“Is this ship the Lion?”

“Aye, aye. That’s her. She is,” several seamen answered together, casting curious glances from their work.

“Tell your captain my name is Kemp,” I shouted after Sebright with what strength of lung I had.

What luck! Williams was the jolly little ship’s captain I was to have dined with on the day of execution on Kingston Point — the day I had been kidnapped. It seemed ages ago. I wanted to get to the side to look after Seraphina, but I simply couldn’t remember how to stand. I sat on the hatch, looking at the seamen.

They were clearing the ropes, collecting the lamps, picking up knives, handspikes, crowbars, swabbing the decks with squashy flaps. A bare-footed, bare-armed fellow, holding a bundle of brass-hilted cutlasses under his arm, had lost himself in the contemplation of my person.

“Where are you bound to?” I inquired at large, and everybody showed a friendly alacrity in answer.

“Havana.” “Havana, sir.” “Havana’s our next port. Aye, Havana.”

The deck rang with modulations of the name.

I heard a loud, “Alas,” sighed out behind me. A distracted, stricken voice repeated twice in Spanish, “Oh, my greatness; oh, my greatness.” Then, shiveringly, in a tone of profound self-communion, “I have a greatly parched throat,” it said. Harshly jovial voices answered:

“Stow your lingo and come before the captain. Step along.”

A prisoner, conducted aft, stalked reluctantly into the light between two short, bustling sailors. Dishevelled black hair like a damaged peruke, mournful, yellow face, enormous stag’s eyes straining down on me. I recognized Manuel-del-Popolo. At the same moment he sprang back, shrieking, “This is a miracle of the devil — of the devil.”

The sailors fell to tugging at his arms savagely, asking, "What's come to you?" and, after a short struggle that shook his tatters and his raven locks tempestuously like a gust of wind, he submitted to be walked up repeating:

"Is it you, Señor? Is it you? Is it you?"

One of his shoulders was bare from neck to elbow; at every step one of his knees and part of a lean thigh protruded their nakedness through a large rent; a strip of grimy, blood-stained linen, torn right down to the waist, dangled solemnly in front of his legs. There was a horrible raw patch amongst the roots of his hair just above his temple; there was blood in his nostrils, the stamp of excessive anguish on his features, a sort of guarded despair in his eye. His voice sank while he said again, twice:

"Is it you? Is it you?" And then, for the last time, "Is it you?" he repeated in a whisper.

The seamen formed a wide ring, and, looking at me, he talked to himself confidentially.

"Escaped — the Inglez! Then thou art doomed, Domingo. Domingo, thou art doomed. Dom... Señor!"

The change of tone, his effort to extend his hands towards me, surprised us all. I looked away.

"Hold hard! Hold him, mate!"

"Señor, condescend to behold my downfall. I am led here to the slaughter, Señor! To the slaughter, Señor! Pity! Grace! Mercy! And only a short while ago — behold. Slaughter... I... Manuel. Señor, I am universally admired — with a parched throat, Señor. I could compose a song that would make a priest weep... A greatly parched throat, Señor," he added piteously.

I could not help turning my head. I had not been used half as hard as he. It was enough to look at him to believe in the dryness of his throat. Under the matted mass of his hair, he was grinning in amiable agony, and his globular eyes yearned upon me with a motionless and glassy lustre.

"You have not forgotten me, Señor? Forget Manuel! Impossible! Manuel, Señor. For the love of God. Manuel. Manuel-del-Popolo. I did sing, deign to remember. I offered you my fidelity, Señor. As you are a caballero, I charge you to remember. Save me, Señor. Speak to those men... For the sake of your honour, Señor."

His voice was extraordinarily harsh — not his own. Apparently, he believed that he was going to be cut to pieces there and then by the sailors. He seemed to read it in their faces, shuddering and shrinking whenever he raised his eyes. But all these faces gaped with good-natured wonder, except the faces of his two guardians, and these expressed a state of conscientious worry. They were ridiculously anxious to suppress his sudden contortions, as one would some gross indecency. In the scuffle they hissed and swore under their breath. They were scandalized and made unhappy by his behaviour.

"Are you ready down there?" roared the bo'sun in the waist.

"Olla raight! Olla raight! Waita a leetle," I heard Castro's voice coming, as if from under the ship. I said coldly a few words about the certain punishment awaiting a pirate

in Havana, and got on to my feet stiffly. But Manuel was too terrified to understand what I meant. He attempted to snatch at me with his imprisoned hands, and got for his pains a severe jerking, which made his head roll about his shoulders weirdly.

“Pity, Señor!” he screamed. And then, with low fervour, “Don’t go away. Listen! I am profound. Perhaps the Señor did not know that? Mercy! I am a man of intrigue. A politico. You have escaped, and I rejoice at it.”... He bared his fangs, and frothed like a mad dog... “Señor, I am made happy because of the love I bore you from the first — and Domingo, who let you slip out of the Casa, is doomed. He is doomed. Thou art doomed, Domingo! But the excessive affection for your noble person inspires my intellect with a salutary combination. Wait, Señor! A moment! An instant!... A combination!...”

He gasped as though his heart had burst. The seamen, open-mouthed, were slowly narrowing their circle.

“Can’t he gabble!” remarked someone patiently.

His eyes were starting out of his head. He spoke with fearful rapidity.

“... There’s no refuge from the anger of the Juez but the grave — the grave — the grave!... Ha! ha! Go into thy grave, Domingo. But you, Señor — listen to my supplications — where will you go? To Havana. The Juez is there, and I call the malediction of the priests on my head if you, too, are not doomed. Life! Liberty! Señor, let me go, and I shall run — I shall ride, Señor — I shall throw myself at the feet of the Juez, and say... I shall say I killed you. I am greatly trusted by the reason of my superior intelligence. I shall say, ‘Domingo let him go — but he is dead. Think of him no more — of that Inglez who escaped — from Domingo. Do not look for him. I, your own Manuel, have killed him.’ Give me my life for yours, Señor. I shall swear I had killed you with this right hand! Ah!”

He hung on my lips breathless, with a face so distorted that, though it might have been death alone he hated, he looked, indeed, as if impatient to set to and tear me to pieces with his long teeth. Men clutching at straws must have faces thus convulsed by an eager and despairing hope. His silence removed the spell — the spell of his incredible loquacity. I heard the boatswain’s hoarse tones:

“Hold on well, ma’am. Right! Walk away steady with that whip!”

I ran limping forward.

“High enough,” he rumbled; and I received Seraphina into my arms.

Chapter 4

I said, “This is home, at last. It is all over”; and she stood by me on the deck. She pushed the heavy black cloak from over her head, and her white face appeared above the dim black shadow of her mourning. She looked silently round her on the mist, the groups of rough men, the splatterings of light that were like violence, too. She said nothing, but rested her hand on my arm.

She had her immense griefs, and this was the home I offered her. She looked back at the side. I thought she would have liked to be in the boat again. I said:

“The people in this ship are my old friends. You can trust them — and me.”

Tomas Castro, clambering leisurely over the side, followed. As soon as his feet touched the deck, he threw the corner of his cloak across his left shoulder, bent down half the rim of his hat, and assumed the appearance of a short, dark conspirator, overtopped by the stalwart sailors, who had abandoned Manuel to crowd, bare-armed, bare-chested, pushing, and craning their necks, round us.

She said, “I can trust you; it is my duty to trust you, and this is now my home.”

It was like a definite pronouncement of faith — and of a line of policy. She seemed, for that moment, quite apart from my love, a thing very much above me and mine; closed up in an immense grief, but quite whole-souledly determined to go unflinchingly into a new life, breaking quietly with all her past for the sake of the traditions of all that past.

The sailors fell back to make way for us. It was only by the touch of her hand on my arm that I had any hope that she trusted me, me personally, and apart from the commands of the dead Carlos; the dead father, and the great weight of her dead traditions that could be never anything any more for her — except a memory. Ah, she stood it very well; her head was erect and proud. The cabin door opened, and a rigid female figure with dry outlines, and a smooth head, stood out with severe simplicity against the light of the cabin door. The light falling on Seraphina seemed to show her for the first time. A lamentable voice bellowed:

“Señorita!... Señorita!” and then, in an insinuating, heart-breaking tone, “Señorita!...”

She walked quietly past the figure of the woman, and disappeared in the brilliant light of the cabin. The door closed. I remained standing there. Manuel, at her disappearance, raised his voice to a tremendous, incessant yell of despair, as if he expected to make her hear.

“Señorita... proteccion del oprimido; oh, hija de piedad... Señorita.”

His lamentable noise brought half the ship round us; the sailors fell back before the mate, Sebright, walking at the elbow of a stout man in loose trousers and jacket. They stopped.

“An unexpected meeting, Captain Williams,” was all I found to say to him. He had a constrained air, and shook hands in awkward silence.

“How do you do?” he said hurriedly. After a moment he added, with a sort of confused, as if official air, “I hope, Kemp, you’ll be able to explain satisfactorily...”

I said, rather off-handedly, “Why, the two men I killed ought to be credentials enough for all immediate purposes!”

“That isn’t what I meant,” he said. He spoke rather with a mumble, and apologetically. It was difficult to see in him any trace of the roystering Williams who had roared toasts to my health in Jamaica, after the episode at the Ferry Inn with the admiral. It was as if, now, he had a weight on his mind. I was tired. I said:

“Two dead men is more than you or any of your crew can show. And, as far as I can judge, you did no more than hold your own till I came.”

He positively stuttered, “Yes, yes. But...”

I got angry with what seemed stupid obstinacy.

“You’d be having a rope twisted tight round your head, or red-hot irons at the soles of your feet, at this very moment, if it had not been for us,” I said indignantly.

He wiped his forehead perplexedly. “Phew, how you do talk!” he remonstrated. “What I mean is that my wife...” He stopped again, then went on. “She took it into her head to come with me this voyage. For the first time... And you two coming alone in an open boat like this! It’s what she isn’t used to.”

I simply couldn’t get at what he meant; I couldn’t even hear him very well, because Manuel-del-Popolo was still calling out to Seraphina in the cabin. Williams and I looked at each other — he embarrassed, and I utterly confounded.

“Mrs. Williams thinks it’s irregular,” Sebright broke in, “you and your young lady being alone — in an open boat at night, and that sort of thing. It isn’t what they approve of at Bristol.”

Manuel suddenly bellowed out, “Señorita — save me from their barbarity. I am a victim. Behold their bloody knives ready — and their eyes which gloat.”

He shrank convulsively from the fellow with the bundle of cutlasses under his arm, who innocently pushed his way close to him; he threw himself forward, the two sailors hung back on his arms, nearly sitting on the deck, and he strained dog-like in his intense fear of immediate death. Williams, however, really seemed to want an answer to his absurdity that I could not take very seriously. I said:

“What do you expect us to do? Go back to our boat, or what?”

It seemed to affect him a good deal. “Wait till you are caught by a good woman yourself,” he mumbled wretchedly.

Was this the roystering Williams? The jolly good fellow? I wanted to laugh, a little hysterically, because of the worry after great fatigue. Was his wife such a terrifying

virago? "A good woman," Williams insisted. I turned my eyes to Sebright, who looked on amusedly.

"It's all right," he answered my questioning look. "She's a good soul, but she doesn't see fellows like us in the congregation she worships with at home." Then he whispered in my ear, "Owner's niece. Older than the skipper. Married him for love. Suspects every woman — every man, too, by George, except me, perhaps. She's learned life in some back chapel in Bristol. What can you expect? You go straight into the cabin," he added.

At that moment the cabin door opened again, and the figure of the woman I had seen before reappeared against the light.

"I was allowed to stand under the gate of the Casa, Excellency, I was in very truth. Oh, turn not the light of your face from me." Manuel, who had been silent for a minute, immediately recommenced his clamour in the hope, I suppose, that it would reach Seraphina's ears, now the door was opened.

"What is to be done, Owen?" the woman asked, with a serenity I thought very merciless.

She had precisely the air of having someone "in the house," someone rather questionable that you want, at home, to get rid of, as soon as a very small charity permitted.

"Madam," I said rather coldly, "I appeal to your woman's compassion..."

"Even thus the arch-enemy sets his snares," she retorted on me a little tremulously.

"Señorita, I have seen you grow," Manuel called again. "Your father, who is with the saints, gave me alms when I was a boy. Will you let them kill a man to whom your father..."

"Snares. All snares. Can she be blessed in going away from her natural guardians at night, alone, with a young man? How can we, consistently with our duty..."

Her voice was cold and gentle. Even in the imperfect light her appearance suggested something cold and monachal. The thought of what she might have been saying, or, in the subtle way of women, making Seraphina feel, in there, made me violently angry, but lucid, too.

"She comes straight from the fresh grave of her father," I said. "I am her only guardian."

Manuel rose to the height of his appeal. "Señorita, I worshipped your childhood, I threw my hat in the air many times before your coach, when you drove out all in white, smiling, an angel from paradise. Excellency, help me. Excel..."

A hand was clapped on his mouth then, and we heard only a great scuffle going on behind us. The way to the cozy cabin remained barred. My heart was kindled by resentment, but by the power of love my soul was made tranquil, for come what absurdity might, I had Sera-phina safe for the time. The woman in the doorway guarded the respectable ship's cuddy from the un-wedded vagabondage of romance.

"What's to be done, Owen?" she asked again, but this time a little irresolutely, I thought. "You know something of this — but I..."

“My dear, what an idea,” began Williams; and I heard his helpless mutters, “Like a hero — one evening — admiral — old Topnambo — nothing of her — on my soul — Lord’s son...”

Sebright spoke up from the side. “We could drive them overboard together, certainly, Mrs. Williams, but that wouldn’t be quite proper, perhaps. Put them each in a bag, separately, and drown them one on each side of the ship, decently...”

“You will not put me off with your ungodly levity, Mr. Sebright.”

“But I am perfectly serious, Mrs. Williams. It may raise a mutiny amongst these horrid, profane sailors, but I really don’t see how we are to get rid of them else. The bo’sun has cut adrift their ramshackle, old sieve of a boat, and she’s now a quarter of a mile astern, half-full of water. And we can’t give them one of the ship’s boats to go and get their throats cut ashore. J. Perkins, Esquire, wouldn’t like it. He would swear something awful, if the boat got lost. Now, don’t say no, Mrs. Williams. I’ve heard him myself swear a pound’s worth of oaths for a matter of tenpence. You know very well what your uncle is. A perfect Turk in that way.”

“Don’t be scandalous, Mr. Sebright.”

“But I didn’t begin, Mrs. Williams. It’s you who are raising all this trouble for nothing; because, as a matter of fact, they did not come alone. They had a man with them. An elderly, most respectable man. There he stands yonder, with a feather in his hat. Hey! You! Señor caballero, hidalgo, Pedro — Miguel — José — what’s your particular saint? Step this way a bit...”

Manuel managed to jerk a half-choked “Excellency,” and Castro, muffled up to the eyes, began to walk slowly aft, pausing after each solemn stride. The dark woman in the doorway was as effectual as an angel with a flaming sword. She paralyzed me completely.

Sebright dropped his voice a little. “I don’t see that’s much worse than going off at six o’clock in the morning to get married on the quiet; all alone with a man in a hackney coach — you know you did — and being given away by a perfect stranger.”

“Mr. Sebright! Be quiet! How dare you?... Owen!”

Williams made a vague, growling noise, but Sebright, after muttering hurriedly, “It’s all right, sir,” proceeded with the utmost coolness:

“Why, all Bristol knows it! There are those who said that you got out of the scullery window into the back street. I am only telling you...”

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself to believe such tales,” she cried in great agitation. “I walked out at the gate!”

“Yes. And the gardener’s wife said you must have sneaked the key off the nail by the side of the cradle — coming to the lodge the evening before, to see her poor, ailing baby. You ought to know what love brings the best of us to. And your uncle isn’t a bloody-handed pirate either. He’s only a good-hearted, hard-swearing old heathen. And you, too, are good-hearted. Come, Mrs. Williams. I know you’re just longing to tuck this young lady up in bed — poor thing. Think what she has gone through! You ought to be fussing with sherry and biscuits and what not — making that good-for-

nothing steward fly round. The beggar is hiding in the lazarette, I bet. Now then — allow me.”

I got hold of the matter there again. I said — because I felt that the matter only needed making clear:

“This young lady is the daughter of a great Spanish noble. Her father was killed by these pirates. I am myself of noble family, and I am her appointed guardian, and am trying to save her from a very horrible fate.”

She looked at me apprehensively.

“You would be committing a wicked act to try to interfere with this,” I said.

I suppose I carried conviction.

“I must believe what you say,” she said. She added suddenly, with a sort of tremulous, warm feeling, “There, there. I don’t mean to be unkind. I knew nothing, and a married woman can’t be too careful. For all I could have told, you might have been a — a libertine; one of the poor lost souls that Satan...”

Manuel, as if struggling with the waves, managed to free his lips.

“Excellency, help!” he spluttered, like a drowning man.

“I will give the young lady every care,” Mrs. Williams said, “until light shall be vouchsafed.”

She shut the door.

“You will go too far, Sebright,” Williams remonstrated; “and I’ll have to give you the sack.”

“It’s all right, captain. I can turn her round my little finger,” said the young man cheerily. “Somebody has to do it if you won’t — or can’t. What shall we do with that yelping Dago? He’s a distressful beast to have about the decks.”

“Put him in the coal-hole, I suppose, as far as Havana. I won’t rest till I see him on his way to the gallows. The Captain-General shall be made sick of this business, or my name isn’t Williams. I’ll make a breeze over it at home. You shall help in that, Kemp. You ain’t afraid of big-wigs. Not you. You ain’t afraid of anything...”

“He’s a devil of a fellow, and a dead shot,” threw in Sebright. “And jolly lucky for us, too, sir. It’s simply marvellous that you should turn up like this, Mr. Kemp. We hadn’t a grain of powder that wasn’t caked solid in the canisters. Nothing’ll take it out of my head that somebody had got at the magazine while we lay in Kingston...”

It did not occur to Williams to ask whether I was wounded, or tired, or hungry. And yet all through the West Indies the dinners you got on board the *Lion* were famous in shipping circles. But festive men of his stamp are often like that. They do it more for the glory and romance of the hospitality, and he could not, perhaps, under the circumstances, expect me to intone “for he is a jolly good fellow” over the wine. He was by no means a bad or unfeeling man; only he was not hungry himself, and another’s mere necessity of that sort failed to excite his imagination. I know he was no worse than other men, and I have reason to remember him with gratitude; but, at the time, I was surprised and indignant at the extraordinary way he took my presence for granted, as if I had come off casually in a shore boat to idle away an hour or two on board.

Since his wife appeared satisfied, he did not seem to desire any explanation. I felt as if I had for him no independent existence. When I had ceased to be a source of domestic difficulty, I became a precious sort of convenience, a most welcome person (“an English gentleman to back me up,” he repeated several times), who would help him to make “these old women at the Admiralty sit up!” A burning shame, this! It had gone on long enough, God knows, but if they were to tackle an old trader, like the “Lion”, now, it was time the whole country should hear of it. His owner, J. Perkins, his wife’s uncle, wasn’t the man to go to sleep over the job. Parliament should hear of it. Most fortunate I was there to be produced — eye-witness — nobleman’s son. He knew I could speak up in a good cause.

“And by the way, Kemp,” he said, with sudden annoyance, recollecting himself, as it were, “you never turned up for that dinner — sent no word, nor anything...”

Williams had been talking to me, but it was with Sebright that I felt myself growing intimate. The young mate of the “Lion” stood by, very quiet, listening with a capable smile. Now he said, in a tone of dry comment:

“Jolly sight more useful turning up here.”

“I was kidnapped away from Ramon’s back shop, if that’s a sufficient apology. It’s rather a long story.”

“Well, you can’t tell it on deck, that’s very clear,” Sebright had to shout to me. “Not while this infernal noise — what the deuce’s up? It sounds more like a dog-fight than anything else.”

As we ran towards the main hatch I recognized the aptness of the comparison. It was that sort of vicious, snarling, yelping clamour which arises all at once and suddenly dies.

“Castro! Thou Castro!”

“Malediction... My eyelids...”

“Thou! Englishman’s dog!”

“Ha! Porco.”

The voices ceased. Castro ran tiptoeing lightly, mantled in ample folds. He assumed his hat with a brave tap, crouched swiftly inside his cloak. It touched the deck all round in a black cone surmounted by a peering, quivering head. Quick as thought he hopped and sank low again. Everybody watched with wonder this play, as of some large and diabolic toy. For my part, knowing the deadly purpose of these preliminaries, I was struck with horror. Had he chosen to run on him at once, nothing could have saved Manuel. The poor wretch, vigorously held in front of Castro, was far too terrified to make a sound. With an immovable sailor on each side, he scuffled violently, and covered by starts as if tied up between two stone posts. His dumb, rapid panting was in our ears. I shouted:

“Stop, Castro! Stop!... Stop him, some of you! He means to kill the fellow!”

Nobody heeded my shouting. Castro flung his cloak on the deck, jumped on it, kicked it aside, all in the same moment as it seemed, dodged to the right, to the

left, drew himself up, and stepped high, paunchy in his tight smalls and short jacket, making all the time a low, sibilant sound, which was perfectly blood-curdling.

“He has a blade on his forearm!” I yelled. “He’s armed, I tell you!”

No one could comprehend my distress. A sailor, raising a lamp, had a broad smile. Somebody laughed outright. Castro planted himself before Manuel, nodded menacingly, and stooped ready for a spring. I was too late in my grab at his collar, but Manuel’s guardians, acting with precision, put out one arm each to meet his rush, and he came flying backwards upon me, as though he had rebounded from a wall.

He had almost knocked me down, and while I staggered to keep my feet the air resounded with urgent calls to shoot, to fire, to bring him down!... “Kill him, Señor!” came in an entreating yell from Castro. And I became aware that Manuel had taken this opportunity to wrench himself free. I heard the hard thud of his leap. Straight from the hatch (as I was told later by the marvelling sailors) he had alighted with both feet on the rail. I only saw him already there, sitting on his heels, jabbering and nodding at us like an enormous baboon. “Shoot, sir! Shoot!” “Kill! Kill, Señor! As you love your life — kill!”

Unwittingly, without volition, as if compelled by the suggestion of the bloodthirsty cries, my hand drew the remaining pistol out of my belt. I raised it, and found myself covering the strange antics of an infuriated ape. He tore at his flanks with both hands in the idea, I suppose, of stripping for a swim. Rags flew from him in all directions; an astounding eruption of rags round a huddled-up figure crouching, wildly active, in front of the muzzle. I had him. I was sure of my shot. He was only an ape. A dead ape. But why? Wherefore? To what end? What could it matter whether he lived or died. He sickened me, and I pitied him, as I should have pitied an ape.

I lowered my arm an almost imperceptible fraction of a second before he sprang up and vanished. The sound of the heavy plunge was followed by a regretful clamour all over the decks, and a general rush to the side. There was nothing to be seen; he had gone through the layer of fog covering the water. No one heard him blow or splutter. It was as if a lump of lead had fallen overboard.

Williams wouldn’t have had this happen for a five-pound note. Sebright expressed the hope that he wouldn’t cheat the gallows by drowning. The two men who had held him slunk away abashed. To lower a boat for the purpose of catching him in the water would have been useless and imprudent.

“His friends can’t be far off yet in the boats,” growled the bo’sun; “and if they don’t pick him up, they would be more than likely to pick up our chaps.”

Somebody expectorated in so marked a manner that I looked behind me. Castro had resumed his cloak, and was draping himself with deliberate dignity. When this undertaking had been accomplished, he came up very close to me, and without a word looked up balefully from the heavy folds thrown across his mouth and chin under the very tip of his hooked nose.

“I could not do it,” I said. “I could not. It would have been useless. Too much like murder, Tomas.”

“Oh! the inconstancy, the fancifulness of these English,” he generalized, with suppressed passion, right into my face. “I don’t know what’s worse, their fury or their pity. The childishness of it! The childishness... Do you imagine, Señor, that Manuel or the Juez O’Brien shall some day spare you in their turn? If I didn’t know the courage of your nation...”

“I despise the Juez and Manuel alike,” I interrupted angrily. I despised Castro, too, at that moment, and he paid me back with interest. There was no mistaking his scathing tone.

“I know you well. You scorn your friends, as well as your foes. I have seen so many of you. The blessed saints guard us from the calamity of your friendship...”

“No friendship could make an assassin of me, Mr. Castro...”

“... Which is only a very little less calamitous than your enmity,” he continued, in a cold rage. “A very little less. You let Manuel go... Manuel!... Because of your mercy... Mercy! Bah! It is all your pride — your mad pride. You shall rue it, Señor. Heaven is just. You shall rue it, Señor.”

He denounced me prophetically, wrapped up with an air of midnight secrecy; but, after all, he had been a friend in the act, if not in the spirit, and I contented myself by asking, with some pity for his imbecile craving after murder:

“Why? What can Manuel do to me? He at least is completely helpless.”

“Did the Señor Don Juan ever ask himself what Manuel could do to me — Tomas Castro? To me, who am poor and a vagabond, and a friend of Don Carlos, may his soul rest with God. Are all you English like princes that you should never think of anybody but yourselves?”

He revolted and provoked me, as if his opinion of the English could matter, or his point of view signify anything against the authority of my conscience. And it is our conscience that illumines the romantic side of our life. His point of view was as benighted and primitive as the point of view of hunger; but, in his fidelity to the dead architect of my fortunes, he reflected dimly the light of Carlos’ romance, and I had taken advantage of it, not so much for the saving of my life as for the guarding of my love. I had reached that point when love displaces one’s personality, when it becomes the only ground under our feet, the only sky over our head, the only light of vision, the first condition of thought — when we are ready to strive for it, as we fight for the breath of our body. Brusquely I turned my back on him, and heard the repeated clicking of flint against his blade. He lighted a cigarette, and crossed the deck to lean cloaked against the bulwark, smoking moodily under his slouched hat.

Chapter 5

Manuel's escape was the last event of that memorable night. Nothing more happened, and nothing more could be done; but there remained much talk and wonderment to get through. I did all the talking, of course, under the cuddy lamps. Williams, red and stout, sat staring at me across the table. His round eyes were perfectly motionless with astonishment — the story of what had happened in the Casa Riego was not what he had expected of the small, badly reputed Cuban town.

Sebright, who had all the duties of the soiled ship and chipped men to attend to, came in from the deck several times, and would stand listening for minutes with his fingers playing thoughtfully about his slight moustache. The dawn was not very far when he led me into his own cabin. I was half dead with fatigue, and troubled by an inward restlessness.

"Turn in into my berth," said Sebright.

I protested with a stiff tongue, but he gave me a friendly push, and I tumbled like a log on to the bedclothes. As soon as my head felt the pillow the fresh colouring of his face appeared blurred, and an arm, mistily large, was extended to put out the light of the lamp screwed to the bulkhead.

"I suppose you know there are warrants out in Jamaica against you — for that row with the admiral," he said.

An irresistible and unexpected drowsiness had relaxed all my limbs.

"Hang Jamaica!" I said, with difficult animation. "We are going home."

"Hang Jamaica!" he agreed. Then, in the dark, as if coming after me across the obscure threshold of sleep, his voice meditated, "I am sorry, though, we are bound for Havana. Pity. Great pity! Has it occurred to you, Mr. Kemp, that..."

It is very possible that he did not finish his sentence; no more penetrated, at least, into my drowsy ear. I awoke slowly from a trance-like sleep, with a confused notion of having to pick up the thread of a dropped hint. I went up on deck.

The sun shone, a faint breeze blew, the sea sparkled freshly, and the wet decks glistened. I stood still, touched by the new glory of light falling on me; it was a new world — new and familiar, yet disturbingly beautiful. I seemed to discover all sorts of secret charms that I had never seen in things I had seen a hundred times. The watch on deck were busy with brooms and buckets; a sailor, coiling a rope over a pin, paused in his work to point over the port-quarter, with a massive fore-arm like a billet of red mahogany.

I looked about, rubbing my eyes. The "Lion", close hauled, was heading straight away from the coast, which stood out, not very far yet, outlined heavily and flooded

with light. Astern, and to leeward of us, against a headland of black and indigo, a dazzling white speck resembled a snowflake fallen upon the blue of the sea.

“That’s a schooner,” said the seaman.

They were the first words I heard that morning, and their friendly hoarseness brushed away whatever of doubt might seem to mar the inexplicability of my new glow of my happiness. It was because we were safe — she and I — and because my undisturbed love let my heart open to the beauty of the young day and the joyousness of a splendid sea. I took deep breaths, and my eyes went all over the ship, embracing, like an affectionate contact, her elongated shape, the flashing brasses, the tall masts, the gentle curves of her sails soothed into perfect stillness by the wind. I felt that she was a shrine, for was not Seraphina sleeping in her, as safe as a child in its cradle? And presently the beauty, the serenity, the purity, and the splendour of the world would be reflected in her clear eyes, and made over to me by her glance.

There are times when an austere and just Providence, in its march along the inscrutable way, brings our hearts to the test of their own unreason. Which of us has not been tried by irrational awe, fear, pride, abasement, exultation? And such moments remain marked by indelible physical impressions, standing out of the ghostly level of memory like rocks out of the sea, like towers on a plain. I had many of these unforgettable emotions — the profound horror of Don Balthasar’s death; the first floating of the boat, like the opening of wings in space; the first fluttering of the flames in the fog — many others afterwards, more cruel, more terrible, with a terror worse than death, in which the very suffering was lost; and also this — this moment of elation in the clear morning, as if the universe had shed its glory upon my feelings as the sunshine glorifies the sea. I laughed in very lightness of heart, in a profound sense of success; I laughed, irresponsible and oblivious, as one laughs in the thrilling delight of a dream.

“Do I look so confoundedly silly?” asked Sebright, speaking as though he had a heavy cold. “I am stupid — tired. I’ve been on my feet this twenty-four hours — about the liveliest in my life, too. You haven’t slept very long either — none of us have. I’m sure I hope your young lady has rested.”

He put his hands in his pockets. He might have been very tired, but I had never seen a boy fresh out of bed with a rosier face. The black pin-points of his pupils seemed to bore through distance, exploring the horizon beyond my shoulder. The man called Mike, the one I had had the tussle with overnight, came up behind the indefatigable mate, and shyly offered me my pistol. His head was bound over the top, and under the chin, as if for toothache, and his bronzed, rough-hewn face looked out astonishingly through the snowy whiteness of the linen. Only a few hours before, we had been doing our best to kill each other. In my cordial glow, I bantered him light-heartedly about his ferocity and his strength.

He stood before me, patiently rubbing the brown instep of one thick foot with the horny sole of the other.

“You paid me off for that bit, sir,” he said bashfully. “It was in the way of duty.”

"I'm uncommon glad you didn't squeeze the ghost out of me," I said; "a morning like this is enough to make you glad you can breathe."

To this day I remember the beauty of that rugged, grizzled, hairy seaman's eyelashes. They were long and thick, shadowing the eyes softly like the lashes of a young girl.

"I'm sure, sir, we wish you luck — to you and the young lady — all of us," he said shamefacedly; and his bass, half-concealed mutter was quite as sweet to my ears as a celestial melody; it was, after all, the sanction of simple earnestness to my desires and hopes — a witness that he and his like were on my side in the world of romance.

"Well, go forward now, Mike," Sebright said, as I took the pistol.

"It's a blessing to talk to one's own people," I said, expansively, to him. "He's a fine fellow." I stuck the pistol in my belt. "I trust I shall never need to use barrel or butt again, as long as I live."

"A very sensible wish," Sebright answered, with a sort of reserve of meaning in his tone; "especially as on board here we couldn't find you a single pinch of powder for a priming. Do you notice the consort we have this morning?"

"What do I want with powder?" I asked. "Do you mean that?" I pointed to the white sail of the schooner. Sebright, looking hard at me, nodded several times.

"We sighted her as soon as day broke. D'you know what she means?"

I said I supposed she was a coaster.

"It means, most likely, that the fellow with the curls that made me think of my maiden aunt, has managed to keep his horse-face above water." He meant Manuel-del-Popolo. "What mischief he may do yet before he runs his head into a noose, it's hard to say. The old Spaniard you brought with you thinks he has already been busy — for no good, you may be sure."

"You mean that's one of the Rio schooners?" I asked quickly.

That, with all its consequent troubles forme, was what he did mean. He said I might take his word for it that, with the winds we had had, no craft working along the coast could be just there now unless she came out of Rio Medio. There was a calm almost up to sunrise, and it looked as if they had towed her out with boats before daylight... "Seems a rather unlikely bit of exertion for the lazy brutes; but if they are as much afraid of that confounded Irishman as you say they are, that would account for their energy."

They would steal and do murder simply for the love of God, but it would take the fear of a devil to make them do a bit of honest work — and pulling an oar was honest work, no matter why it was done. This was the combined wisdom of Sebright and of Tomas Castro, with whom he had been in consultation. As to the fear of the devil, O'Brien was very much like a devil, an efficient substitute. And there was certainly somebody or something to make them bestir themselves like this...

Before my mind arose a scene: Manuel, the night before, pulled out of the water into a boat — raging, half-drowned, eloquent, inspired. The contemptible beast was inspired, as a politician is, a demagogue. He could sway his fellows, as I had heard enough to know. And I felt a slight chill on the warmth of my hope, because that

bright sail, brilliantly and furtively dodging along in our wake, must be the product of Manuel's inspiration, urged to perseverance by the fear of O'Brien. The mate continued, staring knowingly at it:

"You know I am putting two and two together, like the old maids that come to see my aunt when they want to take away a woman's character. The Dagos are out and no mistake. The question is, Why? You must know whether those schooners can sail anything; but don't forget the old Lion is pretty smart. Is it likely they'll attempt the ship again?"

I negated that at once. I explained to Sebright that the store of ammunition in Rio Medio would not run to it; that the Lugareños were cowardly, divided by faction, incapable, by themselves, of combining for any length of time, and still less of following a plan requiring perseverance and hardihood.

"They can't mean anything in the nature of open attack," I affirmed. "They may have attempted something of the sort in Nichols' time, but it isn't in their nature."

Sebright said that was practically Castro's opinion, too — except that Castro had emphasized his remarks by spitting all the time, "like an old tomcat. He seems a very spiteful man, with no great love for you, Mr. Kemp. Do you think it safe to have him about you? What are all these grievances of his?"

Castro seemed to have spouted his bile like a volcano, and had rather confused Sebright. He had said much about being a friend of the Spanish lord — Carlos; and that now he had no place on earth to hide his head.

"As far as I could make out, he's wanted in England," said Sebright, "for some matter of a stolen watch, years ago in Liverpool, I think. And your cousin, the grandee, was mixed up in that, too. That sounds funny; you didn't tell us about that. Damme if he didn't seem to imply that you, too... But you have never been in Liverpool. Of course not..."

But that had not been precisely Castro's point. He had affirmed he had enemies in Spain; he shuddered at the idea of going to France, and now my English fancifulness had made it impossible for him to live in Rio Medio, where he had had the care of a good pad-rona.

"I suppose he means a landlady," Sebright chuckled. "Old but good, he says. He expected to die there in peace, a good Christian. And what's that about the priests getting hold of his very last bit of silver? I must say that sounded truest of all his rigmarole. For the salvation of his soul, I suppose?"

"No, my cousin's soul," I said gloomily.

"Humbugs. I only understood one word in three."

Just then Tomas himself stalked into sight among the men forward. Coming round the corner of the deck-house, he stopped at the galley door like a crow outside a hut, waiting. We watched him getting a light for his cigarette at the galley door with much dignified pantomime. The negro cook of the Lion, holding out to him in the doorway a live coal in a pair of tongs, turned his Ethiopian face and white ivories towards a group of sailors lost in the contemplation of the proceedings.' And, when Castro had

passed them, spurting jets of smoke, they swung about to look after his short figure, upon whose draped blackness the sunlight brought out reddish streaks as if bucketfuls of rusty water had been thrown over him from hat to toe. The end of his broken plume hung forward aggressively.

“Look how the fellow struts! Night and thunder! Hey, Don Tenebroso! Would your worship hasten hither...” Sebright hailed jocularly.

Castro, without altering his pace, came up to us.

“What do you think of her now?” asked Sebright, pointing to the strange sail. “She’s grown a bit plainer, now she is out of the glare.”

Castro, wrapping his chin, stood still, face to the sea. After a long while:

“Malediction,” he pronounced slowly, and without moving his head shot a sidelong glance at me.

“It’s clear enough how he feels about our friends over there. Malediction. Just so. Very proper. But it seems as though he had a bone to pick with all the world,” drawled Sebright, a little sleepily. Then, resuming his briskness, he bantered, “So you don’t want to go to England, Mr. Castro? No friends there? *Sus. per col.*, and that sort of thing?”

Castro, contemptuous, staring straight away, nodded impatiently.

“But this gentleman you are so devoted to is going to England — to his friends.”

Castro’s arms shook under the mantle falling all round him straight from the neck. His whole body seemed convulsed. From his puckered dark lips issued a fiendish and derisive squeal.

“Let his friends beware, then. *Por Dios!* Let them beware. Let them pray and fast, and beg the intercession of the saints. *Ha! ha! ha!...*”

Nothing could have been more unlike his saturnine self-centred truculence of restraint. He impressed me; and even Sebright’s steady, cool eyes grew perceptibly larger before this sarcastic fury. Castro choked; the rusty, black folds encircling him shook and heaved. Unexpectedly he thrust out in front of the cloak one yellow, dirty little hand, side by side with the bright end of his fixed blade.

“What do I hear? To England! Going to England! *Ha!* Then let him hasten there straight! Let him go straight there, I say — I, Tomas Castro!”

He lowered his tone to impress us more, and the point of the knife, as it were an emphatic forefinger, tapped the open palm forcibly. Did we think that a man was not already riding along the coast to Havana on a fast mule? — the very best mule from the stables of Don Balthasar himself — that murdered saint. The Captain-General had no such mules. His late excellency owned a sugar estate halfway between Rio Medio and Havana, and a relay of riding mules was kept there for quickness when His Excellency of holy memory found occasion to write his commands to the capital. The news of our escape would reach the Juez next day at the latest. Manuel would take care of that — unless he were drowned. But he could swim like a fish. Malediction!

“I cried out to you to kill!” he addressed me directly; “with all my soul I cried. And why? Because he had seen you and the *senorita*, too, *alas!* He should have been made

dumb — made dumb with your pistol, Señor, since those two stupid English mariners were too much for an old man like me. Manuel should have been made dumb — dumb forever, I say. What mattered he — that gutter-born offspring of an evil Gitana, whom I have seen, Señor! I, myself, have seen her in the days of my adversity in Madrid, Señor — a red flower behind the ear, clad in rags that did not cover all her naked skin, looking on while they fought for her with knives in a wine-shop full of beggars and thieves. Si, señor. That's his mother. Improvisador — politico — capataz. Ha... Dirt!"

He made a gesture of immense contempt.

"What mattered he? The coach would have returned from the cathedral, and the Casa Riego could have been held for days — and who could have known you were not inside. I had conversed earnestly with Cesar the major-domo — an African, it is true, but a man of much character and excellent sagacity. Ah, Manuel! Manuel! If I — — — But the devil himself fathers the children of such mothers. I am no longer in possession of my first vigour, and you, Señor, have all the folly of your nation..."

He bared his grizzled head to me loftily.

"... And the courage! Doubtless, that is certain. It is well. You may want it all before long, Señor... And the courage!"

The broken plume swept the deck. For a time he blinked his creased, brown eyelids in the sun, then pulled his hat low down over his brows, and, wrapping himself up closely, turned away from me to look at the sail to leeward.

"What an old, old, wrinkled, little, puffy beggar he is!" observed Sebright, in an undertone...

"Well, and what is your worship's opinion as to the purpose of that schooner?"

Castro shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows?"... He released the gathered folds of his cloak, and moved off without a look at either of us.

"There he struts, with his wings drooping like a turkey-cock gone into deep mourning," said Sebright. "Who knows? Ah, well, there's no hurry to know for a day or two. I don't think that craft could overhaul the Lion, if they tried ever so. They may manage to keep us in sight perhaps."

He yawned, and left me standing motionless, thinking of Seraphina. I longed to see her — to make sure, as if my belief in the possession of her had been inexplicably weakened. I was going to look at the door of her cabin. But when I got as far as the companion I had to stand aside for Mrs. Williams, who was coming up the winding stairs.

From above I saw the gray woollen shawl thrown over her narrow shoulders. Her parting made a broad line on her brown head. She mounted busily, holding up a little the front of her black, plain skirt. Her glance met mine with a pale, searching candour from below.

Overnight she had heard all my story. She had come out to the saloon whilst I had been giving it to Williams, and after saying reassuringly, "The young lady, I am thankful, is asleep," she had sat with her eyes fixed upon my lips. I had been aware of her anxious face, and of the slight, nervous movements of her hands at certain

portions of my narrative under the blazing lamps. We met now, for the first time, in the daylight.

Hastily, as if barring my road to Seraphina's cabin, "Miss Riego, I would have you know," she said, "is in good bodily health. I have this moment looked upon her again. The poor, superstitious young lady is on her knees, crossing herself."

Mrs. Williams shuddered slightly. It was plain that the sight of that popish practice had given her a shock — almost a scare, as if she had seen a secret and nefarious rite. I explained that Seraphina, being a Catholic, worshipped as her lights enjoined, as we did after ours. Mrs. Williams only sighed at this, and, making an effort, proposed that I should walk with her a little. We began to pace the poop, she gliding with short steps at my side, and drawing close the skimpy shawl about her. The smooth bands of her hair put a shadow into the slight hollows of her temples. No nun, in the chilly meekness of the habit, had ever given me such a strong impression of poverty and renunciation.

But there was in that faded woman a warmth of sentiment. She flushed delicately whenever caught (and one could not help catching her continually) following her husband with eyes that had an expression of maternal uneasiness and the captivated attention of a bride. And after she had got over the idea that I, as a member of the male British aristocracy, was dissolute — it was an article of faith with her — that warmth of sentiment would bring a faint, sympathetic rosiness to her sunken cheeks.

She said suddenly and trembling, "Oh, young sir, reflect upon these things before it is too late. You young men, in your luxurious, worldly, ungoverned lives..."

I shall never forget that first talk with her on the poop — her hurried, nervous voice (for she was a timid woman, speaking from a sense of duty), and the extravagant forms her ignorance took. With the emotions of the past night still throbbing in my brain and heart, with the sight of the sea and the coast, with the Rio Medio schooner hanging on our quarter, I listened to her, and had a hard task to believe my ears. She was so convinced that I was "dissolute," because of my class — as an earl's grandson.

It is difficult to imagine how she arrived at the conviction; it must have been from pulpit denunciations of the small Bethel on the outskirts of Bristol. Her uncle, J. Perkins, was a great ruffian, certainly, and Williams was dissolute enough, if one wished to call his festive imbecilities by a hard name. But these two could, by no means, be said to belong to the upper classes. And these two, apart from her favourite preacher, were the only two men of whom she could be said to have more than a visual knowledge.

She had spent her best years in domestic slavery to her bachelor uncle, an old shipowner of savage selfishness; she had been the deplorable mistress of his big, half-furnished house, standing in a damp garden full of trees. The outrageous Perkins had been a sailor in his time — mate of a privateer in the great French war, afterwards master of a slaver, developing at last into the owner of a small fleet of West Indiamen. Williams was his favourite captain, whom he would bring home in the evening to drink rum and water, and smoke churchwarden pipes with him. The niece had to sit up, too, at these dismal revels. Old Perkins would keep her out of bed to mix the grogs, till he was ready to climb the bare stone staircase, echoing from top to bottom with his

stumbles. However, it seems he dozed a good deal in snatches during the evening, and this, I suppose, gave their opportunity to the pale, spiritual-looking spinster with the patient eyes, and to the thick, staring Williams, florid with good living, and utterly unused to the company of women of that sort. But in what way these two unsimilar beings had looked upon each other, what she saw in him, what he imagined her to be like, why, how, wherefore, an understanding arose between them, remains inexplicable. It was her romance — and it is even possible that he was moved by an unselfish sentiment. Sebright accounted for the matter by saying that, as to the woman, it was no wonder. Anything to get away from a bullying old ruffian, that would use bad language in cold blood just to horrify her — and then burst into a laugh and jeer; but as to Captain Williams (Sebright had been with him from a boy), he ought to have known he was quite incapable of keeping straight after all these free-and-easy years.

He used to talk a lot, about that time, of good women, of settling down to a respectable home, of leading a better life; but, of course, he couldn't. Simply couldn't, what with old friends in Kingston and Havana — and his habits formed — and his weakness for women who, as Sebright put it, could not be called good. Certainly there did not seem to have been any sordid calculation in the marriage. Williams fully expected to lose his command; but, as it turned out, the old beast, Perkins, was quite daunted by the loss of his niece. He found them out in their lodgings, came to them crying — absolutely whimpering about his white hairs, talking touchingly of his will, and promising amendment. In the end it was arranged that Williams should keep his command; and Mrs. Williams went back to her uncle. That was the best of it. Actually went back to look after that lonely old rip, out of pure pity and goodness of heart. Of course old Perkins was afraid to treat her as badly as before, and everything was going on fairly well, till some kind friend sent her an anonymous letter about Williams' goings on in Jamaica. Sebright strongly suspected the master of another regular trading ship, with whom Williams had a difference in Kingston the voyage before last — Sebright said — about a small matter, with long hair — not worth talking about. She said nothing at first, and nearly worried herself into a brain-fever. Then she confessed she had a letter — didn't believe it — but wanted a change, and would like to come for one voyage. Nothing could be said to that.

The worst was, the captain was so knocked over at the idea of his little sins coming to light, that he — Sebright — had the greatest difficulty in preventing him from giving himself away.

“If I hadn't been really fond of her,” Sebright concluded, “I would have let everything go by the board. It's too difficult. And mind, the whole of Kingston was on the broad grin all the time we were there — but it's no joke. She's a good woman, and she's jealous. She wants to keep her own. Never had much of her own in this world, poor thing. She can't help herself any more than the skipper can. Luckily, she knows no more of life than a baby. But it's a most cruel set out.”

Sebright had exposed the domestic situation on board the *Lion* with a force of insight and sympathy hardly to be expected from his years. No doubt his attachment

to the disparate couple counted for not a little. He seemed to feel for them both a sort of exasperated affection; but I have no doubt that in his way he was a remarkable young man with his contrasted bringing up first at the hands of an old maiden lady; afterwards on board ship with Williams, to whom he was indentured at the age of fifteen, when as he casually mentioned — "a scoundrelly attorney in Exeter had run off with most of the old girl's money." Indeed, looking back, they all appear to me uncommon; even to the round-eyed Williams, cowed simply out of respect and regard for his wife, and as if dazed with fright at the conventional catastrophe of being found out before he could get her safely back to Bristol. As to Mrs. Williams, I must confess that the poor woman's ridiculous and genuine misery, inducing her to undertake the voyage, presented itself to me simply as a blessing, there on the poop. She had been practically good to Seraphina, and her talking to me mattered very little, set against that... And such talk!

It was like listening to an earnest, impassioned, tremulous impertinence. She seemed to start from the assumption that I was capable of every villainy, and devoid of honour and conscience; only one perceived that she used the words from the force of unworldly conviction, and without any real knowledge of their meaning, as a precocious child uses terms borrowed from its pastors and masters.

I was greatly disconcerted at first, but I was never angry. What of it, if, with a sort of sweet absurdity, she talked in great agitation of the depravity of hearts, of the sin of light-mindedness, of the self-deception which leads men astray — a confused but purposeful jumble, in which occasional allusions to the errors of Rome, and to the want of seriousness in the upper classes, put in a last touch of extravagance?

What of it? The time was coming when I should remember the frail, homely, as if starved, woman, and thank heaven for her generous heart, which was gained for us from that moment. Far from being offended, I was drawn to her. There is a beauty in the absolute conscience of the simple; and besides, her distrust was for me, alone. I saw that she erected* herself not into a judge, but into a guardian, against the dangers of our youth and our romance. She was disturbed by its origin.

There was so much of the unusual, of the unheard of in its beginning, that she was afraid of the end. I was so inexperienced, she said, and so was the young lady — poor motherless thing — wilful, no doubt — so very taking — like a little child, rather. Had I comprehended all my responsibility? (And here one of the hurried side-allusions to the errors of Rome came in with a reminder, touching the charge of another immortal soul beside my own.) Had I reflected?...

It seems to me that this moment was the last of my boyishness. It was as if the contact with her earnestness had matured me with a power greater than the power of dangers, of fear, of tragic events. She wanted to know insistently whether I were sure of myself, whether I had examined my feelings, and had measured my strength, and had asked for guidance. I had done nothing of this. Not till brought face to face with her unanswerable simplicity did I descend within myself. It seemed I had descended so deeply that, for a time, I lost the sound of her voice. And again I heard her.

“There’s time yet,” she was saying. “Think, young sir (she had addressed me throughout as ‘young sir.’) My husband and I have been talking it over most anxiously. Think well before you commit the young lady for life. You are both so young. It looks as if we had been sent providentially...”

What was she driving at? Did she doubt my love? It was rather horrible; but it was too startling and too extravagant to be met with anger. We looked at each other, and I discovered that she had been, in reality, tremendously excited by this adventure. This was the secret of her audacity. And I was also possessed by excitement. We stood there like two persons meeting in a great wind. Without moving her hands, she clasped and unclasped her fingers, looking up at me with soliciting eyes; and her lips, firmly closed, twitched.

“I am looking for the means of explaining to you how much I love her,” I burst out. “And if I found a way, you could not understand. What do you know? — what can you know?...”

I said this not in scorn, but in sheer helplessness. I was at a loss before the august magnitude of my feeling, which I saw confronting me like an enormous presence arising from that blue sea. It was no longer a boy-and-girl affair; no longer an adventure; it was an immense and serious happiness, to be paid for by an infinity of sacrifice.

“I am a woman,” she said, with a fluttering dignity. “And it is because I know how women suffer from what men say...”

Her face flushed. It flushed to the very bands of her hair. She was rosy all over the eyes and forehead. Rosy and ascetic, with something outraged and inexpressibly sweet in her expression. My great emotion was between us like a mist, through which I beheld strange appearances. It was as if an immaterial spirit had blushed before me. And suddenly I saw tears — tears that glittered exceedingly, falling hard and round, like pellets of glass, out of her faded eyes.

“Mrs. Williams,” I cried, “you can’t know how I love her. No one in the world can know. When I think of her — and I think of her always — it seems to me that one life is not enough to show my devotion. I love her like something unchangeable and unique — altogether out of the world; because I see the world through her. I would still love her if she had made me miserable and unhappy.”

She exclaimed a low “Ah!” and turned her head away for a moment.

“But one cannot express these things,” I continued. “There are no words. Words are not meant for that. I love her so that, were I to die this moment, I verily believe my soul, refusing to leave this earth, would remain hovering near her...”

She interrupted me with a sort of indulgent horror. “Sh! sh!” I mustn’t talk like that. I really must not — and inconsequently she declared she was quite willing to believe me. Her husband and herself had not slept a wink for thinking of us. The notion of the fat, sleepy Williams, sitting up all night to consider, owlshly, the durability of my love, cooled my excitement. She thought they had been providentially thrown into our way to give us an opportunity of reconsidering our decision. There were still so many difficulties in the way.

I did not see any; her utter incomprehension began to weary me, while she still twined her fingers, wiped her eyes by stealth, as it were, and talked unflinchingly. She could not have made herself clearly understood by Seraphina. Moreover, women were so helpless — so very helpless in such matters. That is why she was speaking to me. She did not doubt my sincerity at the present time — but there was, humanly speaking, a long life before us — and what of afterwards? Was I sure of myself — later on — when all was well?

I cut her short. Seizing both her hands:

“I accept the omen, Mrs. Williams!” I cried. “That’s it! When all is well! And all must be well in a very short time, with you and your husband’s help, which shall not fail me, I know. I feel as if the worst of our troubles were over already...”

But at that moment I saw Seraphina coming out on deck. She emerged from the companion, bare-headed, and looked about at her new surroundings with that air of imperious and childlike beauty which made her charm. The wind stirred slightly her delicate hair, and I looked at her; I looked at her stilled, as one watches the dawn or listens to a sweet strain of music caught from afar. Suddenly dropping Mrs. Williams’ hand, I ran to her...

When I turned round, Williams had joined his wife, and she had slipped her arm under his. Her hand, thin and white, looked like the hand of an invalid on the brawny forearm of that man bursting with health and good condition. By the side of his lustiness, she was almost ethereal — and yet I seemed to see in them something they had in common — something subtle, like the expression of eyes. It was the expression of their eyes. They looked at us with commiseration; one of them sweetly, the other with his owlish fixity. As we two, Seraphina and I, approached them together, I heard Williams’ thick, sleepy voice asking, “And so he says he won’t?” To which his wife, raising her tone with a shade of indignation, answered, “Of course not.” No, I was not mistaken. In their dissimilar persons, eyes, faces, there was expressed a common trouble, doubt, and commiseration. This expression seemed to go out to meet us sadly, like a bearer of ill-news. And, as if at the sight of a downcast messenger, I experienced the clear presentiment of some fatal intelligence.

It was conveyed to me late in the afternoon of that ‘same day out of Williams’ own thick lips, that seemed as heavy and inert as his voice.

“As far as we can see,” he said, “you can’t stay in the ship, Kemp. It would do no one any good — not the slightest good. Ask Sebright here.”

It was a sort of council of war, to which we had been summoned in the saloon. Mrs. Williams had some sewing in her lap. She listened, her hands motionless, her eyes full of desolation. Seraphina’s attitude, leaning her cheek on her hand, reminded me of the time when I had seen her absorbed in watching the green-and-gold lizard in the back room of Ramon’s store, with her hair falling about her face like a veil. Castro was not called in till later on. But Sebright was there, leaning his back negligently against the bulkhead behind Williams, and looking down on us seated on both sides of the long table. And there was present, too, in all our minds, the image of the Rio Medio

schooner, hull down on our quarter. In all the trials of sailing, we had not been able to shake her off that day.

“I don’t want to hide from you, Mr. Kemp,” Sebright began, “that it was I who pointed out to the captain that you would be only getting the ship in trouble for nothing. She’s an old trader and favourite with shippers; and if we once get to loggerheads with the powers, there’s an end of her trading. As to missing Havana this trip, even if you, Mr. Kemp, could give a pot of money, the captain could never show his nose in there again after breaking his charter-party to help steal a young lady. And it isn’t as if she were nobody. She’s the richest heiress in the island. The biggest people in Spain would have their say in this matter. I suppose they could put the captain in prison or something. Anyway, good-bye to the Havana business for good. Why, old Perkins would have a fit. He got over one runaway match... All right, Mrs. Williams, not another word... What I meant to say is that this is nothing else but a love story, and to knock on the head a valuable old-established connection for it..Don’t bite your lip, Mr. Kemp. I mean no disrespect to your feelings. Perkins would start up to break things — let alone his heart. I am sure the captain and Mrs. Williams think so, too.”

The festive and subdued captain of the *Lion* was staring straight before him, as if stuffed. Mrs. Williams moved her fingers, compressed her lips, and looked helplessly at all of us in turn. “Besides altering his will,” Sebright breathed confidentially at the back of my head. I perceived that this old Perkins, whom I had never seen, and was never to see in the body, whose body no one was ever to see any more (he died suddenly on the echoing staircase, with a flat candlestick in his hand; was already dead at the time, so that Mrs. Williams was actually sitting in the cabin of her very own ship) — I perceived that old Perkins was present at this discussion with all the power of a malignant, bad-tempered spirit. Those two were afraid of him. They had defied him once, it is true — but even that had been done out of fear, as it were.

Dismayed, I spoke quickly to Seraphina. With her head resting on her hand, and her eyes following the aimless tracings of her finger on the table, she said:

“It shall be as God wills it, Juan.”

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t!” said Sebright, coughing behind me. He understood Spanish fairly well. “What I’ve said is perfectly true. Nevertheless the captain was ready to risk it.”

“Yes,” ejaculated Williams profoundly, out of almost still lips, and otherwise so motionless all over that the deep sound seemed to have been produced by some person under the table. Mrs. Williams’ fingers were clasped on her lap, and her eyes seemed to beg for belief all round our faces.

“But the point is that it would have been no earthly good for you two,” continued Sebright. “That’s the point I made. If O’Brien knows anything, he knows you are on board this ship. He reckons on it as a dead certainty. Now, it is very evident that we could refuse to give you up, Mr. Kemp, and that the admiral (if the flagship’s off Havana, as I think she must be by now) would have to back us up. How you would get

on afterwards with old Groggy Rowley, I don't know. It isn't likely he has forgotten you tried to wipe the floor with him, if I am to take the captain's yarn as correct."

"A regular hero," Williams testified suddenly, in his concealed, from-under-the-table tone. "He's not afraid of any of them; not he. Ha! ha! Old Topnambo must have..." He glanced at his wife, and bit his tongue — perhaps at the recollection of his unsafe conjugal position — ending in disjointed words, "In his chaise — warrant — separationist — rebel," and all this without moving a limb or a muscle of his face, till, with a low, throaty chuckle, he fluttered a stony sort of wink to my address.

Sebright had paused only long enough for this ebullition to be over. The cool logic of his surmise appalled me. He didn't see why O'Brien or anybody in Havana should want to interfere with me personally. But if I wanted to keep my young lady, it was obvious she must not arrive in Havana on board a ship where they would be sure to look for her the very first thing. It was even worse than it looked, he declared. His firm conviction was that if the *Lion* did not turn up in Havana pretty soon, there would be a Spanish man-of-war sent out to look for her — or else Mr. O'Brien was not the man we took him for. There was lying in harbour a corvette called the *Tornado*, a very likely looking craft. I didn't expect them to fight a corvette. No doubt there would be a fuss made about stopping a British ship on the high seas; but that would be a cold comfort after the lady had been taken away from me. She was a person of so much importance that even our own admiral could be induced — say, by the Captain-General's remonstrances — to sanction such an action. There was no saying what Rowley would do if they only promised to present him with half a dozen pirates to take home for a hanging. Why! that was the very identical thing the flagship was kept dodging off Havana for! And O'Brien knew where to lay his hands on a gross of such birds, for that matter.

"No," concluded Sebright, overwhelming me from behind, as I sat looking, not at the uncertainties of the future, but at the paralyzing hopelessness of the bare to-morrow. "The *Lion* is no place for you, whether she goes into Havana or not. Moreover, into Havana she must go now. There's no help for it. It's the deuce of a situation."

"Very well," I gasped. I tried to be resolute. I felt, suddenly, as if all the air in the cabin had gone up the open skylight. I couldn't remain below another moment; and, muttering something about coming back directly, I jumped up and ran out without looking at any one lest I should give myself away. I ran out on deck for air, but the great blue emptiness of the open staggered me like a blow over the heart. I walked slowly to the side, and, planting both my elbows on the rail, stared abroad defiantly and without a single clear thought in my head. I had a vague feeling that the descent of the sun towards the waters, going on before my eyes with changes of light and cloud, was like some gorgeous and empty ceremonial of immersion belonging to a vast barren faith remote from consolation and hope. And I noticed, also, small things without importance — the hirsute aspect of a sailor; the end of a rope trailing overboard; and Castro, so different from everybody else on board that his appearance seemed to create

a profound solitude round him, lounging before the cabin door as if engaged in a deep conspiracy all by himself. I heard voices talking loudly behind me, too.

I noted them distinctly, but with perfect indifference. A long time after, with the same indifference, I looked over my shoulder. Castro had vanished from the quarter-deck. And I turned my face to the sea again as a man, feeling himself beaten in a fight with death, might turn his face to the wall.

I had fought a harder battle with a more cruel foe than death, with the doubt of myself; an endless contest, in which there is no peace of victory or of defeat. The open sea was like a blank and unscalable wall imprisoning the eternal question of conduct. Right or wrong? Generosity or folly? Conscience or only weak fear before remorse? The magnificent ritual of sunset went on palpitating with an inaudible rhythm, with slow and unerring observance, went on to the end, leaving its funeral fires on the sky and a great shadow upon the sea. Twice I had honourably stayed my hand. Twice... to this end.

In a moment, I went through all the agonies of suicide, which left me alive, alas, to burn with the shame of the treasonable thought, and terrified by the revolt of my soul refusing to leave the world in which a young girl lived! The vast twilight seemed to take the impress of her image like wax. What did Seraphina think of me? I knew nothing of her but her features, and it was enough. Strange, this power of a woman's face upon a man's heart — this mastery, potent as witchcraft and mysterious like a miracle. I should have to go and tell her. I did not suppose she could have understood all of Sebright's argumentation. Therefore, it was for me to explain to what a pretty pass I had brought our love.

I was so greatly disinclined to stir that I let Sebright's voice go on calling my name half a dozen times from the cabin door. At last I faced about.

"Mr. Kemp! I say, Kemp! Aren't you coming in yet?"

"To say good-by," I said, approaching him.

It had fallen dark already.

"Good-by? No. The carpenter must have a day at least."

Carpenter! What had a carpenter to do in this? However, nothing mattered — as though I had managed to spoil the whole scheme of creation.

"You didn't think of making a start to-night, did you?" Sebright wondered. "Where would be the sense of it?"

"Sense," I answered contemptuously. "There is no sense in anything. There is necessity. Necessity."

He remained silent for a time, peering at me.

"Necessity, to be sure," he said slowly. "And I don't see why you should be angry at it."

I was thinking that it was easy enough for him to keep cool — the necessity being mine. He continued to philosophize with what seemed to me a shocking freedom of mind.

“Must try to put some sense into it. That’s what we are here for, I guess. Anyhow, there’s some room for sense in arranging the way a thing is to be done, be it as hard as it may. And I don’t see any sense, either, in exposing a woman to more hardship than is absolutely necessary. We have talked it out now, and I can do no more. Do go inside for a bit. Mrs. Williams is worrying the Señorita, rather, I’m afraid.”

I paused a moment to try and regain the command of my faculties. But it was as if a bombshell had exploded inside my skull, scattering all my wits to the four winds of heaven. Only the conviction of failure remained, attended by a profound distress.

I fancy, though, I presented a fairly bold front. The lamp was lit, and small changes had occurred during my absence. Williams had turned his bulk sideways to the table. Mrs. Williams had risen from her place, and was now sitting upright close to Seraphina, holding one little hand inclosed caressingly between her frail palms, as if she had there something alive that needed cherishing. And in that position she looked up at me with a strange air of worn-out youth, cast by a rosy flush over her forehead and face. Seraphina still leaned her head on her other hand, and I noted, through the soft shadow of falling hair, the heightened colour on her cheek and the augmented brilliance of her eye.

“How I wish she had been an English girl,” Mrs. Williams sighed regretfully, and leaned forward to look into Seraphina’s half-averted face.

“My dear, did you quite, quite understand what I have been saying to you?”

She waited.

“Si Señora,” said Seraphina. None of us moved. Then, after a time, turning to me with sudden animation, “This woman asked me if I believed in your love,” she cried. “She is old. Oh, Juan, can the years change the heart? your heart?” Her voice dropped. “How am I to know that?” she went on piteously. “I am young — and we may not live so long. I believe in mine...”

The corners of her delicate lips drooped; but she mastered her desire to cry, and steadied her voice which, always rich and full of womanly charm, took on, when she was deeply moved, an imposing gravity of timbre.

“But I am a Spaniard, and I believe in my lover’s honour; in your — your English honour, Juan.”

With the dignity of a supreme confidence she extended her hand. It was one of the culminating moments of our love. For love is like a journey in mountainous country, up through the clouds, and down into the shadows to an unknown destination. It was a moment rapt and full of feeling, in which we seemed to dwell together high up and alone — till she withdrew her hand from my lips, and I found myself back in the cabin, as if precipitated from a lofty place.

Nobody was looking at us. Mrs. Williams sat with downcast eyelids, with her hands reposing on her lap: her husband gazed discreetly at a gold moulding on the deck-beam; and the upward cast of his eyes invested his red face with an air of singularly imbecile ecstasy. And there was Castro, too, whom I had not seen till then, though I must have brushed against him on entering. He had stood by the door a mute, and,

as it were, a voluntarily unmasked conspirator with the black round of the hat lying in front of his feet. He, alone, looked at us. He looked from Seraphina to me — from me to Seraphina. He looked unutterable things, rolling his crow-footed eyes in pious horror and glowering in turns. When Seraphina addressed him, he hastened to incline his head with his usual deference for the daughter of the Riegos.

She said, “There are things that concern this caballero, and that you can never understand. Your fidelity is proved. It has sunk deep here... It shall give you a contented old age — on the word of Seraphina Riego.”

He looked down at his feet with gloomy submission.

“There is a proverb about an enamoured woman,” he muttered to himself, loud enough for me to overhear. Then, stooping deliberately to pick up his hat, he flourished it with a great sweep lower than his knees. His dumpy black back flitted out of the cabin; and almost directly we heard the sharp click of his flint and blade outside the door.

Chapter 6

How often the activity of our life is the least real part of it! Life, looked upon as a whole, presents itself to my fancy as a pursuit with open arms of a winged and magnificent dream, hovering just over our heads and casting its glory upon our hopes. It is in this simple vision, which is one and enduring, and not in the changing facts, that we must look for meaning and for truth. The three quiet days we spent together on board the *Lion* remain to me memorable and full of import, eventless and containing the very quintessence of existence. We shared the sunshine, always together, very close, turning hand in hand to the sea, whose unstained blueness continued under our feet the blue above our heads, as though we had been snatched up into the sky. The insignificant words we exchanged seemed informed by a sustaining certitude and an admirable gravity, as though there had been some quality of unerring wisdom in the blind love of man and woman. From the inexhaustible treasure of her feelings she drew words, glances, gestures that appeased every uneasiness of my heart. In some brief moment of illumination whose advent my man's eyes had utterly missed, she had learned all at once everything there was to know. She knew. She no longer needed to survey my actions, my words, my thoughts; but she accorded me the sincere flattery of spell-bound attention, and it was made intoxicating by her smile. In those short days of a pause, when, like a swimmer turning on his back, we lived in the trustful confidence of the sustaining depths, instead of struggling with the agitation of the surface — in these days we had the time to look at each other profoundly; and I saw her smile come back again a little changed, more meaning and a little less mirthful, as if her lips had been made stiff by sorrow. But she was young; and youth, the time of softness, of tenderness, of enthusiasm, and of pity, presents a surface as hard as marble to the finality of death.

Breathing side by side, drinking in the sunshine, and talking of ourselves not at all, but casting the sense of our love like a magnificent garment over the wide significance of a world already conquered, we could not help being made aware of the currents of excitement and sympathy that converged upon our essential isolation from the life of the ship. It was the excitement of the adventure brewing for our drinking according to Sebright's recipe. People approached us — spoke to us. We attended to them as if called down from an elevation; we were aware of the kind tone; and, remaining indistinct, they retreated, leaving us free to regain the heights of the lovers' paradise — a region of tender whispers and intense silences. Suddenly there would be a short, throaty laugh behind our backs, and Williams would begin, "I say, Kemp; do you call to mind so-and-so?" Invariably some planter or merchant in Jamaica. I never could.

Williams would grunt, "No? I wonder how you passed your time away these two years or more. The place isn't that big." His purpose was to cheer me up by some gossip, if only he could find a common acquaintance to talk over. I believe he thought me a queer fish. He told me once that everybody he knew in Jamaica had that precise opinion of me. Then with a chuckle and muttering, "Warrants — assault — Top — nambo — ha, ha!" he would leave us to ourselves, and continue his waddle up and down the poop. He wore loose silk trousers, and the round legs inside moved like a contrivance made out of two gate-posts.

He was absurd. They all were that before our sweet reasonableness. But this atmosphere, full of interest and good will, was good to breathe. The very steward — the same who had been hiding in the lazarette during the fight — a hunted creature, displaying the most insignificant anatomy ever inhabited by a quailing spirit, devoted himself to the manufacture of strange cakes, which at tea-time he would deposit smoking hot in front of Seraphina's place. After each such exploit, he appeared amazed at his audacity in taking so much upon himself. The carpenter took more than a day, tinkering at an old ship's boat. He was a Shetlander — a sort of shaggy hyperborean giant with a forbidding face, an appraising, contemplative manner, and many nails in his mouth. At last the time came when he, too, approached our oblivion from behind, with a large hammer in his hand; but instead of braining us with one sweep of his mighty arm, he remarked simply in uncouth accents, "There now; I am thinking she will do well for what ye want her. I can do no more for ye."

We turned round, arm-in-arm, to look at the boat. There she was, lying careened on the deck, with patched sides, in a belt of chips, shavings, and sawdust; a few pensive sailors stood about, gazing down at her with serious eyes. Sebright, bent double, circled slowly on a prowl of minute inspection. Suddenly straightening himself up, he pronounced a curt "She'll do"; and, without looking at us at all, went off busily with his rapid stride.

A light sigh floated down upon our heads. Williams and his wife appeared on the poop above us like an allegorical couple of repletion and starvation, conceived in a fantastic vein on a balcony. A cigar smouldered in his stumpy red fingers. She had slipped a hand under his arm, as she would always do the moment they came near each other. She never looked more wasted and old-maidish than when thus affirming her wifely rights. But her eyes were motherly.

"Ah, my dears!" (She usually addressed Seraphina as "miss," and myself as "young sir.") "Ah, my dears! It seems so heartless to be sending you off in such a small boat, even for your own good."

"Never fear, Mary. Repaired. Carry six comfortably," reassured Williams in a tremendous mutter, like a bull.

"But why can't you give them one of the others, Owen? That big one there?"

"Nonsense, Mary. Never see boat again. Wouldn't grudge it. Only Sebright is quite right. Didn't you hear what Sebright said? Very sensible. Ask Sebright. He will explain to you again."

It was Sebright, with his asperity and his tact, with fits of brusqueness subdued by an almost affectionate contempt, who conducted all their affairs, as I have seen a trustworthy and experienced old nurse rule the infinite perplexities of a room full of children. His clear-sightedness and mental grip seemed independent of age and experience, like the ability of genius. He had an imaginative eye for detail, and, starting from a mere hint, would go scheming onwards with astonishing precision. His plan, to which we were committed — committed helplessly and without resistance — was based upon the necessity of our leaving the ship.

He had developed it to me that evening, in the cabin, directly Castro had gone out. He had already got Williams and his wife to share his view of our situation. He began by laying it down that in every desperate position there was a loophole for escape. Like other great men, he was conscious of his ability, and was inclined to theorize at large for a while. You had to accept the situation, go with it in a measure, and as you had walked into trouble with your eyes shut, you had only to continue with your eyes open. Time was the only thing that could defeat one. If you had no time, he admitted, you were at a dead wall. In this case he judged there would be time, because O'Brien, warned already, would sit tight for a few days, being sure to get hold of us directly the Lion came into port. It was only if the Lion failed to turn up within a reasonable term in Havana, that he would take fright, and take measures to hunt her up at sea. But I might rest assured that the Lion was going to Havana as fast as the winds would allow her.

What was, then, the situation? he continued, looking at me piercingly above Williams' cropped head. I had run away for dear life from Cuba (taking with me what was best in it, to be sure, he interjected, with a faint smile towards Seraphina). I had no money, no friends (except my friends in this cabin, he was good enough to say); warrants out against me in Jamaica; no means to get to England; no safety in the ship. It was no use shirking that little fact. We must leave the Lion. This was a hopeless enough position. But it was hopeless only because it was not looked upon in the right way. We assumed that we had to leave her forever, while the whole secret of the trick was in this, that we need only leave her for a time. After O'Brien's myrmidons had gone through her, and had been hooted away empty-handed, she became again, if not absolutely safe, then at least possible — the only possible refuge for us — the only decent means of reaching England together, where, he understood, our trouble would cease. Williams nodded approval heavily.

"The friends of Miss Riego would be glad to know she had made the passage under the care of a respectable married lady," Sebright explained, in that imperturbable manner of his, which reflected faintly all his inner moods — whether of recklessness, of jocularly or anxiety — and often his underlying scorn. His gravity grew perfectly portentous. "Mrs. Williams," he continued, "was, of course, very anxious to do her part creditably. As it happened, the Lion was chartered for London this voyage; and notwithstanding her natural desire to rejoin, as soon as possible, her home and her

aged uncle in Bristol, she intended to go with the young lady in a hackney coach to the very door.”

I had previously told them that the lately appointed Spanish ambassador in London was a relation of the Riegos, and personally acquainted with Seraphina, who, nearly two years before, had been on a short visit to Spain, and had lived for some months with his family in Madrid, I believe. No trouble or difficulty was to be apprehended as to proper recognition, or in the matter of rights and inheritance, and so on. The ambassador would make that his own affair. And for the rest I trusted the decision of her character and the strength of her affection. I was not afraid she would let any one talk her out of an engagement, the dying wish of her nearest kinsman, sealed, as it were, with the blood of her father. This matter of temporary absence from the Lion, however, seemed to present an insuperable difficulty. We could not, obviously, be left for days floating in an open boat outside Havana harbour, waiting till the ship came out to pick us up. Sebright himself admitted that at first he did not see how it could be contrived. He didn't see at all. He thought and thought. It was enough to sicken one of every sort of thinking. Then, suddenly, the few words Castro had let drop about the sugar estate and the relay of mules came into his head — providentially, as Mrs. Williams would say. He fancied that the primitive and grandiose manner for a gentleman to keep a relay of mules — any amount of mules — in case he should want to send a letter or two, caused the circumstance to stick in his mind. At once he had “our little hidalgo” in, and put him through an examination.

“He turned fairly sulky, and tried constantly to break out against you, till Dona Seraphina here gave him a good talking to,” Sebright said.

Otherwise it was most satisfactory. The place was accessible from the sea through a narrow inlet, opening into a small, perfectly sheltered basin at the back of the sand-dunes. The little river watering the estate emptied itself into that basin. One could land from a boat there, he understood, as if in a dock — and it was the very devil if I and Miss Riego could not lie hidden for a few days on her own property, the more so that, as it came out in the course of the discussion, while I had “rushed out to look at the sunset,” that the manager, or whatever they called him — the fellow in charge — was the husband of Dona Seraphina's old nurse-woman. Of course, it behoved us to make as little fuss as possible — try to reach the house along by-paths early in the morning, when all the slaves would be out at work in the fields. Castro, who professed to know the locality very well indeed, would be of use. Meantime, the Lion would make her way to Havana, as if nothing was the matter. No doubt all sorts of confounded alguazils and custom-house hounds would be ready to swarm on board in full cry. They would be made very welcome. Any strangers on board? Certainly not. Why should there be?... Rio Medio? What about Rio Medio? Hadn't been within miles and miles of Rio Medio; tried this trip to beat up well clear of the coast. Search the ship? With pleasure — every nook and cranny. He didn't suppose they would have the cheek to talk of the pirates; but if they did venture — what then? Pirates? That's very serious and dishonourable to the power of Spain. Personally, had seen nothing

of pirates. Thought they had all been captured and hanged quite lately. Rumours of the Lion having been attacked obviously untrue. Some other ship, perhaps... That was the line to take. If it didn't convince them, it would puzzle them altogether. Of course, Captain Williams, in his great regard for me, had abandoned the intention of making an affair of state of the outrage committed on his ship. He would not lodge any complaint in Havana — nothing at all. The old women of the Admiralty wouldn't be made to sit up this time. No report would be sent to the admiral either. Only, if the ship were interfered with, and bothered under any pretence whatever, once they had been given every facility to have one good look everywhere, the admiral would be asked to stop it. And the Spanish authorities would have not a leg to stand on either, for this simple reason, that they could not very well own to the sources of their information. Meantime, all hands on board the Lion had to be taken into confidence; that could not be avoided. He, Sebright, answered for their discretion while sober, anyhow; and he promised me that no leave or money would be given in Havana, for fear they should get on a spree, and let out something in the grogshops on shore. We all knew what a sailor-man was after a glass or two. So that was settled. Now, as to our rejoining the Lion. This, of necessity, must be left to me. Counting from the time we parted from her to land on the coast, the Lion would remain in Havana sixteen days; and if we did not turn up in that time, and the cargo was all on board by then, Captain Williams would try to remain in harbour on one pretence or another a few days longer. But sixteen days should be ample, and it was even better not to hurry up too much. To arrive on the fifteenth day would be the safest proceeding in a way, but for the cutting of the thing too fine, perhaps. With all these mules at our disposal, Sebright didn't see why we should not make our way by land, pass through the town at night, or in the earliest morning, and go straight on board the Lion — perhaps use some sort of disguise. He couldn't say. He was out of it there. Blackened faces or something. Anyway, we would be looked out for on board night and day.

Later on, however, we had learned from Castro that the estate possessed a sailing craft of about twenty tons, which made frequent trips to Havana. These sugar droghers belonging to the plantations (every estate on the coast had one or more) went in and out of the harbour without being taken much notice of. Sometimes the battery at the water's edge on the north side or a custom-house guard would hail them, but not often — and even then only to ask the name, where from, and for the number of sugar-hogsheads on board. "By heavens! That's the very thing!" rejoiced Sebright. And it was agreed that this would be our best way. We should time our arrival for early morning, or else at dusk. The craft that brought us in should be made, by a piece of unskillful management, to fall aboard the Lion, and remain alongside long enough to give us time to sneak in through an open deck-port.

The whole occurrence must be so contrived as to wear the appearance of a pure accident to the onlookers, should there be any. Shouting and an exchange of abuse on both parts should sound very true. Then the drogher, getting herself clear, would proceed innocently to the custom-house steps, where all such coasters had to report

themselves on arrival. "Never fear. We shall put in some loud and scandalous cursing," Sebright assured me. "The boys will greatly enjoy that part, I dare say."

Remained to consider the purpose of the schooner that had come out of Rio Medio to hang on our skirts. It was doubtful whether it was in our power to shake her off. Sebright was full of admiration for her sailing qualities, coupled with infinite contempt for the "lubberly gang on board."

"If I had the handling of her, now," he said, "I would take my position as near as I liked, and stick there. It seems almost as if she would do it of herself, if those imbeciles would only let her have her own way. I never yet saw a Spaniard, good or bad, that was anything of a sailor. As it is, we may maintain a distance that would make it difficult for them to see what we are about. And if not, then — why, you must take your leave of us at night."

He didn't know that, but for the dismalness of such a departure, it were not just as well. Who could tell what eyes might be watching on shore?

"You know I never pretended my plan was quite safe. But have you got another?"

I made no answer, because I had no other, and could not think of one. Incredible as it may appear, not only my heart, but my mind, also, in the awakened comprehension of my love, refused to grapple with difficulties. My thoughts raced ahead of ships and pursuing men, into a dream of cloudless felicity without end. And I don't think Sebright expected any suggestion from me. This took place during one of our busy talks — only he and I — alone in his cabin. He had been washing his hands, making ready for tea.

"Do you know," he said, turning full on me, and wiping his fingers carefully with a coarse towel — "do you know, I shouldn't wonder if that schooner were not keeping watch on us, in suspicion of just some such move on our part. 'Tis extraordinary how clever the greatest fool may show himself sometimes. Only, with their lubberly Spanish seamanship, they would expect us, probably, to make a whole ceremony of your landing: ship hove to for hours close in shore, a boat going off to land and returning, and all such pother. 'We are sure to see their little show,' they think to themselves. Eh? What? Whereas we shall keep well clear of the land when the time comes, and drop you in the dark without as much check on our way as there is in the wink of an eye. Hey?... Mind, Mr. Kemp, you take the boat out of sight up that little river, in case they should have a fancy, as they go along after us, to peep into that inlet. As I have said it wouldn't do to trust too much in any fool's folly."

And now the time was approaching; the time to awake and step forth out of the temple of sunshine and love — of whispers and silences. It had come. The night before both Williams and Sebright had been on deck, working the ship with an anxious care to take the utmost advantage of every favouring flaw in the contrary breeze. In the morning I was told there was a norther brewing. A norther is a tempestuous gale. I saw no signs of it. The realm of the sun, like the vanished one of the stars, appeared to my senses to be profoundly asleep, and breathing as gently as a child upon the ship. The Lion, too, seemed to lie wrapped in an enchanted slumber from the water-line to the tops of her upright masts. And yet she moved with the breath of the world, but

so imperceptibly that it was the coast that seemed to be nearing her like a line of low vapour blown along the water. Between Williams and Sebright Castro pointed with his one arm, and a splutter of guttural syllables fell like hail out of his lips. The other two seemed incredulous. He stamped with both his feet angrily. Finally they went below together, to look at the chart, I suppose. They came up again very fast, one after another, and stood in a row, looking on as before. Three more dissimilar human beings it would have been difficult to imagine.

Dazzling white patches, about the size of a man's hand, came out between sky and water. They grew in width, and ran together with a hummocky outline into a continuous undulation of sand-dunes. Here and there this rampart had a gap like a breach made by guns. Mrs. Williams, behind me, blew her nose faintly; her eyes were red, but she did not look at us. No eye was turned our way, and the spell of the coast was on her, too. A low, dark headland broke out to view through the dunes, and stood there conspicuous amongst the heaps of dazzling sand, like a small man frowning. A voice on deck pronounced:

"That's right. Here's his landmark. The fellow knew very well what he was talking about."

It was Sebright's voice, and Castro, strolling away triumphantly, affected to turn his back on the land. He had recognized the formation of the coast about the inlet long before anybody else could distinguish the details. His word had been doubted. He was offended, and passed us by, wrapping himself up closely. One of Seraphina's locks blew against my cheek, and this last effort of the breeze remained snared in the silken meshes of her hair.

"There's not enough wind to fill the sail of a toy boat," grumbled Sebright; "and you can't pull this heavy gig ashore with only that one-armed man at the other oar." He was sorry he could not send us off with four good rowers. The norther might be coming on before they could return to the ship, and — apart from the presence of four English sailors on the coast being sure to get talked about — there was the difficulty in getting them back on board in Havana. We could, no doubt, smuggle ourselves in; but six people would make too much of a show. On the other hand, the absence of four men out of the ship's company could not be accounted for very well to the authorities. "We can't say they all died, and we threw them overboard. It would be too startling. No; you must go alone, and leave us at the first breath of wind; and that, I fear, 'll be the first of the norther, too."

He threw his head back, and hailed, "Do you see anything of that schooner from aloft there?"

"Nothing of her, sir," answered a man perched, with dangling feet, astride the very end of the topsail yard-arm. He paused, scanned the space from under the flat of his hand, and added, shouting with deliberation, "There's — a — haze — to seaward, sir." The ship, with her decks sprinkled over with men in twos and threes, sent up to his ears a murmur of satisfaction.

If we could not see her, she could not see us. This was a favourable circumstance. To the infinite gratification of everyone on board, it had been discovered at daylight that the schooner had lost touch with us during the hours of darkness — either through unskillful handling, or from some accidental disadvantage of the variable wind. I had been informed of it, directly I showed myself on deck in the morning, by several men who had radiant grins, as if some great piece of luck had befallen them, one and all. They shared their unflagging attention between the land and the sea-horizon, pointing out to each other, with their tattooed arms, the features of the coast, nodding knowingly towards the open. At midday most of them brought out their dinners on deck, and could be seen forward, each with a tin plate in the left hand, gesticulating amicably with clasp knives. A small white handkerchief hung from Mrs. Williams' fingers, and now and then she touched her eyes lightly, one after the other. Her husband and Sebright, with a grave mien, stamped busily around the binnacle aft, changing places, making way for each other, stooping in turns to glance carefully along the compass card at the low bluff, like two gunners laying a piece of heavy ordnance for an important shot. The steward, emerging out of the companion, rang a handbell violently, and remained scared at the failure of that appeal. After waiting for a moment, he produced a further feeble tinkle, and sank down out of sight, with resignation.

A white sun, as if blazing with the pallor of fury, swung past the zenith in a profound and universal stillness. There was not a wrinkle on the sea; it presented a lustrous and glittering level, like the polished facet of a gem. In the cabin we sat down to the meal, not even pretending a desire to eat, exchanging vague phrases, hanging our heads over the empty plates. But the regular footsteps of the boatswain left in charge hesitated, stopped near the skylight. He said in an imperfectly assured voice, "Seems as if there was a steadier draught coming now." At this we rose from the table impetuously, as though he had shouted an alarm of fire, and Mrs. Williams, with a little cry, ran round to Seraphina. Leaving the two women locked in a silent embrace, the captain, Sebright and myself hurried out on deck.

Every man in the ship had done the same. Even the shiny black cook had come out of his galley, and was already comfortably seated on the rail, baring his white teeth to the sunshine.

"Just about enough to blow out a farthing dip," said Sebright, in a disappointed mutter.

He thought, however, we had better not wait for more. There would be too much presently. Some sailors hauled the boat alongside, the rest lined the rail as for a naval spectacle, and Williams stared blankly. We were waiting for Seraphina, who appeared, attended by Mrs. Williams, looking more kind, bloodless, and ascetic than ever. But my girl's cheeks glowed; her eyes sparkled audaciously. She had done up her hair in some way that made it fit her head like a cap. It became her exceedingly, and the decision of her movements, the white serenity of her brow, dazzled me as if I had never seen her before. She seemed less childlike, older, ripe for this adventure in a

new development of strength and courage. She inclined her head slowly at the gaping sailors, who had taken their caps off.

As soon as she appeared, Castro, who had been leaning against the bulwark, started up, and with a muttered "Adios, Señores," went down the overside ladder and ensconced himself in the bow of the boat. The leave-taking was hurried over. Williams gave no sign of feeling, except, perhaps, for the greater intensity of his stare, which passed beyond our shoulders in the very act of handshaking. Sebright helped Seraphina down into the boat, and ran up again nimbly. Mrs. Williams, with her slim hand held in both mine, uttered a few incoherent words — about men's promises and the happiness of women, as I thought; but, truth to say, my own suppressed excitement was too considerable for close attention. I only knew that I had given her my confidence, that complete and utter confidence which neither wisdom nor power alone, can command. And, suddenly, it occurred to me that the heiress of a splendid name and fortune, down in the boat there, had no better friend in the world than this woman, who had come to us out of the waste of the sea, opening her simple heart to our need, like a pious and naive hermit in a wilderness throwing open the door of his cell to strange wayfarers.

"Mrs. Williams," I stammered. "If we — if I — there's no saying what may happen to any of us. If she ever comes to you — if she ever is in want of help..."

"Yes, yes. Always, always — like my own daughter."

And the good woman broke down, as if, indeed, I were taking her own daughter away.

"Nonsense, Mary!" Williams advanced, muttering tremendously. "They are not going round the world. Dare say get ashore in time for supper."

He stared through her without expression, as if she had been thin air, but she seized his arm, of course, and he gave me, then, an amazingly rapid wink which, I suppose, meant that I should go...

"All right there?" asked Sebright from above, as soon as I had taken my seat in the stern sheets by the side of Seraphina. He was standing on the poop deck ready with a sign for letting go the end of our painter on deck; but before I could answer in the affirmative, Castro, ensconced forward under his hat, drew his ready blade across the rope, as it were a throat.

At once a narrow strip of water opened between the boat and the ship, and our long-prepared departure, hastened thus by half a second, seemed to strike everybody dumb with surprise, as if we had taken wings to ourselves to fly away. Hastily I grasped the tiller to give the boat a sheer, and heard a sort of loud gasp in the air above. A row of heads, posed on chins all along the rail, stared after us with unanimous fixity. Mrs. Williams averted her face on her husband's shoulder. Behind the couple, Sebright raised his cap gravely.

Our little sail filled to a breeze which was much too feeble to produce a perceptible effect on the ship, and we left behind us her towering form, as one recedes from a tall white spire on a plain. I laid the boat's head straight for the dwarf headland, marking the mouth of the inlet on the interminable range of sand-dunes. We drove on

with a smart ripple, but before we felt sufficiently settled to exchange a few words the animated sound languished suddenly, paused altogether, and, with a renewed murmur under our feet seemed to lose itself below the glassy waters.

Chapter 7

The calm had returned. The sea, changing from the warm glitter of a gem, and attuned to the grays and blacks of space, resembled a monstrous cinder under a sky of ashes.

The sun had disappeared, smothered in these clouds that had formed themselves all at once and everywhere, like some swift corruption of the upper air. For the best part of the afternoon the ship and the boat remained lying at right angles, within half a mile of each other. What light was left in the world, cut off from the source of life, seemed to sicken with a strange decay. The long stretch of sands and the sails of the motionless vessel stood out lividly pale in universal gloom. And yet the state of the atmosphere was such that we could see clear-cut the very folds in the steep face of the dunes, and the figures of the people moving on the poop of the Lion. There was always somebody there that had the aspect of watching us. Then, with some excitement, we saw them on board haul up the mainsail and lower the gig.

The four oars beat the sombre water, rising and falling apparently in the same place. She was an interminable time coming on, but as she neared us I was surprised at her dashing speed. Sebright, who steered, laid her alongside smartly, and two of his men, clambering over without a word, lowered our lug at once.

“We came to reef your sail for you. You couldn’t manage that very well with a one-armed crew,” said the young mate quietly in the enormous stillness. In his opinion, we couldn’t expect now any wind till the first squall came down. This flurry, as he called it, would send us in smoking, and he was sure it would help the ship, as well, into Havana, in about twenty-four hours. He didn’t think that it would come very heavy at first; and, once landed, we need not care how hard it blew.

He tendered me over the gunwale a pocket-flask covered with leather, and with a screwed silver stopper in the shape of a cup. It was from the captain; full of prime rum. We were pretty sure to get wet. He thrust, also, into my hands a gray woollen shawl. Mrs. Williams thought my young lady might be glad of it at night. “The dear old woman has shut herself up inside their stateroom, and is praying for you now,” he concluded. “Look alive, boys.”

His men did not answer him, but at some words he addressed to Castro, the latter, in the bows and looking at the coast, growled with a surly impatience. He was perfectly sure of the entrance. Had been in and out several times. Yes. At night, too. Sebright then turned to me. After all, it was not so difficult. The inlet bore due south from us, and the wind would come true from the north. Always did in these bursts. I had only

to keep dead before it. "The clouds will light you in at the last," he added meaningly, glancing upwards.

The two sailors, having finished reefing, hoisted, lowered, and hoisted again the yard to see that the gear ran clear, and without one look at us, stepped back into the gig, and sat down in their places. For a moment longer we lay together, touching sides. Sebright extended his hand from boat to boat.

"You are in God's care now, Kemp," he said, looking up at me, and with an unexpected depth of feeling in his tone. "Take no turn with the sheet on any account, and if you feel it coming too heavy, let fly and chance it. Did I tell you we have sighted the schooner from aloft? No? We can just make her out from the main-yard away astern under the land. That don't matter now... Señorita, I kiss your hands." He liked to air his Spanish... "Keep cool whatever happens. Dead before it — mind. And count on sixteen days from to-morrow. Well. No more. Give way, boys."

He never looked back. We watched the boat being hoisted and secured. Shortly afterwards, as we were observing the Lion shortening sail, the first of the rain descended between her and us like a lowered veil. For a time she remained mistily visible, dark and gaunt with her bared spars. The downpour redoubled; she disappeared; and our hearts were stirred to a faster beat.

The shower fell on us, around us, descending perpendicularly, with a steady force; and the thunder rolled far off, as if coming from under the sea. Sometimes the muffled rumbling stopped, and let us hear plainly the gentle hiss and the patter of the drops falling upon a vast expanse. Suddenly, mingled with a loud detonation right over our heads, a burst of light outlined under the bellying strip of our sail the pointed crown of Castro's hat, reposing on a heap of black clothing huddled in the bows. The darkness swallowed it all. I swung Seraphina in front of me, and made her sit low on the stern sheets beneath my feet. A lot of foam boiled up around the boat, and we had the sensation of having been sent flying from a catapult.

Everything was black — perfectly black. At intervals, headlong gusts of rain swept over our heads. I suppose I did keep sufficiently cool, but in every flash of lightning the wind, the sea, the clouds, the rain, and the boat appeared to rush together thundering upon the coast. The line of sands, bordered with a belt of foam, zigzagged dazzlingly upon an earth as black as the clouds; only the headland, with every vision, remained sombre and unmoved. At last it rose up right before the boat. Blue lightning streamed on a lane of tumbling waters at its foot. Was this the entrance? With the vague notion of shortening sail, I let the sheet go from my hand. There was a jerk, the crack of snapped wood, and the next flash showed me Castro emerging from the ruins of mast and sail. He uprose, hurling the wreck from him overboard, then flickered out of sight with his arm waving to the left, and I bore accordingly on the tiller. In a moment I saw him again, erect forward, with the arm pointing to the right, and I obeyed his signal. The clouds, straining with water and fire, were, indeed, lighting us on our way. A wave swelled astern, chasing us in; rocking frightfully, we glanced past a stationary mass of foam — a sandbar — breakers... It was terrible... Suddenly, the motion of the boat

changed, and the flickers of lightning fell into a small, land-locked basin. The wind tore deep furrows in it, howling and scuffling behind the dunes. Spray flew from the whole surface, the entire pool of a bay seemed to heave bodily upwards, and I saw Castro again, with his face to me this time. His black cloak was blowing straight out from his throat, his mouth yawned wide; he shouted directions, but in an instant darkness sealed my eyes with its impenetrable impress. It was impossible to steer now; the boat swung and reeled where she listed; a violent shock threw me sideways off my seat. I felt her turning over, and, gathering Seraphina in my arms, I leaped out before she capsized. I leaped clear out into shallow water.

I should never in my life have thought myself capable of such a feat, and yet I did it with assurance, with no effort that I can remember. More than that — I managed, after the leap, to keep my feet in the clinging, staggering clutch of water charged with sand, which swirled heavily about my knees. It kept on hurling itself at my legs from behind, while I waded across the narrow strip of sand with an inspired firmness of step defying all the power of the elements. I felt the harder ground at last, but not before I had caught a momentary glimpse of a black and bulky object tumbling over and over in the advancing and withdrawing liquid flurry of the beach.

“Sit still here on the ground,” I shouted to Seraphina, though flights of spray enveloped us completely. “I am going back for Castro.”

I faced about, putting my head down. He had been undoubtedly knocked over; and an old man, with only one hand to help himself with, ran a very serious risk of being buffeted into insensibility, and thus coming to his death in some four feet of water. The violent glare disclosed a body, entangled in a cloak, rolling about helplessly between land and water, as it were. I dashed on in the dark; a wave went over my head as I stooped, nearly waist-deep, groping. His rotary motion, in that smother, made it extremely difficult to obtain any sort of hold. A little more, and he would have knocked my legs from under me, but it was as if my grim determination were by itself of a saving nature. He submitted to being hauled up the beach, passively, like a sack. It was a heavy drag on the sand; I felt him bump behind me on the edge of the harder ground, and a deluge fell uninterruptedly from above. He lay prone on his face, like a corpse, between Seraphina and myself. We could not remain there, however.

But where to go? What to do? In what direction to look for a refuge? Was there any shelter near by? How were we to reach it? How were we to move at all? No doubt he had expired; and the earth, swept, deluged, glimmering fiercely and devastated with an awful uproar, appeared no longer habitable. A thunder-clap seemed to crash new life into him; the world flared all round, as if turning to a spark, and he was seen sitting up dazedly, like one called up from the dead. Through it all he had preserved his hat.

It was fixed firmly down under his chin with a handkerchief, the side rims over his ears like flaps, and, for the rest, presenting the appearance of a coal-scuttle bonnet behind, as well as in front. We followed its peculiar aspect. Driving on under this indestructible headgear, he flickered in and out of the world, while, with entwined arms and leaning back against the wind with all our might, Seraphina and myself were

borne along in his train. He knew of a shelter; and this knowledge, perhaps, and also his evident familiarity with the topography of the country, made him appear indomitably confident in the storm.

A small plain of coarse grass was bounded by the steep spur of a rise. To the left a little river would burst, all at once, in all its windings into a bluish sulphurous glow; and between the crashes of thunder there was heard the long-drawn, whistling swish of the rushes and cane-brakes springing on the boggy ground. We skirted the rise. The rain beat against it; the lightning showed its streaming and furrowed surface. We stumbled in the gusts. We felt under our feet, mud, sand, rocky inequalities of the ground, and the moving stones in the bed of a torrent, which broke headlong against our ankles. The entrance of a deep ravine opened.

Its lower sides palpitated with the ceaseless tossing of dwarf trees and bushes; and, motionless above the sombre tumult of the slopes, the monumental stretch of bare rock rose on high, level at the top, and emitting a ghastly yellow sheen in the flashes. The thunderclaps rolled ponderously between the narrowing walls of that chasm, that was all aflame one moment, and all black the next. A torrent springing at its head, and dashing with inaudible fury along the bottom, seemed to gleam placidly amongst the rounded forms of inky bushes and pale boulders below our path. Enormous eddies of wind from above made us stop short and totter breathless, clinging to each other.

Castro sustained Seraphina on the other side; but frequently he had to leave us and move ahead, looking for the way. There was, in fact, a half-obliterated path winding along the less steep of the two sides; and we struggled after our guide with the unthinking fortitude of despair. He was being disclosed to us so suddenly, extinguished so swiftly, that he appeared, always, as if motionless and posturing in a variety of climbing attitudes. The rise of the bottom was very steep, and the last hundred yards really stiff. We did them practically on our hands and knees. The dislodged stones bounded away from under our feet, unheard, like puff-balls.

At the top I tried to make of my body a shelter for Seraphina. The wind howled and roared over us. "Up! Vamos! The worst is yet before us," shrieked Castro in my ear.

What could he mean by this? The play of lightning opened to view only a vast and rolling upland. Fire flowed in sheets undulating with the expanses of long grass amongst the trees, here and there, in coal-black clumps, and flashed violently against a low edge of forests very dark and far away.

"Let us go!" he cried. "Courage, Señorita!"

Courage! The populace said of her that she had never needed to put her foot to the ground. If courage consists, for a being so tender, in toiling and enduring without faltering and plaint, — even to the very limit of physical power, — then she was the most courageous woman in the world, as she was the most charming, most faithful, most generous, and the most worthy of love. I tried not to think of her racked limbs, for the very pain and pity of it. We retraced our steps, but now following the edge of that precipice out of which we had emerged. I had peremptorily insisted on carrying

her. She put her arms round my neck and, to my uplifted heart, she weighed no heavier than a feather. Castro, grasping my arm, guided my steps and gave me support against the wind.

There was a distinct lull. Even the thunder had rolled away, dwindling to a deep mutter. Castro fell on his knees in front of me.

“It is here,” I heard him scream.

I set Seraphina down. A hooked dart of fire tore in two the thick canopy of clouds. I started back from the edge.

“What! Here?” I yelled.

“Señor — Si! There is a cavern below...”

I had seen a ledge clinging to the face of the rock.

It was a cornice inclining downwards upon the wall of the precipice, as you see, sometimes, a flight of stairs built against the outside wall of a house. And it resembled a stair roughly, with long, sloping steps, wet with rain.

“Por Dios, Señor, do not let us stay to think here, or we shall perish in this tempest.”

He howled, gesticulated, shrieked with all the strength of his lungs. He knew these tornadoes. Brute beasts would be found lying dead in the fields in the morning. This was the beginning only. The lightning showed his kneeling form, the eager upturned face, and a finger pointing urgently into the abyss. The wind was nothing! Nothing to what would come after. As he shrieked these words I was feeling the crust of the earth vibrate, absolutely vibrate, under the soles of my feet, with the sound of thunder.

He unfastened his cloak, and was seen to struggle above his head with the hovering and flapping cloth, as though he had captured a black and pugnacious bird. We mastered at last a corner each, and then we started to twist the whole, as if to wring the water out. We produced, thus, a sort of short rope, the thickness of a cable, and the descent began.

“Do not look behind you. Do not look,” Castro screeched.

The first downward steps were terrible, but as soon as our heads had sunk below the level of the plain it was better, for we had turned about to the rock, moving sideways, cautiously, one step at a time, as if inspecting its fractured roughness for traces of a mysterious inscription. Castro, with one end of the twisted cloak in his hand, went first; I held the other; and between us, Seraphina, the rope at her back, imitated our movements, with her loosened hair flying high in the wind, and her pale, rigid head as if deaf to the crashes. I saw the drawn stillness of her face, her dilated eyes staring within three inches of the strata. The strain on our prudence was tremendous. The knowledge of the precipice behind must have affected me. Explain it as you will, several times during that descent I felt my brain slip away from my control, and suggest a desire to fling myself over backwards. The twigs of the bushes, growing a little below the outer edge of the path, swished at my calves. Castro stopped. The cornice ended as a broken stairway hangs upon nothing. A tall, narrow arch stood back in the rock, with a sill three feet high at least. Castro clambered over; his head and torso, when he

turned about, were lighted up blindingly between the inner walls at every flash. Seeing me lay hold of Seraphina, he yelled:

“Señor, mind! It’s death if you stagger back.”

I lifted her up, and put her over like a child; and, no sooner in myself, felt my strength leave all my limbs as water runs out of an overturned vessel. I could not have lifted up a child’s doll then. Directly, with a wild little laugh, she said to me:

“Juan — I shall never dare come out.”

I hugged her silently to my breast.

Castro went ahead. It was a narrow passage; our elbows touched the sides all the way. He struck at his flint regularly, sparks streamed down from his hand; we felt a freshness, a sense of space, as though we had come into another world. His voice directed us to turn to the left, then cried in the dark, “Stand still.” A blue gleam darted after us, and retired without having done anything against the tenebrous body of gloom, and the thunder rolled far in, unobstructed, in leisurely, organ-like peals, as if through an amazingly vast emptiness of a temple. But where was Castro? We heard snappings, rustlings, mutters; sparks streamed, now here, now there. We dared not move. There might have been steep ridges — deep holes in that cavern. And suddenly we discovered him on all-fours, puffing out his cheeks above a small flame kindled in a heap of dry sticks and leaves.

It was an abode of darkness, enormous, without sonority. Feeble currents of air, passing on our faces, gave us a feeling of being in the open air on a night more black than any known night had been before. One’s voice lost itself in there without resonance, as if on a plain; the smoke of our blaze drove aslant, scintillating with red sparks, and went trailing afar, as if under the clouds of a starless sky. Ultimately, it must have escaped through some imperceptible crevices in the roof of rock. In one place, only, the light of the fire illuminated a small part of the rugged wall, where the shadows of our bodies would surge up, repeating our movements, and suddenly be gone from our sight. Everywhere else, pressing upon the reflection of the flames, the blind darkness of the vault might have extended away for miles and miles.

Castro thought it probable. He made me observe the incline of the floor. It sloped down deep and far. For miles, no doubt. Nobody could tell; no one had seen the end of it. This cavern had been known of old. This brushwood, these dead leaves, that would make a couch for her Excellency, had been stored for years — perhaps by men who had died long ago. Look at the dry rot. These large piles of branches were found stacked up when he first beheld this place. Caramba! What toil! What fatigue! Let us thank the saints, however.

Nevertheless, he shook his head at the strangeness of it. His cloak, spread out wide, was drying in the light, while he busied himself with his hat, turning it before the blaze in both hands, tenderly; and his tight little figure, lit up in front from head to foot, steamed from every limb. His round, plump shoulders and gray-shock head smoked quietly at the top. Suddenly, the fine mesh of wrinkles on his face ran together,

shrinking like a torn cobweb; a spasmodic sound, quite new to me, was heard. He had laughed.

The warmth of the fire had penetrated our chilled bodies with a feeling of comfort and repose. Williams' flask was empty; and this was a new Castro, mellowed, discourative, almost genial. It was obvious to me that, had it not been for him, we two, lost and wandering in the storm, should have died from exposure and exhaustion — from some accident, perhaps. On the other hand I had indubitably saved his life, and he had already thanked me in high-flown language; very grave, but exaggerating the horrors of his danger, as a woman might have done for the better expression of gratitude. He had been greatly shocked. Spaniards, as a race, have never, for all their conquests, been on intimate terms with the sea. As individuals I have often observed in them, especially in the lower classes, a sort of dread, a dislike of salt water, mingled with contempt and fear.

Castro, lifting up his right arm, protested that I had given a proof of very noble devotion in rushing back for an old man into that black water. Ough! He shuddered. He had given himself up — *por Dios!* He hinted that, at his age, he could not have cared much for life; but then, drowning in the sea was a death abhorrent to an old Christian. You died brutally — without absolution, and unable, even, to think of your sins. He had had his mouth filled with horrid, bitter sand, too. *Tfui!* He gave me a thousand thanks. But these English were wonderful in their way... Ah! *Caramba!* They were...

A large protuberance of the rocky floor had been roughly chipped into the semblance of a seat, God only knows by what hands and in what forgotten age. Seraphina's inclined pose, her torn dress, the wet tresses lying over her shoulders, her homeless aspect, made me think of a beautiful and miserable gipsy girl drying her hair before a fire. A little foot advanced, gleamed white on the instep in front of the ruddy glare; her clasped fingers nursed one raised knee; and, shivering no longer, her head drooping in still profile, she listened to us, frowning thoughtfully upon the flames.

In the guise of a beggar-maid, and fair, like a fugitive princess of romance, she sat concealed in the very heart of her dominions. This cavern belonged to her, as Castro remarked, and the bay of the sea, and the earth above our heads, the rolling upland, herds of cattle, fields of sugar-cane — even as far as the forest away there; the forest itself, too. And there were on that estate, alone, over two hundred Africans, he was able to tell us. He boasted of the wealth of the Riegos. Her Excellency, probably, did not know such details. Two hundred — certainly. The estate of Don Vincente Salazar was on the other side of the river. Don Vincente was at present suffering the indignity of a prison for a small matter of a quarrel with another caballero — who had died lately — and all, he understood, through the intrigues of the prior of a certain convent; the uncle, they said, of the dead caballero. Bah! There was something to get. These fat friars were like the lean wolves of Russia — hungry for everything they could see. Never enough, *Cuerpo de Dios!* Never enough! Like their good friend who helped them in their iniquities, the Juez O'Brien, who had been getting rich for years on the

sublime generosity of her Excellency's blessed father. In the greatness of his nobility, Don Balthasar of holy memory had every right to be obstinate... Basta! He would speak no more; only there is a saying in Castile that fools and obstinate people make lawyers rich...

"Vuestra Señoria," he cried, checking himself, slapping his breast penitently, "deign to forgive me. I have been greatly exalted by the familiarity of the two last men of your house — allowed to speak freely because of my fidelity... Alas! Alas!"

Seraphina, on the other side of the fire, made a vague gesture, and took her chin in her hand without looking at him.

"Patience," he mumbled to himself very audibly. "He is rich, this picaro, O'Brien. But there is, also, a proverb — that no riches shall avail in the day of vengeance."

Noticing that we had begun to whisper together, he threw himself before the fire, and was silent.

"Promise me one thing, Juan," murmured Seraphina.

I was kneeling by the side of her seat.

"By all that's holy," I cried, "I shall force him to come out and fight fair — and kill him as an English gentleman may."

"Not that! Not that!" she interrupted me. She did not mean me to do that. It was what she feared. It would be delivering myself into that man's hands. Did I think what that meant? It would be delivering her, too, into that man's power. She would not survive it. And if I desired her to live on, I must keep out of O'Brien's clutches.

"In my thoughts I have bound my life to yours, Juan, so fast that the stroke which cuts yours, cuts mine, too. No death can separate us."

"No," I said.

And she took my head in her hands, and looked into my eyes.

"No more mourning," she whispered rapidly. "No more. I am too young to have a lover's grave in my life — and too proud to submit..."

"Never," I protested ardently. "That couldn't be."

"Therefore look to it, Juan, that you do not sacrifice your life which is mine, either to your love — or — or — to revenge." She bowed her head; the falling hair concealed her face. "For it would be in vain."

"The cloak is perfectly dry now, Señorita," said Castro, reclining on his elbow on the edge of the darkness.

We two stepped out towards the entrance, leaving her on her knees, in silent prayer, with her hands clasped on her forehead, and leaning against the rugged wall of rock. Outside, the earth, enveloped in fire and uproar, seemed to have been given over to the fury of a devil.

Yes. She was right. O'Brien was a formidable and deadly enemy. I wished ourselves on board the *Lion* chaperoned by Mrs. Williams, and in the middle of the Atlantic. Nothing could make us really safe from his hatred but the vastness of the ocean. Meantime we had a shelter, for that night, at least, in this cavern that seemed big

enough to contain, in its black gloom of a burial vault, all the dust and passions and hates of a nation...

Afterwards Castro and I sat murmuring by the diminished fire. He had much to say about the history of this cave. There was a tradition that the ancient buccaneers had held their revels in it. The stone on which the *senorita* had been sitting was supposed to have been the throne of their chief. A ferocious band they were, without the fear of God or devil — mostly English. The Rio Medio picaroons had used this cavern, occasionally, up to a year or so ago. But there were always ugly affairs with the people on the estate — the *vaqueros*. In his younger days Don Balthasar, having whole leagues of grass land here, had introduced a herd of cattle; then, as the Africans are useless for that work, he had ordered some peons from Mexico to be brought over with their families — ignorant men, who hardly knew how to make the sign of the cross. The quarrels had been about the cattle, which the *Lugareños* killed for meat. The peons rode over them, and there were many wounds on both sides. Then, the last time a Rio Medio schooner was lying here (after looting a ship outside), there was some gambling going on (they played round this very stone), and Manuel — (Si, Señor, this same Manuel the singer — *Bestia!*) — in a dispute over the stakes, killed a peon, striking him unexpectedly with a knife in the throat. No vengeance was taken for this, because the *Lugareños* sailed away at once; but the widow made a great noise, and some rumours came to the ears of Don Balthasar himself — for he, Castro, had been honoured with a mission to visit the estate. That was even the first occasion of Manuel's hate for him — Castro. And, as usual, the Intendente after all settled the matter as he liked, and nothing was done to Manuel. Don Balthasar was old, and, besides, too great a noble to be troubled with the doings of such vermin... And Castro began to yawn.

At daybreak — he explained — he would start for the hacienda early, and return with mules for Seraphina and myself. The buildings of the estate were nearly three leagues away. All this tract of the country on the side of the sea was very deserted, the sugar-cane fields worked by the slaves lying inland, beyond the habitations. Here, near the coast, there were only the herds of cattle ranging the savannas and the peons looking after them, but even they sometimes did not come in sight of the sea for weeks together. He had no fear of being seen by anybody on his journey; we, also, could start without fear in daylight, as soon as he brought the mules. For the rest, he would make proper arrangements for secrecy with the husband of Seraphina's nurse — Enrico, he called him: a silent Galician; a graybeard worthy of confidence.

One of his first cares had been to grub out of his soaked clothes a handful of tobacco, and now he turned over the little drying heap critically. He hunted up a fragment of maize leaf somewhere upon his bosom. His face brightened. "Bueno," he muttered, very pleased.

"Señor — good-night," he said, more humanized than I had supposed possible; or was it only that I was getting to know him better? "And thanks. There's that in life which even an old tired man... Here I, Castro... old and sad, Señor. Yes, Señor — nothing of mine in all the world — and yet... But what a death! Ouch! the brute

water... Caramba! Altogether improper for a man who has escaped from a great many battles and the winter of Russia... The snow, Señor...”

He drowsed, garrulous, with the blackened end of his cigarette hanging from his lower lip, swayed sideways — and let himself go over gently, pillowing his head on the stump of his arm. The thin, viperish blade, stuck upwards from under his temple, gleamed red before the sinking fire.

I raised a handful of flaring twigs to look at Sera-phina. A terrible night raged over the land; the inner arch of the opening growled, winking bluishly time after time, and, like an enchanted princess enveloped in a beggar’s cloak, she was lying profoundly asleep in the heart of her dominions.

Chapter 8

The first thing I noted, on opening my eyes, was that Castro had gone already; I was annoyed. He might have called me. However, we had arranged everything the evening before. The broad day, penetrating through the passage, diffused a semicircle of twilight over the flooring. It extended as far as the emplacement of the fire, black and cold now with a gray heap of ashes in the middle. Farther away in the darkness, beyond the reach of light, Seraphina on her bed of leaves did not stir. But what was that hat doing there? Castro's hat. It asserted its existence more than it ever did on the head of its master; black and rusty, like a battered cone of iron, reposing on a wide flange near the ashes. Then he was not gone. He would not start to walk three leagues, bare-headed. He would appear presently; and I waited, vexed at the loss of time. But he did not appear. "Castro," I cried in an undertone. The leaves rustled; Seraphina sat up.

We were pleased to be with each other in an inexpugnable retreat, to hear our voices untinged by anxiety; and, going to the outer end of the short passage, we breathed with joy the pure air. The tops of the bushes below glittered with drops of rain, the sky was clear, and the sun, to us invisible, struck full upon the face of the rock on the other side of the ravine. A great bird soared, all was light and silence, and we forgot Castro for a time. I threw my legs over the sill, and sitting on the stone surveyed the cornice. The bright day robbed the ravine of half its horrors. The path was rather broad, though there was a frightful sheer drop of ninety feet at least. Two men could have walked abreast on that ledge, and with a hand-rail one would have thought nothing of it. The most dangerous part yet was at the entrance, where it ended in a rounded projection not quite so wide as the rest. I bantered Seraphina as to going out. She said she was ready. She would shut her eyes, and take hold of my hand. Englishmen, she had heard, were good at climbing. Their heads were steady. Then we became silent. There were no signs of Castro. Where could he have gone? What could he be doing? It was unimaginable.

I grew nervous with anxiety at last, and begged Seraphina to go in. She obeyed without a word, and I remained just within the entrance, watching. I had no means to tell the time, but it seemed to me that an hour or two passed. Hadn't we better, I thought, start at once on foot for the hacienda? I did not know the way, but by descending the ravine again to the sea, and walking along the bank of the little river, I was sure to reach it. The objection to this was that we should miss Castro. Hang Castro! And yet there was something mysterious and threatening in his absence. Could he — could he have stepped out for some reason in the dark, perhaps, and tumbled

off the cornice? I had seen no traces of a slip — there would be none on the rock; the twigs of the growth below the edge would spring back, of course. But why should he fall? The footing was good — however, a sudden attack of vertigo... I tried to look at it from every side. He was not a somnambulist, as far as I knew. And there was nothing to eat — I felt hungry already — or drink. The want of water would drive us out very soon to the spring bubbling out at the head of the ravine, a mile in the open. Then why not go at once, drink, and return to our lair as quickly as possible?

But I did not like to think of her going up and down the cornice. I remembered that we had a flask, and went in hastily to look for it. First, I looked near the hat; then, Seraphina and I, bent double with our eyes on the ground examined every square inch of twilight; we even wandered a long way into the darkness, feeling about with our hands. It was useless! I called out to her, and then we desisted, and coming together, wondered what might have become of the thing. He had taken it — that was clear.

But if, as one might suppose, he had taken it away to get some water for us, he ought to have been back long before. I was beginning to feel rather alarmed, and I tried to consider what we had better do. It was necessary to learn, first, what had become of him. Staring out of the opening, in my perplexity, I saw, on the other side of the ravine, the lower part of a man from his waist to his feet.

By crouching down at once, I brought his head into view. This was not Castro. He wore a black sombrero, and on his shoulder carried a gun. He turned his back on the ravine, and began to walk straight away, sinking from my sight till only his hat and shoulders remained visible. He lifted his arm then — straight up — evidently as a signal, and waited. Presently another head and shoulders joined him, and they glided across my line of sight together. But I had recognized their bandit-like aspect with infinite consternation. Lu-garenos!

I caught Seraphina's hand. My first thought was that we should have to steal out of the cavern with the first coming of darkness. Castro must be lying low in hiding somewhere above. The thing was plain. We must try to make our way to the hacienda under the cover of the night, unseen by those two men. Evidently they were emissaries sent from Rio Medio to watch this part of the coast against our possible landing. I was to be hunted down, it seems: and I reproached myself bitterly with the hardships I was bringing upon her continually. Thinking of the fatigues she had undergone — (I did not think of dangers — that was another thing — the romance of dying together like all the lovers in the tradition of the world) — I shook with rage and exasperation. The firm pressure of her hands calmed me. She was content. But what if they took it into their heads to come into the cavern?

The emptiness of the blue sky above the sheer yellow rock opposite was frightful. It was a mere strip, stretched like a luminous bandage over our eyes. They were, perhaps, even now on their way round the head of the ravine. I had no weapon except the butt of my pistol. The charges had been spoilt by the salt water, of course, and I had been tempted to fling it out of my belt, but for the thought of obtaining some powder somewhere. And those men I had seen were armed. At once we abandoned the

neighbourhood of the entrance, plunging straight away into the profound obscurity of the cave. The rocky ground under our feet had a gentle slope, then dipped so sharply as to surprise us; and the entrance, diminishing at our backs, shone at last no larger than the entrance of a mouse-hole. We made a few steps more, gropingly. The bead of light disappeared altogether when we sat down, and we remained there hand-in-hand and silent, like two frightened children placed at the centre of the earth. There was not a sound, not a gleam. Sera-phina bore the crushing strain of this perfect and black stillness in an almost heroic immobility; but, as to me, it seemed to lie upon my limbs, to embarrass my breathing like a numbness full of dread; and to shake that feeling off I jumped up repeatedly to look at that luminous bead, that point of light no bigger than a pearl in the infinity of darkness. And once, just as I was looking, it shut and opened at me slowly, like the deliberate drooping and rising of the lid upon a white eyeball.

Somebody had come in.

We watched side by side. Only one. Would he go out? The point of light, like a white star setting in a coal-black firmament, remained uneclipsed. Whoever had entered was in no haste to leave. Moreover, we had no means of telling what another obscuring of the light might mean; a departure or another arrival. There were two men about, as we knew; and it was even possible that they had entered together in one wink of the light, treading close upon each other's heels. We both felt the sudden great desire to know for certain. But, especially, we needed to find out if perchance this was not Castro who had returned. We could not afford to lose his assistance. And should he conclude, we were out — should he risk himself outside again, in order to find us and be discovered himself, and thus lost to us when we felt him so necessary? And the doubt came. If this man was Castro, why didn't he penetrate further, and shout our names? He ought to have been intelligent enough to guess... And it was this doubt that, making suspense intolerable, put us in motion.

We circled widely in that subterranean darkness, which, unlike the darkest night on the surface of the earth, had no suggestion of shape, no horizon, and seemed to have no more limit than the darkness of infinite space. On this floor of solid rock we moved with noiseless steps, like a pair of timid phantoms. The spot of light grew in size, developed a shape — stretching from a pearly bead to a silvery thread; and, approaching from the side, we scanned from afar the circumscribed region of twilight about the opening. There was a man in it. We contemplated for a time his rounded back, his drooping head. It was gray. The man was Castro. He sat rocking himself sorrowfully over the ashes. He was mourning for us. We were touched by this silent faithfulness of grief.

He started when I put my hand on his shoulder, looked up, then, instead of giving any signs of joy, dropped his head again.

“You managed to avoid them, Castro?” I said.

“Señor, behold. Here I am. I, Castro.”

His tone was gloomy, and after sitting still for a while under our gaze, he slapped his forehead violently. He was in his tantrums, I judged, and, as usual, angry with me —

the cause of every misfortune. He was upset and annoyed beyond reason, as I thought, by this new difficulty. It meant delay — a certain measure of that sort of danger of which we had thought ourselves free for a time — night travelling for Seraphina. But I had an idea to save her this. We did not all want to go. Castro could start, alone, for the hacienda after dark, and bring, besides the mules, half a dozen peons with him for an escort. There was nothing really to get so upset about. The danger would have been if he had let himself be caught. But he had not. As to his temper, I knew my man; he had been amiable too long. But by this time we were so sure of his truculent devotion that Seraphina spoke gently to him, saying how anxious we had been — how glad we were to see him safe with us... He would not be conciliated easily, it seemed, and let out only a blood-curdling dismal groan. Without looking at her, he tried hastily to make a cigarette. He was very clever at it generally, rolling it with one hand on his knee somehow; but this time all his limbs seemed to shake, he lost several pinches of tobacco, dropped the piece of maize leaf. Seraphina, stooping over his shoulder, took it up, twisted the thing swiftly. "Take, amigo," she said.

He was looking up at her, as if struck dumb, roiling his eye wildly. He jumped up. "You — Señorita! For a miserable old man! You break my heart."

And with long strides he disappeared in the darkness, leaving us wondering.

We sat side by side on the couch of leaves. With Castro there I felt we were quite equal to dealing with the two Lugareños if they had the unlucky idea of intruding upon us. Indeed, a vigilant man, posted on one side of the end of the passage, could have disputed the entrance against ten, twenty, almost any number, as long as he kept his strength and had something heavy enough to knock them over. Faint sounds reached me, as if at a great distance Castro had been shouting to himself. I called to him. He did not answer, but unexpectedly his short person showed itself in the brightest part of the light.

"Señor!" he called out with a strange intonation. I got up and went to him. He seemed to be listening intently with his ear turned to the opening. Then suddenly:

"Look at me, Señor. Am I Castro — the same Castro? old and friendless?"

He stood biting his forefinger and looking up at me from under his knitted eyebrows. I didn't know what to say. What was this nonsense?

He ejaculated a sort of incomprehensible babble, and, passing by me, rushed towards Seraphina; she sat up, startled, on her couch of leaves. Falling before her on his plump knees, he seized her hand, pressed it against his ragged moustache.

"Excellency, forgive me! No — no forgiveness! Ha! old man! Ha — thou old man..."

He bowed before her shadowy figure, that sustained the pale oval of the face, till his forehead struck the rock. Plunging his hand into the ashes, he poured a fistful with inarticulate low cries over his gray hairs; and the agitation of that obese little body on its knees had a lamentable and grotesque inconsequence, as inexplicable in itself as the sorrow of a madman. Full of wonder before his abject collapse, she murmured:

"What have you done?"

He tried to fling himself upon her feet, but my hand was in his collar, and after an unmerciful shaking, I sat him down by main force. He gulped, blinked the whites of his eyes, then, in a whisper full of rage:

“Horror, shame, misery, and malediction; I have betrayed you.”

At once she said soothingly, “Tomasr I do not believe this”; while I thought to myself: How? Why? For what reason? In what manner betrayed? How was it possible? And, if so, why did he come back to us? But, as things stood, he would never dare approach a Lugareño. If he had, they would never have let him go again.

“You told them we were here?” I asked, so perfectly incredulous that I was not at all surprised to hear him protest, by all the saints, that he never did — never would do. Never. Never... But why should he? Was he the prey of some strange hallucination? Rocking himself, he struck his breast with his clenched hand, then suddenly caught at his hair and remained perfectly motionless. Minutes passed; this despairing stillness inspired in me a feeling of awe at last — the awe of something inconceivable. My head buzzed so with the effort to think that I had the illusions of faint murmurs in the cave, the very shadows of murmurs. And all at once a real voice — his voice — burst out fearfully rapid and voluble.

He had really gone out to get a provision of water. Waking up early, he saw us sleeping, and felt a great pity for the *senorita*. As to the *caballero* — his saviour from drowning, alas! — the *senorita* would need every ounce of his strength. He would let us sleep till his return from the spring; and, there being a blessed freshness in the air, he caught up the flask and started bare-headed. The sun had just risen. Would to God he had never seen it! After plunging his face in the running water, he remained on his knees and busied himself in rinsing and filling the flask. The torrent, gushing with force, made a loud noise, and after he had done screwing the top on, he was about to rise, when, glancing about carelessly, he saw two men leaning on their *escopetas* and looking at him in perfect silence. They were standing right over him; he knew them well; one they called *El Rubio*; the other, the little one, was José — squinting José. They said nothing; nothing at all. With a sudden and mighty effort he preserved his self-command, affected unconcern and, instead of getting up, only shifted his pose to a sitting position, took off his shoes and stockings, and proceeded to bathe his feet. But it was as if a blazing fire had been kindled in his breast, and a tornado had been blowing in his head.

He could not tell whence these two had come, with what object, or how much they knew. They might have been only messengers from *Rio Medio* to *Havana*. They generally went in couples. If Manuel had escaped alive out of the sea, everything was known in *Rio Medio*. From where he sat he beheld the empty, open sea over the dunes, but the edge of the upland, cleft by many ravines (of which the one we had ascended was the deepest), concealed from him the little basin and the inlet. He was certain these men had not come up that way. They had approached him over the plain. But there was more than one way by which the upland could be reached from below. The thoughts rushed round and round his head. He remembered that our boat must be

floating or lying stranded in the little bay, and resolved, in case of necessity, to say that we two were dead, that we had been drowned.

It was El Rubio who put the very question to him, in an insolent tone, and sitting on the ground out of his reach, with his gun across his knees. His long knife ready in his hand, squinting José remained standing over Castro. Those two men nodded to each other significantly at the intelligence. He perceived that they were more than half disposed to credit his story. They had nearly been drowned themselves pursuing that accursed heretic of an Englishman. When, from their remarks, he learned that the schooner was in the bay, he began putting on his shoes, though the hope of making a sudden dash for his life down the ravine abandoned him.

The schooner had been run in at night during the gale, and in such distress that they let her take the ground. She was not injured, however, and some of them were preparing to haul her off. Our boat, as I conceived, after bumping along the beach, had drifted within the influence of the current created by the little river, or else by the water forced into the basin by the tempest, seeking to escape, and had been carried out towards the inlet. She was seen at daylight, knocking about amongst the breakers, bottom up, and in such shallow water that three or four men wading out knee-deep managed to turn her over. They had found Mrs. Williams' woollen shawl and my cap floating underneath. At the same time the broken mast and sail were made out, tossing upon the waves, not very far off to seaward. That the boat had been in the bay at all did not seem to have occurred to them. It had been concluded that she had capsized outside the entrance. It was very possible that we had been drowned under her. Castro hastened to confirm the idea by relating how he had been clinging to the bottom of the boat for a long time. Thus he had saved himself, he declared.

"Manuel will be glad," observed El Rubio then, with an evil laugh. And for a long time nobody said a word.

El Rubio, cross-legged, was observing him with the eyes of a basilisk, but Castro swore a great oath that, as to himself, he showed no signs of fear. He looked at the water gushing from the rock, bubbling up, sparkling, running away in a succession of tiny leaps and falls. Why should he fear? Was he not old, and tired, and without any hope of peace on earth? What was death? Nothing. It was absolutely nothing. It comes to all. It was rest after much vain trouble — and he trusted that, through his devotion to the Mother of God, his sins would be forgiven after a short time in purgatory. But, as he had made up his mind not to fall into Manuel's hands, he resolved that presently he would stab himself to the heart, where he sat — over this running water. For it would not be like a suicide. He was doomed, and surely God did not want his body to be tormented by such a devil as Manuel before death.

He would lean far over before he struck his faithful blade into his breast, so as to fall with his face in the water. It looked deliciously cool, and the sun was heavy on his bare head. Suddenly, El Rubio sprang to his feet, saying:

"Now, José."

It is clear that these ruffians stood in awe of his blade. In their cowardly hearts they did not think it quite safe (being only two to one) to try and disarm that old man. They backed away a step or two, and, levelling their pieces, suddenly ordered him to get up and walk before. He threw at them an obscene word. He thought to himself, "Buena! They will blow my head off my shoulders." No emotion stirred in him, as if his blood had already ceased to run in his veins. They remained, all three, in a state of suspended animation, but at last El Rubio hissed through his teeth with vexation, and grunted:

"Attention, José. Take aim. We will break his legs and take away the sting of this old scorpion."

Castro's blood felt chilly in his limbs, but instead of planting his knife in his breast, he spoke up to ask them where, supposing he consented, they wished to conduct him.

"To Manuel — our captain. He would like to embrace you before you die," said El Rubio, advancing a stride nearer, his gun to his shoulder. "Get up! March!"

And Castro found himself on his feet, looking straight into the black holes of the barrels.

"Walk!" they exclaimed together, stepping upon him.

The time had come to die.

"Ha! Canalla!" he said.

They made a menacing clamour, "Walk viejo, traitor; walk."

"Señorita — I walked." The heartrending effort of the voice, the trembling of this gray head, the sobs under the words, oppressed our breast with dismay and dread. Ardently he would have us believe that at this juncture he was thinking of us only — of us wondering, alone, ignorant of danger, and hidden blindly under the earth. His purpose was to provoke the two Luga-reños to shoot, so that we should be warned by the reports. Besides, an opportunity for escape might yet present itself in some most unlikely way, perhaps at the very last moment. Had he not his own life in his own hands? He cared not for it. It was in his power to end it at any time. And there would be dense thickets on the way; long grass where one could plunge suddenly — who knows! And overgrown ravines where one could hide — creep under the bushes — escape — and return with help... But when he faced the plains its greatness crushed his poor strength. The uncovered vastness imprisoned him as effectually as a wall. He knew himself for what he was: an old man, short of breath, heavy of foot; nevertheless he walked on hastily, his eyes on the ground. The footsteps of his captors sounded behind him, and he tried to edge towards the ravine. When nearly above the opening of the cavern he would, he thought, swerve inland, and dash off as fast as he was able. Then they would have to fire at him; we would be sure to hear the shots, the warning would be clear... and suddenly, looking up, he saw that a small band of Lugareños, having just ascended the brow of the upland, were coming to meet him. Now was the time to get shot; he turned sharply, and began to run over that great plain towards a distant clump of trees.

Nobody fired at him. He heard only the mingled jeers and shouts of the two men behind, "Quicker, Castro; quicker!" They followed him, holding their sides. Those ahead had already spread themselves out over the plain, yelling to each other, and were converging upon him. That was the time to stop, and with one blow fall dead at their feet. He doubled round in front of Manuel, who stood waving his arms and screeching orders, and ran back towards the ravine. The plain rang with furious shouts. They rushed at him from every side. He would throw himself over. It was a race for the precipice. He won it.

I suppose he found it not so easy to die, to part with the warmth of sunshine, the taste of food; to break that material servitude to life, contemptible as a vice, that binds us about like a chain on the limbs of hopeless slaves. He showered blows upon his chest, sitting before us, he battered with his fist at the side of his head till I caught his arm. We could always sell our lives dearly, I said. He would have to defend the entrance with me. We two could hold it till it was blocked with their corpses.

He jumped up with a derisive shriek; a cloud of ashes flew from under his stumble, and he vanished in the darkness with mad gesticulations.

"Their corpses — their corpses — their... Ha! ha! ha!"

The snarling sound died away; and I understood, then, what meant this illusion of ghostly murmurs that once or twice had seemed to tremble in the narrow region of gray light around the arch. The sunshine of the earth, and the voices of men, expired on the threshold of the eternal obscurity and stillness in which we were imprisoned, as if in a grave with inexorable death standing between us and the free spaces of the world.

Chapter 9

For it meant that. Imprisoned! Castro's derisive shriek meant that. And I had known it before. He emerged back out of the black depths, with livid, swollen features, and foam about his mouth, to splutter:

"Their corpses, you say... Ha! Our corpses," and retreated again, where I could only hear incoherent mutters.

Seraphina clutched my arm. "Juan — together — no separation."

I had known it, even as I spoke of selling our lives dearly. They could only be surrendered. Surrendered miserably to these wretches, or to the everlasting darkness in which Castro muttered his despair. I needed not to hear this ominous and sinister sound — nor yet Seraphina's cry. She understood, too. They would never come down unless to look upon us when we were dead. I need not have gone to the entrance of the cave to understand all the horror of our fate. The Lugareños had already lighted a fire. Very near the brink, too.

It was burning some thirty feet above my head; and the sheer wall on the other side caught up and sent across into my face the crackling of dry branches, the loud excited talking, the arguments, the oaths, the laughter; now and then a very shriek of joy. Manuel was giving orders. Some advanced the opinion that the cursed Inglez, the spy who came from Jamaica to see whom he could get for a hanging without a priest, was down there, too. So that was it! O'Brien knew how to stir their hate. I should get a short shrift. "He was a fiend, the Inglez: look how many of us he has killed!" they cried; and Manuel would have loved to cut my flesh, in small pieces, off my bones — only, alas! I was now beyond his vengeance, he feared. However, somebody was left.

He must have thrown himself flat, with his head over the brink, for his yell of "Castro!" exploded, and rolled heavily between the rocks.

"Castro! Castro! Castro!" he shouted twenty times, till he set the whole ravine in an uproar. He waited, and when the clamour had quieted down amongst the bushes below, called out softly, "Do you hear me, Castro, my victim? Thou art my victim, Castro."

Castro had crept into the passage after me. He pushed his head beyond my shoulder.

"I defy thee, Manuel," he screamed.

A hubbub arose. "He's there! He is there!"

"Bravo, Castro," Manuel shouted from above. "I love thee because thou art my victim. I shall sing a song for thee. Come up. Hey! Castro! Castro! Come up... No? Then the dead to their grave, and the living to their feast."

Sometimes a little earth, detached from the layer of soil covering the rock, would fall streaming from above. The men told off to guard the cornice walked to and fro near the edge, and the confused murmur of voices hung subdued in the air of the cleft, like a modulated tremor. Castro, moaning gently, stumbled back into the cave.

Seraphina had remained sitting on the stone seat. The twilight rested on her knees, on her face, on the heap of cold ashes at her feet. But Castro, who had stood stock-still, with a hand to his forehead, turned to me excitedly:

“The peons, for Dios!” Had I ever thought of the peons belonging to the estancia?

Well, that was a hope. I did not know exactly how matters stood between them and the Lugareños. There was no love lost. A fight was likely; but, even if no actual collision took place, they would be sure to visit the camp above in no very friendly spirit; a chance might offer to make our position known to these men, who had no reason to hate either me or Castro — and would not be afraid of thwarting the miserable band of ghouls sitting above our grave. How our presence could be made known I was not sure. Perhaps simply by shouting with all our might from the mouth of the cave. We could offer rewards — say who we were, summon them for the service of their own Señorita. But, probably, they had never heard of her. No matter. The news would soon reach the hacienda, and Enrico had two hundred slaves at his back. One of us must always remain at the mouth of the cave listening to what went on above. There would be the trampling of horses’ hoofs — quarrelling, no doubt — anyway, much talk — new voices — something to inform us. Only, how soon would they come? They were not likely to be riding where there were no cattle. Had Castro seen any signs of a herd on the uplands near by?

His face fell. He had not. There were many savannas within the belt of forests, and the herds might be miles away, stampeded inland by the storm. Sitting down suddenly, as if overcome, he averted his eyes and began to scratch the rock between his legs with the point of his blade.

We were all silent. How long could we wait? How long could people live?... I looked at Seraphina. How long could she live?... The thought seared my heart like a hot iron. I wrung my hands stealthily.

“Ha! my blade!” muttered Castro. “My sting... Old scorpion! They did not take my sting away... Only — bah!”

He, a man, had not risen to the fortitude of a venomous creature. He was defeated. He groaned profoundly. Life was too much. It clung to one. A scorpion — an insect — within a ring of flames, would lift its sting and stab venom into its own head. And he — Castro — a man — a man, por Dios — had less firmness than a creeping thing. Why — why, did he not stab this dishonoured old heart?

“Señorita,” he cried agonizingly, “I swear I did shout to them to fire — so — in to my breast — and then...”

Seraphina leaned over him pityingly.

“Enough, Castro. One lives because of hope. And grieve not. Thy death would have done no good.”

Her face had a splendid pallor, the radiant whiteness and majesty of marble; it had never before appeared to me more beautiful: and her hair unrolling its dark undulations, as if tinged deep with the funereal gloom of the background, covered her magnificently right down to her elbows. Her eyes were incredibly profound. Her person had taken on an indefinable beauty, a new beauty, that, like the comeliness that comes from joy, love, or success, seemed to rise from the depths of her being, as if an unsuspected and sombre quality of her soul had responded to the horror of our situation. The fierce trials had gradually developed her, as burning sunshine opens the bud of a flower; and I beheld her now in the plenitude of her nature. From time to time Castro would raise up to her his blinking old eyes, full of timidity and distress.

He had not been young enough to throw himself over — he had worn the chain for too many years, had lived well and softly too long, was too old a slave. And yet — if he had had the courage of the act! Who knows? I rejected the thought far from me. It returned, and I caught myself looking at him with irritated eyes. But this first day passed not intolerably. We ignored our sufferings. Indeed, I felt none for my part. We had kept our thoughts bound to the slow blank minutes. And if we exchanged a few words now and then, it was to speak of patience, of resolution to endure and to hope.

At night, from the hot ravine full of shadows, came the cool fretting of the stream. The big blaze they kept up above crackled distinctly, throwing a fiery, restless stain on the face of the rock in front of the cave, high up under the darkness and the stars of the sky — and a pair of feet would appear stamping, the shadow of a pair of ankles and feet, fantastic, sustaining no gigantic body, but enormous, tramping slowly, resembling two coffins leaping to a slow measure. I see them in my dreams now, sometimes. They disappeared.

Manuel would sing; far in the night the monotonous staccato of the guitar went on, accompanying plaintive murmurs, outbursts of anger and cries of pain, the tremulous moans of sorrow. My nerves vibrated, I broke my nails on the rock, and seemed to hear once more the parody of all the transports and of every anguish, even to death — a tragic and ignoble rendering of life. He was a true artist, powerful and scorned, admired with derision, obeyed with jeers. It was a song of mourning; he sat on the brink with his feet dangling over the precipice that sent him back his inspired tones with a confused noise of sobs and desolation... His idol had been snatched from the humility of his adoring silence, like a falling star from the sight of the worm that crawls... He stormed on the strings; and his voice emerged like the crying of a castaway in the tumult of the gale. He apostrophized his instrument... Woe! Woe! No more songs. He would break it. Its work was done. He would dash it against the rock... His palm slapped the hollow wood furiously... So that it should lie shattered and mute like his own heart!

A frenzied explosion of yells, jests, and applause covered the finale.

A complete silence would follow, as if in the acclamations they had exhausted at once every bestial sound. Somebody would cough pitifully for a long time — and when he had done spluttering and cursing, the world outside appeared lost in an even more profound stillness. The red stain of the fire wavered across to play under the dark

brow of the rock. The irritated murmur of the torrent, tearing along below, returned timidly at first, expanded, filled the ravine, ran through my ears in an angry babble. The deadened footfalls on the brink sometimes dislodged a pebble: it would start with a feeble rattle and be heard no more.

In the daytime, too, there were silences up there, perfect, profound. No prowling of feet disturbed them; the sun blazed between the rocks, and even the hum of insects could be heard. It seemed impossible not to believe that they had all died by a miracle, or else had been driven away by a silent panic. But two or more were always on the watch, directly above, with their heads over the edge; and suddenly they would begin to talk together in drowsy tones. It was as if some barbarous somnambulists had mumbled in the daytime the bizarre atrocity of their thoughts.

They discussed Williams' flask, which had been picked up. Was the cup made of silver, they wondered. Manuel had appropriated it for his own use, it seems. Well — he was the *capataz*. The *Inglez*, should he appear by an impossible chance, was to be shot down at once; but Castro must be allowed to give himself up. And they would snigger ferociously. Sometimes quarrels arose, very noisy, a great hubbub of bickerings touching their jealousies, their fears, their unspeakable hopes of murder and rapine. They did not feel very safe where they were. Some would maintain that Castro could not have saved himself, alone. The *Inglez* was there, and even the *senorita* herself... Manuel scouted the idea with contempt. He advanced the violence of the storm, the fury of the waves, the broken mast, the position of the boat. How could they expect a woman!... No. It was as his song had it. And he defended his point of view angrily, as though he could not bear being robbed of that source of poetical inspiration. He emitted profound sighs and superb declamations.

Castro and I listened to them at the mouth of the cave. Our tongues were dry and swollen in our mouths, there was the pressure of an iron clutch on our windpipes, fire in our throats, and the pangs of hunger that tore at us like iron pincers. But we could hear that the bandits above were anxious to be gone; they had but very few charges for their guns, and it was apparent that they were afraid of a collision with the peons of the hacienda. Glaring at each other with bloodshot, uncertain eyes, Castro and I imagined longingly a vision of men in ponchos spurring madly out of the woods, bent low, and swinging *riatas* over the necks of their horses — with the thunder of the galloping hoofs in the cave. Seraphina had withdrawn further into the darkness. And, with a shrinking fear, I would join her, to eat my heart out by the side of her tense and mute contemplation.

Sometimes Manuel would begin again, "Castro! Castro! Castro!" till he seemed to stagger the rocks and disturb the placid sunshine with an immense wave of sound. He called upon his victim to drink once more before he died. Long shrieks of derision rent the air, as if torn out of his breast by far greater torments than any his fancy delighted to invent. There was something terrible and weird in the abundance of words screeched continuously, without end, as if in desperation. No wonder Castro fled from the passage. And Seraphina and I, within, would be startled out of our half-delirious

state by the sudden appearance of that old man, disordered, sordid, with a white beard sprouting, who wandered, weeping aloud in the twilight.

More than once I would stagger off far away into the depths of the cavern in an access of rage, fling myself on the floor, bite my arms, beat my head on the rock. I would give myself up. She must be saved from this tortured death. She had said she would throw herself over if I left her. But would she have the strength? It was impossible to know. For days it seemed she had been lying perfectly still, on her side, one hand under her wan cheek, and only answering "Juan" when I pronounced her name. There was something awful in our dry whispers. They were lifeless, like the tones of the dead, if the dead ever speak to each other across the earth separating the graves. The moral suffering, joined to the physical torture of hunger and thirst, annihilated my will in a measure, but also kindled a vague, gnawing feeling of hostility against her. She asked too much of me. It was too much. And I would drag myself back to sit for hours, and with an aching heart look towards her couch from a distance.

My eyes, accustomed to obscurity, traced an indistinct and recumbent form. Her forehead was white; her hair merged into the darkness which was gathering slowly upon her eyes, her cheeks, her throat. She was perfectly still. It was cruel, it was odious, it was intolerable to be so still. This must end. I would carry her out by main force. She said no word, but there was in the embrace of those arms instantly thrown around my neck, in the feel of those dry lips pressed upon mine, in the emaciated face, in the big shining eyes of that being as light as a feather, a passionate mournfulness of seduction, a tenacious clinging to the appointed fate, that suddenly overawed my movement of rage. I laid her down again, and covered my face with my hands. She called out to Castro. He reeled, as if drunk, and waited at the head of her couch, with his chin dropped on his breast. "Vuestra, Señoría," he muttered.

"Listen well, Castro." Her voice was very faint, and each word came alone, as if shrunk and parched. "Can my gold — the promise of much gold — you know these men — save the lives...?"

He uttered a choked cry, and began to tremble, groping for her hand.

"Si, Señorita. Excellency, si. It would. Mercy. Save me. I am too old to bear this. Gold, yes; much gold. Manuel..."

"Listen, Castro... And Don Juan?" His head fell again. "Speak the truth, Castro."

He struggled with himself; then, rattling in his throat, shrieked "No!" with a terrible effort. "No. Nothing can save thy English lover." "Why?" she breathed feebly. He raged at her in his weakness. Why? Because the order had gone forth; because they dared not disobey. Because she had only gold in the palm of her hand, while Señor O'Brien held all their lives in his. The accursed Juez was for them like death itself that walks amongst men, taking this one, leaving another.

He was their life, and their law, and their safety, and their death — and the caballero had not killed him...

His voice seemed to wither and dry up gradually in his throat. He crawled away, and we heard him chuckling horribly somewhere, like a madman. Seraphina stretched out her hand.

“Then, Juan — why not together — like this?”

If she had the courage of this death, I must have even more. It was a point of honour. I had no wish, and no right, to seek for some easier way out of life. But she had a woman’s capacity for passive endurance, a serenity of mind in this martyrdom confessing to something sinister in the power of love that, like faith, can move mountains and order cruel sacrifices. She could have walked out in perfect safety — and it was that thought that maddened me. And there was no sleep; there were only intervals in which I could fall into a delirious reverie of still lakes, of vast sheets of water. I waded into them up to my lips. Never further. They were smooth and cold as ice; I stood in them shivering and straining for a draught, burning within with the fire of thirst, while a phantom all pale, and with its hair streaming, called to me “Courage!” from the brink in Seraphina’s voice. As to Castro, he was going mad. He was simply going mad, as people go mad for want of food and drink. And yet he seemed to keep his strength. He was never still. It was a factitious strength, the restlessness of incipient insanity. Once, while I was trying to talk with him about our only hope — the peons — he gave me a look of such sombre distraction that I left off, intimidated, to wonder vaguely at this glimpse of something hidden and excessive springing from torments which surely could be no greater than mine.

He had the strength, and sometimes he could find the voice, to hurl abuse, curses, and imprecations from the mouth of the cave. Great shouts of laughter exploded above, and they seemed to hold their breath to hear more; or Manuel, hanging over, would praise in mocking, mellifluous accents the energy of his denunciations. I tried to pull him away from there, but he turned upon me fiercely; and from prudence — for all hope was not dead in me yet — I left him alone.

That night I heard him make an extraordinary sound chewing; at the same time he was sobbing and cursing stealthily. He had found something to eat, then! I could not believe my ears, but I began to creep towards the sound, and suddenly there was a short, mad scuffle in the darkness, during which I nearly spitted myself on his blade. At last, trembling in every limb, with my blood beating furiously in my ears, I scrambled to my feet, holding a small piece of meat in my hands. Instantly, without hesitating, without thinking, I plunged my teeth into it only to fling it far away from me with a frantic execration. This was the first sound uttered since we had grappled. Lying prone near me, Castro, with a rattle in his throat, tried to laugh.

This was a supreme touch of Manuel’s art; they were pressed for time, and he had hit upon that deep and politic invention to hasten the surrender of his beloved victim. I nearly cried with the fiery pain on my cracked lips. That piece of half-putrid flesh was salt — horribly salt — salt like salt itself. Whenever they heard him rave and mutter at the mouth of the cave, they would throw down these prepared scraps. It was as if I had put a live coal into my mouth.

“Ha!” he croaked feebly. “Have you thrown it away? I, too; the first piece. No matter. I can no more swallow anything, now.”

His voice was like the rustling of parchment at my feet.

“Do not look for it, Don Juan. The sinners in hell... Ha! Fiend. I could not resist.”

I sank down by his side. He seemed to be writhing on the floor muttering, “Thirst — thirst — thirst.” His blade clicked on the rock; then all was still. Was he dead? Suddenly he began with an amazingly animated utterance.

“Señor! For this they had to kill cattle.”

This thought had kept him up. Probably, they had been firing shots. But there was a way of hamstringing a stalked cow silently; and the plains were vast, the grass on them was long; the carcasses would lie hidden out of sight; the herds were rounded up only twice every year. His despairing voice died out in a mournful fall, and again he was as still as death.

“No! I can bear this no longer,” he uttered with force. He refused to bear it. He suffered too much. There was no hope. He would overwhelm them with maledictions, and then leap down from the ledge. “Adios, Señor.”

I stretched out my arm and caught him by the leg. It seemed to me I could not part with him. It would have been disloyal, an admission that all was over, the beginning of the end. We were exhausting ourselves by this sort of imbecile wrestling. Meantime, I kept on entreating him to be a man; and at last I managed to clamber upon his chest. “A man!” he sighed. I released him. For a space, unheard in the darkness, he seemed to be collecting all his remaining strength.

“Oh, those strange Inglez! Why should I not leap? and whom do you love best or hate more, me or the senorita? Be thou a man, also, and pray God to give thee reason to understand men for once in thy life. Ha! Enamoured woman — he is a fool! But I, Castro...”

His whispering became appallingly unintelligible, then ceased, passing into a moan. My will to restrain him abandoned me. He had brought this on us. And if he really wished to give up the struggle...

“Señor,” he mumbled brokenly, “a thousand thanks. Br-r-r! Oh, the ugly water — water — water — water — salt water — salt! You saved me. Why? Let God be the Judge. I would have preferred a malignant demon for a friend. I forgive you. Adios! And — -Her Excellency — poor Castro... Ha! Thou old scorpion, encircled by fire — by fire and thirst. No. No scorpion, alas! Only a man — not like you — therefore — a Mass — or two — perhaps...”

The freshness of the night penetrated through the arch, as far as the faint twilight of the day. I heard his tearful muttering creep away from my side. “Thirst — thirst — thirst.” I did not stir; and an incredulity, a weariness, the sense of our common fate, mingled with an unconfessed desire — the desire of seeing what would come of it — a desire that stirred my blood like a glimmer of hope, and prevented me from making a movement or uttering a whisper. If his sufferings were so great, who was I to... Mine, too. I almost envied him. He was free.

As if an inward obscurity had parted in two I looked to the very bottom of my thoughts. And his action appeared like a sacrifice. It could liberate us two from this cave before it was too late. He, he alone, was the prey they had trapped. They would be satisfied, probably. Nay! There could be no doubt. Directly he was dead they would depart. Ah! he wanted to leap. He must not be allowed. Now that I understood perfectly what this meant, I had to prevent him. There was no choice. I must stop him at any cost.

The awakening of my conscience sent me to my feet; but before I had stumbled halfway through the passage I heard his shout in the open air, "Behold me!"

A man outside cried excitedly, "He is out!"

An exulting tumult fell into the arch, the clash of twenty voices yelling in different keys, "He is out — the traitor! He is out!" I was too late, but I made three more hesitating steps and stood blinded. The flaming branches they were holding over the precipice showered a multitude of sparks, that fell disappearing continuously in the lurid light, shutting out the night from the mouth of the cave. And in this light Castro could be seen kneeling on the other side of the sill.

With his fingers clutching the edge of the slab, he hung outwards, his head falling back, his spine arched tensely, like a bow; and the red sparks coming from above with the dancing whirl of snowflakes, vanished in the air before they could settle on his face.

"Manuel! Manuel!"

They answered with a deep, confused growl, jostling and crowding on the edge to look down into his eyes. Meantime I stared at the convulsive heaving of his breast, at his upturned chin, his swelling throat. He defied Manuel. He would leap. Behold! he was going to leap — to his own death — in his own time. He challenged them to come down on the ledge; and the blade of the maimed arm waved to and fro stiffly, point up, like a red-hot weapon in the light. He devoted them to pestilence, to English gallows, to the infernal powers: while all the time commenting murmurs passed over his head, as though he had extorted their sinister appreciation.

"Canalla! dogs, thieves, prey of death, vermin of hell — I spit on you — like this!"

He had not the force, nor the saliva, and remained straining mutely upwards while they laughed at him all together, with something sombre, and as if doomed in their derision... "He will jump! No, he will not!" "Yes! Leap, Castro! Spit, Castro!" "He will run back into the cave! Maladetta!"... Manuel's voiced cooed lovingly on the brink:

"Come to us and drink, Castro."

I waited for his leap with doubt, with disbelief, in the helpless agitation of the weak. Gradually he seemed to relax all over.

"Drink deep; drink, and drink, and drink, Castro. Water. Clear water, cool water. Taste, Castro!"

He called on him in tones that were almost tender in their urgency, to come and drink before he died. His voice seemed to cast a spell, like an incantation, upon the tubby little figure, with something yearning in the upward turn of the listening face.

“Drink!” Manuel repeated the word several times; then, suddenly he called, “Taste, Castro, taste,” and a descending brightness, as of a crystal rod hurled from above, shivered to nothing on the upturned face. The light disappearing from before the cave seemed scared away by the inhuman discord of his shriek; and I flung myself forward to lick the splash of moisture on the sill. I did not think of Castro, I had forgotten him. I raged at the deception of my thirst, exploring with my tongue the rough surface of the stone till I tasted my own blood. Only then, raising my head to gasp, and clench my fists with a baffled and exasperated desire, I noticed how profound was the silence, in which the words, “Take away his sting,” seemed to pronounce themselves over the ravine in the impersonal austerity of the rock, and with the tone of a tremendous decree.

Chapter 10

He had surrendered to his thirst. What weakness! He had not thrown himself over, then. What folly! One splash of water on his face had been enough. He was contemptible; and lying collapsed, in a sort of tormented apathy, at the mouth of the cave, I despised and envied his good fortune. It could not save him from death, but at least he drank. I understood this when I heard his voice, a voice altogether altered — a firm, greedy voice saying, “More,” breathlessly. And then he drank again. He was drinking. He was drinking up there in the light of the fire, in a circle of mortal enemies, under Manuel’s gloating eyes. Drinking! O happiness! O delight! What a miserable wretch! I clawed the stone convulsively; I think I would have rushed out for my share if I had not heard Manuel’s cruel and caressing voice:

“How now? You do not want to throw yourself over, my Castro?”

“I have drunk,” he said gloomily.

I think they must have given him something to eat then. In my mind there are many blanks in the vision of that scene, a vision built upon a few words reaching me, suddenly, with great intervals of silence between, as though I had been coming to myself out of a dead faint now and then. A ferocious hum of many voices would rise sometimes impatiently, the scrambling of feet near the edge; or, in a sinister and expectant stillness, Manuel the artist would be speaking to his “beloved victim Castro” in a gentle and insinuating voice that seemed to tremble slightly with eagerness. Had he eaten and drunk enough? They had kept their promises, he said. They would keep them all. The water had been cool — and presently he, Manuel-del-Popolo, would accompany with his guitar and his voice the last moments of his victim. Bursts of laughter punctuated his banter. Ah! that Manuel, that Manuel! Some actually swore in admiration. But was Castro really at his ease? Was it not good to eat and drink? Had he quite returned to life? But, Caramba, amigos, what neglect! The caballero who has honoured us must smoke. They shouted in high glee: “Yes. Smoke, Castro. Let him smoke.” I suppose he did; and Manuel expounded to him how pleasant life was in which one could eat, and drink, and smoke. His words tortured me. Castro remained mute — from disdain, from despair, perhaps. Afterwards they carried him along clear of the cornice, and I understood they formed a half-circle round him, drawing their knives. Manuel, screeching in a high falsetto, ordered the bonds of his feet to be cut. I advanced my head out as far as I dared; their voices reached me deadened; I could only see the profound shadow of the ravine, a patch of dark clear sky opulent with stars, and the play of the firelight on the opposite side. The shadow of a pair of monumental feet, and the lower edge of a cloak, spread amply like a skirt, stood out in it, intensely black

and motionless, right in front of the cave. Now and then, elbowed in the surge round Castro, the guitar emitted a deep and hollow resonance. He was tumultuously ordered to stand up and, I imagine, he was being pricked with the points of their knives till he did get on his feet. "Jump!" they roared all together — and Manuel began to finger the strings, lifting up his voice between the gusts of savage hilarity, mingled with cries of death. He exhorted his followers to close on the traitor inch by inch, presenting their knives.

"He runs here and there, the blood trickling from his limbs — but in vain, this is the appointed time for the leap..."

It was an improvisation; they stamped their feet to the slow measure; they shouted in chorus the one word "Leap!" raising a ferocious roar; and between whiles the song of voice and strings came to me from a distance, softened and lingering in a voluptuous and pitiless cadence that wrung my heart, and seemed to eat up the remnants of my strength. But what could I have done, even if I had had the strength of a giant, and a most fearless resolution? I should have been shot dead before I had crawled halfway up the ledge. A piercing shriek covered the guitar, the song, and the wild merriment.

Then everything seemed to stop — even my own painful breathing. Again Castro shrieked like a madman:

"Señorita — your gold. Señorita! Hear me! Help!"

Then all was still.

"Hear the dead calling to the dead," sneered Manuel.

An awestruck sort of hum proceeded from the Spaniards. Was the señorita alive? In the cave? Or where?

"Her nod would have saved thee, Castro," said Manuel slowly. I got up. I heard Castro stammer wildly:

"She shall fill both your hands with gold. Do you hear, hombres? I, Castro, tell you — each man — both hands — — —"

He had done it. The last hope was gone now. And all that there remained for me to do was to leap over or give myself up, and end this horrible business.

"She was a creature born to command the moon and the stars," Manuel mused aloud in a vibrating tone, and suddenly smote the strings with emphatic violence. She could even stay his vengeance. But was it possible! No, no. It could not be — and yet...

"Thou art alive yet, Castro," he cried. "Thou hast eaten and drunk; life is good — is it not, old man? — and the leap is high."

He thundered "Silence!" to still the excited murmurs of his band. If she lived Castro should live, too — he, Manuel, said so; but he threatened him with horrible tortures, with two days of slow dying, if he dared to deceive. Let him, then, speak the truth quickly.

"Speak, 'viejo'. Where is she?"

And at the opening, fifty yards away, I was tempted to call out, as though I had loved Castro well enough to save him from the shame and remorse of a plain betrayal. That the moment of it had come I could have no doubt. And it was I myself, perhaps, who

could not face the certitude of his downfall. If my throat had not been so compressed, so dry with thirst and choked with emotion, I believe I should have cried out and brought them away from that miserable man with a rush. Since we were lost, he at least should be saved from this. I suffered from his spasmodic, agonized laugh away there, with twenty knives aimed at his breast and the eighty-foot drop of the precipice at his back. Why did he hesitate?

I was to learn, then, that the ultimate value of life to all of us is based on the means of self-deception. Morally he had his back against the wall, he could not hope to deceive himself; and after Manuel had cried again at him, "Where are they?" in a really terrible tone, I heard his answer:

"At the bottom of the sea."

He had his own courage after all — if only the courage not to believe in Manuel's promises. And he must have been weary of his life — weary enough not to pay that price. And yet he had gone to the very verge, calling upon Seraphina as if she could hear him. Madness of fear, no doubt — succeeded by an awakening, a heroic reaction. And yet sometimes it seems to me as if the whole scene, with his wild cries for help, had been the outcome of a supreme exercise of cunning. For, indeed, he could not have invented anything better to bring the conviction of our death to the most sceptical of those ruffians. All I heard after his words had been a great shout, followed by a sudden and unbroken silence. It seemed to last a very long time. He had thrown himself over! It is like the blank space of a swoon to me, and yet it must have been real enough, because, huddled up just inside the sill, with my head reposing wearily on the stone, I watched three moving flames of lighted branches carried by men follow each other closely in a swaying descent along the path on the other side of the ravine. They passed on downwards, flickering out of view. Then, after a time, a voice below, to the left of the cave, ascended with a hooting and mournful effect from the depths.

"Manuel! Manuel! We have found him!... Es muerte!"

And from above Manuel's shout rolled, augmented, between the rocks.

"Bueno! Turn his face up — for the birds!"

They continued calling to each other for a good while. The men below declared their intention of going on to the sea shore; and Manuel shouted to them not to forget to send him up a good rope early in the morning. Apparently, the schooner had been refloated some time before; many of the *Lugareños* were to sleep on board. They purposed to set sail early next day.

This revived me, and I spent the night between Seraphina's couch and the mouth of the cave, keeping tight hold of my reason that seemed to lose itself in this hope, in this darkness, in this torment. I touched her cheek, it was hot — while her forehead felt to my fingers as cold as ice. I had no more voice, but I tried to force out some harsh whispers through my throat. They sounded horrible to my own ears, and she endeavoured to soothe me by murmuring my name feebly. I believe she thought me delirious. I tried to pray for my strength to last till I could carry her out of that cave to the side of the brook — then let death come. "Live, live," I whispered into her ear,

and would hear a sigh so faint, so feeble, that it swayed all my soul with pity and fear, "Yes, Juan."... And I would go away to watch for the dawn from the mouth of the cave, and curse the stars that would not fade.

Manuel's voice always steadied me. A languor had come over them above, as if their passion had been exhausted; as if their hearts had been saddened by an unbridled debauch. There was, however, their everlasting quarrelling. Several of them, I understood, left the camp for the schooner, but avoiding the road by the ravine as if Castro's dead body down there had made it impassable. And the talk went on late into the night. There was some superstitious fear attached to the cave — a legend of men who had gone in and had never come back any more. All they knew of it was the region of twilight; formerly, when they used the shelter of the cavern, no one, it seems, ever ventured outside the circle of the fire. Manuel disdained their fears. Had he not been such a profound politico, a man of stratagems, there would have been a necessity to go down and see... They all protested.

Who was going down? Not they... Their craven cowardice was amazing.

He begged them to keep themselves quiet. They had him for Capataz now. A man of intelligence. Had he not enticed Castro out? He had never believed there was any one else in there. He sighed. Otherwise Castro would have tried to save his life by confessing. There had been nothing to confess. But he had the means of making sure. A voice suggested that the Inglez might have withdrawn himself into the depths. These English were not afraid of demons, being devils themselves; and this one was fiendishly reckless. But Manuel observed, contemptuously, that a man trapped like this would remain near the opening. Hope would keep him there till he died — unless he rushed out like Castro-Manuel laughed, but in a mournful tone: and, listening to the craven talk of their doubts and fears, it seemed to me that if I could appear at one bound amongst them, they would scatter like chaff before my glance. It seemed intolerable to wait; more than human strength could bear. Would the day never come? A drowsiness stole upon their voices.

Manuel kept watch. He fed the fire, and his incomplete shadow, projected across the chasm, would pass and return, obscuring the glow that fell on the rock. His footsteps seemed to measure the interminable duration of the night. Sometimes he would stop short and talk to himself in low, exalted mutters. A big bright star rested on the brow of the rock opposite, shining straight into my eyes. It sank, as if it had plunged into the stone. At last. Another came to look into the cavern. I watched the gradual coming of a gray sheen from the side of Seraphina's couch. This was the day, the last day of pain, or else of life. Its ghostly edge invaded slowly the darkness of the cave towards its appointed limit, creeping slowly, as colourless as spilt water on the floor. I pressed my lips silently upon her cheek. Her eyes were open. It seemed to me she had a smile fainter than her sighs. She was very brave, but her smile did not go beyond her lips. Not a feature of her face moved. I could have opened my veins for her without hesitation, if it had not been a forbidden sacrifice.

Would they go? I asked myself. Through Castro's heroism or through his weakness, perhaps through both the heroism and the weakness of that man, they must be satisfied. They must be. I could not doubt it; I could not believe it. Everything seemed improbable; everything seemed possible. If they descended I would, I thought, have the strength to carry her off, away into the darkness. If there was any truth in what I had overheard them saying, that the depths of the cavern concealed an abyss, we would cast ourselves into it.

The feeble, consenting pressure of her hand horrified me. They would not come down. They were afraid of that place, I whispered to her — and I thought to myself that such cowardice was incredible. Our fate was sealed. And yet from what I had heard...

We watched the daylight growing in the opening; at any moment it might have been obscured by their figures. The tormenting incertitudes of that hour were cruel enough to overcome, almost, the sensations of thirst, of hunger, to engender a restlessness that had the effect of renewed vigour. They were like a nightmare; but that nightmare seemed to clear my mind of its feverish hallucinations. I was more collected, then, than I had been for the last forty-eight hours of our imprisonment. But I could not remain there, waiting. It was absolutely necessary that I should watch at the entrance for the moment of their departure.

The morning was serenely cool and, in its stillness, their talk filled with clear-cut words the calm air of the ravine. A party — I could not tell how many — had already come up from the schooner in a great state of excitement. They feared that their presence had, in some way, become known to the peons of the hacienda. There was much abuse of a man called Carneiro, who, the day before, had fired an incautious shot at a fat cow on one of the inland savannas. They cursed him. Last night, before the moon rose, those on board the schooner had heard the whinnying of a horse. Somebody had ridden down to the water's edge in the darkness and, after waiting a while, had galloped back the way he came. The prints of hoofs on the beach showed that.

They feared these horsemen greatly. A vengeance was owing for the man Manuel had killed; and I could guess they talked with their faces over their shoulders. "And what about finding out whether the Inglez was there, dead or alive?" asked some.

I was sure, now, that they would not come down in a body. It would expose them to the danger of being caught in the cavern by the peons. There was no time for a thorough search, they argued.

For the first time that morning I heard Manuel's voice, "Stand aside."

He came down to the very brink.

"If the Inglez is down there, and if he is alive, he is listening to us now."

He was as certain as though he had been able to see me. He added:

"But there's no one."

"Go and look, Manuel," they cried.

He said something in a tone of contempt. The Voices above my head sank into busy murmurs.

“Give me the rope here,” he said aloud.

I had a feeling of some inconceivable danger nearing me; and in my state of weakness I began to tremble, backing away from the orifice. I had no strength in my limbs. I had no weapons. How could I fight? I would use my teeth. With a light knocking against the rock above the arch, Williams’ flask, tied by its green cord to the end of a thick rope, descended slowly, and hung motionless before the entrance.

It had been freshly filled with water; it was dripping wet outside, and the silver top, struck by the sunbeams, dazzled my eyes.

This was the danger — this bait. And it seems to me that if I had had the slightest inkling of what was coming, I should have rushed at it instantly. But it took me some time to understand — to take in the idea that this was water, there, within reach of my hand. With a great effort I resisted the madness that incited me to hurl myself upon the flask. I hung back with all my power. A convulsive spasm contracted my throat. I turned about and fled out of the passage.

I ran to Seraphina. “Put out your hand to me,” I panted in the darkness. “I need your help.”

I felt it resting lightly on my bowed head. She did not even ask me what I meant; as if the greatness of her soul was omniscient. There was, in that silence, a supreme unselfishness, the unquestioning devotion of a woman.

“Patience, patience,” I kept on muttering. I was losing confidence in myself. If only I had been free to dash my head against the rock. I had the courage for that, yet. But this was a situation from which there was no issue in death.

“We are saved,” I murmured distractedly.

“Patience,” she breathed out. Her hand slipped languidly off my head.

And I began to creep away from her side. I am here to tell the truth. I began to creep away towards the flask. I did not confess this to myself; but I know now. There was a devilish power in it. I have learned the nature of feelings in a man whom Satan beguiles into selling his soul — the horror of an irresistible and fatal longing for a supreme felicity. And in a drink of water for me, then, there was a greater promise than in universal knowledge, in unbounded power, in unlimited wealth, in imperishable youth. What could have been these seductions to a drink? No soul had thirsted after things unlawful as my parched throat thirsted for water. No devil had ever tempted a man with such a bribe of perdition.

I suffered from the lucidity of my feelings. I saw, with indignation, my own wretched self being angled for like a fish. And with all that, in my forlorn state, I remained prudent. I did not rush out blindly. No. I approached the inner end of the passage, as though I had been stalking a wild creature, slowly, from the side. I crept along the wall of the cavern, and protruded my head far enough to look at the fiendish temptation.

There it was, a small dark object suspended in the light, with the yellow rock across the ravine for a background. The silver top shimmered the sunbeams brilliantly. I had half hopes they had taken it away by this time. When I drew my head back I lost sight of it, but all my being went out to it with an almost pitiful longing. I remembered

Castro for the first time in many hours. Was I nothing better than Castro? He had been angled for with salted meat. I shuddered. A darkness fell into the passage. I put down my uplifted foot without advancing. The unexpectedness of that shadow saved me, I believe. Manuel had descended the cornice.

He was alone. Standing before the outer opening, he darkened the passage, through which his talk to the people above came loudly into my ears. They could see now if he were not a worthy Capataz. If the Inglez was in there he was a corpse. And yet, of these living hearts above, of these valientes of Rio Medio, there was not one who would go alone to look upon a dead body. He had contrived an infallible test, and yet they would not believe him. Well, his valiance should prove it; his valiance, afraid neither of light nor of darkness.

I could not hear the answers he got from up there; but the vague sounds that reached me carried the usual commingling of derision and applause, the resentment of their jeers at the admiration he knew how to extort by the display of his talents.

They must kill the cattle, these caballeros. He scolded ironically. Of course. They must feed on meat like lions; but their souls were like the souls of hens born on dunghills. And behold! there was he, Manuel, not afraid of shadows.

He was coming in, there could be no doubt. Out there in the full light, he could not possibly have detected that rapid appearance of my head darted forward and withdrawn at once; but I had a view of his arm putting aside the swinging flask, of his leg raised to step over the high sill. I saw him, and I ran noiselessly away from the opening.

I had the time to charge Seraphina not to move, on our lives — on the wretched remnant of our lives — when his black shape stood in the frame of the opening, edged with a thread of light following the contour of his hat, of his shoulders, of his whole body down to his feet — whence a long shadow fell upon the pool of twilight on the floor.

What had made him come down? Vanity? The exacting demands of his leadership? Fear of O'Brien? The Juez would expect to hear something definite, and his band pretended not to believe in the stratagem of the bottle. I think that, for his part, from his knowledge of human nature, he never doubted its efficacy. He could not guess how very little, only, he was wrong. How very little! And yet he seemed rooted in incertitude on the threshold. His head turned from side to side. I could not make out his face as he stood, but the slightest of his movements did not escape me. He stepped aside, letting in all the fullness of the light.

Would he have the courage to explore at least the immediate neighbourhood of the opening? Who could tell his complex motives? Who could tell his purpose or his fears? He had killed a man in there once. But, then, he had not been alone. If he were only showing off before his unruly band, he need not stir a step further. He did not advance. He leaned his shoulders against the rock just clear of the opening. One half of him was lighted plainly; his long profile, part of his raven locks, one listless hand, his crossed legs, the buckle of one shoe.

“Nobody,” he pronounced slowly, in a dead whisper.

While I looked at him, the profound politico, the artist, the everlastingly questioned Capataz, the man of talent and ability, he thought himself alone, and allowed his head to drop on his breast, as if saddened by the vanity of human ambition. Then, lifting it with a jerk, he listened with one ear turned to the passage; afterwards he peered into the cavern. Two long strides, over the cold heap of ashes, brought him to the stone seat.

It was very plain to me from his starting movements and attitudes, that he shared his uneasy attention between the inside and the outside of the cave. He sat down, but seemed ready to jump up; and I saw him turn his eyes upwards to the dark vault, as if on the alert for a noise from above. I am inclined to think he was expecting to hear the galloping hoofs of the peons' horses every moment. I think he did. The words “I am safer here than they above,” were perfectly audible to me in the mumbling he kept up nervously. He wished to hear the sound of his own voice, as a timid person whistles and talks on a lonely road at night. Only the year before he had killed a man in that cavern, under circumstances that were, I believe, revolting even to the honour of these bandits. He sat there between the shadow of his murder and the reality of the vengeance. I asked myself what could be the outcome of a struggle with him. He was armed; he was not weakened by hunger; but he stood between us and the water. My thirst would give me strength; the desire to end Seraphina's sufferings would make me invincible. On the other hand, it was dangerous to interfere. I could not tell whether they would not try to find out what became of him. It was safest to let him go. It was extremely improbable that they would sail without him.

I am not conscious of having stirred a limb; neither had Seraphina moved, I am ready to swear; but plainly something, some sort of sound, startled him. He bounded out of his seated immobility, and in one leap had his shoulders against the rock standing at bay before the darkness, with his knife in his hand. I wonder he did not surprise me into an exclamation. I was as startled as himself. His teeth and the whites of his eyes gleamed straight at me from afar; he hissed with fear; for an instant I was firmly convinced he had seen me. All this took place so quickly that I had no time to make one movement towards receiving his attack, when I saw him make a great sign of the cross in the air with the point of his dagger.

He sheathed it slowly, and sidled along the few feet to the entrance, his shoulders rubbing the wall. He blocked out the light, and in a moment had backed out of sight.

Before he got to the further end I was already, at the inner, creeping after him. I had started at once, as if his disappearance had removed a spell, as though he had drawn me after him by an invisible bond. Raising myself on my forearms I saw him, from his knees up, standing outside the sill, with his back to the precipice and his face turned up.

“There is nobody in there,” he shouted.

I sank down and wriggled forward on my stomach, raising myself on my elbows, now and then, to look. Manuel was looking upwards conversing with the people above, and

holding Williams' flask in both his hands. He never once glanced into the passage; he seemed to be trying to undo the cord knotted to the end of the thick rope, which hung in a long bight before him. The flask captured my eyes, my thought, my energy. I would tear it away from him directly. There was in me, then, neither fear nor intelligence; only the desire of possessing myself of the thing; but an instinctive caution prevented my rushing out violently. I proceeded with an animal-like stealthiness, with which cool reason had nothing to do.

He had some difficulty with the knot, and evidently did not wish to cut the green silk cord. How well I remember his fumbling fingers. He sat down sideways on the sill, with his legs outside, of course, his face and hands turned to the light, very absorbed in his endeavour. They shouted to him from above.

"I come at once," he cried to them, without lifting his head.

I had crept up almost near enough to grab the flask. It never occurred to me that by flinging myself on him, I could have pushed him off the sill. My only idea was to get hold. He did not exist for me. The leather-covered bottle was the only real thing in the world. I was completely insane. I heard a faint detonation, and Manuel got up quickly from the sill. The flask was out of my reach.

There were more popping sounds of shots fired, away on the plain. The peons were attacking an outpost of the Lugareños. A deep voice cried, "They are driving them in." Then several together yelled:

"Come away, Manuel. Come away. Por Dios..."

Stretched at full length in the passage, and sustaining myself on my trembling arms, I gazed up at him. He stood very rigid, holding the flask in both hands. Several muskets were discharged together just above, and in the noise of the reports I remember a voice crying urgently over the edge, "Manuel! Manuel!" The shadow of irresolution passed over his features. He hesitated whether to run up the ledge or bolt into the cave. He shouted something. He was not answered, but the yelling and the firing ceased suddenly, as if the Lugareños had given up and taken to their heels. I became aware of a sort of increasing throbbing sound that seemed to come from behind me, out of the cave; then, as Manuel lifted his foot hastily to step over the sill, I jumped up deliriously, and with outstretched hands lurched forward at the flask in his fingers.

I believe I laughed at him in an imbecile manner.

Somebody laughed; and I remember the superior smile on his face passing into a ghastly grin, that disappeared slowly, while his astonished eyes, glaring at that gaunt and dishevelled apparition rising before him in the dusk of the passage, seemed to grow to an enormous size. He drew back his foot, as though it had been burnt; and in a panic-stricken impulse, he flung the flask straight into my face, and staggered away from the sill.

I made a catch at it with a scream of triumph, whose unearthly sound brought me back to my senses.

"In the name of God, retire," he cried, as though I had been an apparition from another world.

What took place afterwards happened with an inconceivable rapidity, in less time than it takes to draw breath. He never recognized me. I saw his glare of incredulous awe change, suddenly, to horror and despair. He had felt himself losing his balance.

He had stepped too far back. He tried to recover himself, but it was too late. He hung for a moment in his backward fall; his arms beat the air, his body curled upon itself with an awful striving. All at once he went limp all over, and, with the sunlight full upon his upturned face, vanished downwards from my sight.

But at the last moment he managed to clutch the bight of the hanging rope. The end of it must have been lying quite loose on the ground above, for I saw its whole length go whizzing after him, in the twinkling of an eye. I pressed the flask fiercely to my breast, raging with the thought that he could yet tear it out of my hands; but by the time the strain came, his falling body had acquired such a velocity that I didn't feel the slightest jerk when the green cord snapped — no more than if it had been the thread of a cobweb.

I confess that tears, tears of gratitude, were running down my face. My limbs trembled. But I was sane enough not to think of myself any more.

“Drink! Drink,” I stammered, raising Seraphina's head on my shoulder, while the galloping horses of the peons in hot pursuit passed with a thundering rumble above us. Then all was still.

Our getting out of the cave was a matter of unremitting toil, through what might have been a year of time; the recollection is of an arduous undertaking, accomplished without the usual incentives of men's activity. Necessity, alone, remained; the iron necessity without the glamour of freedom of choice, of pride.

Our unsteady feet crushed, at last, the black embers of the fires scattered by the hoofs of horses; and the plain appeared immense to our weakness, swept of shadows by the high sun, lonely and desolate as the sea. We looked at the litter of the *Lugareños'* camp, rags on the trodden grass, a couple of abandoned blankets, a musket thrown away in the panic, a dirty red sash lying on a heap of sticks, a wooden bucket from the schooner, smashed water-gourds. One of them remained miraculously poised on its round bottom and full to the brim, while everything else seemed to have been overturned, torn, scattered haphazard by a furious gust of wind. A scaffolding of poles, for drying strips of meat, had been knocked over; I found nothing there except bits of hairy hide; but lumps of scorched flesh adhered to the white bones scattered amongst the ashes of the camp — and I thanked God for them.

We averted our eyes from our faces in very love, and we did not speak from pity for each other. There was no joy in our escape, no relief, no sense of freedom. The *Lugareños* and the peons, the pursued and the pursuers, had disappeared from the upland without leaving as much as a corpse in view. There were no moving things on the earth, no bird soared in the pellucid air, not even a moving cloud on the sky. The sun declined, and the rolling expanse of the plain frightened us, as if space had been something alive and hostile.

We walked away from that spot, as if our feet had been shod in lead; and we hugged the edge of the cruel ravine, as one keeps by the side of a friend. We must have been grotesque, pathetic, and lonely; like two people newly arisen from a tomb, shrinking before the strangeness of the half-forgotten face of the world. And at the head of the ravine we stopped.

The sensation of light, vastness, and solitude, rolled upon our souls emerging from the darkness, overwhelmingly, like a wave of the sea. We might have been an only couple sent back from the underworld to begin another cycle of pain on a depopulated earth. It had not for us even the fitful caress of a breeze; and the only sound of greeting was the angry babble of the brook dashing down the stony slope at our feet.

We knelt over it to drink deeply and bathe our faces. Then looking about helplessly, I discovered afar the belt of the sea inclosed between the undulating lines of the dunes and the straight edge of the horizon. I pointed my arm at the white sails of the schooner creeping from under the land, and Seraphina, resting her head on my shoulder, shuddered.

“Let us go away from here.”

Our necessity pointed down the slope. We could not think of another way, and the extent of the plain with its boundary of forests filled us with the dread of things unknown. But, by getting down to the inlet of the sea, and following the bank of the little river, we were sure to reach the hacienda, if only a hope could buoy our sinking hearts long enough.

From our first step downwards the hard, rattling noise of the stones accompanied our descent, growing in volume, bewildering our minds. We had missed the indistinct beginning of the trail on the side of the ravine, and had to follow the course of the stream. A growth of wiry bushes sprang thickly between the large fragments of fallen rocks. On our right the shadows were beginning to steal into the chasm. Towering on our left the great stratified wall caught at the top of the glow of the low sun in a rich, tawny tint, right under the dark blue strip of sky, that seemed to reflect the gloom of the ravine, the sepulchral arid gloom of deep shadows and gray rocks, through which the shallow torrent dashed violently with glassy gleams between the sombre masses of vegetation.

We pushed on through the bunches of tough twigs; the massive boulders closed the view on every side; and Seraphina followed me with her hands on my shoulders. This was the best way in which I could help her descent till the declivity became less steep; and then I went ahead, forcing a path for her. Often we had to walk into the bed of the stream. It was icy cold. Some strange beast, perhaps a bird, invisible somewhere, emitted from time to time a faint and lamentable shriek. It was a wild scene, and the orifice of the cave appeared as an inaccessible black hole some ninety feet above our heads.

Then, as I stepped round a large fragment of rock, my eyes fell on Manuel's body.

Seraphina was behind me. With a wave of my hand I arrested her. It had not occurred to me before that, following the bottom of the ravine, we must come upon

the two bodies. Castro's was lower down, of course. I would have spared her the sight, but there was no retracing our steps. We had no strength and no time. Manuel was lying on his back with his hands under him, and his feet nearly in the brook.

The lower portion of the rope made a heap of cordage on the ground near him, but a great length of it hung perpendicularly above his head. The loose end he had snatched over the edge of his fall had whipped itself tight round the stem of a dwarf tree growing in a crevice high up the rock; and as he fell below, the jerk must have checked his descent, and had prevented him from alighting on his head. There was not a sign of blood anywhere upon him or on the stones. His eyes were shut. He might have lain down to sleep there, in our way; only from the slightly unnatural twist in the position of his arms and legs, I saw, at a glance, that all his limbs were broken.

On the other side of the boulder Seraphina called to me, and I could not answer her, so great was the shock I received in seeing the flutter of his slowly opening eyelids.

He still lived, then! He looked at me! It was an awful discovery to make, and the contrast of his anxious and feverish stare with the collapsed posture of his body was full of intolerable suggestions of fate blundering unlawfully, of death itself being conquered by pain. I looked away only to perceive something pitiless, belittling, and cruel in the precipitous immobility of the sheer walls, in the dark funereal green of the foliage, in the falling shadows, in the remoteness of the sky.

The unconsciousness of matter hinted at a weird and mysterious antagonism. All the inanimate things seemed to have conspired to throw in our way this man just enough alive to feel pain. The faint and lamentable sounds we had heard must have come from him. He was looking at me. It was impossible to say whether he saw anything at all. He barred our road with his remnant of life; but, when suddenly he spoke, my heart stood still for a moment in my motionless body.

"You, too!" he droned awfully. "Behold! I have been precipitated, alive, into this hell by another ghost. Nothing else could have overcome the greatness of my spirit."

His red shirt was torn open at the throat. His bared breast began to heave. He cried out with pain. Ready to fly from him myself, I shouted to Seraphina to keep away.

But it was too late. Imagining I had seen some new danger in our path, she had advanced to stand by my side.

"He is dying," I muttered in distraction. "We can do nothing."

But could we pass him by before he died? "This is terrible," said Seraphina.

My real hope had been that, after driving the Lugareños away, the peons would off-saddle near the little river to rest themselves and their horses. This is why I had almost pitilessly hurried Seraphina, after we had left the cave, down the steep but short descent of the ravine. I had kept to myself my despairing conviction that we could never reach the hacienda unaided, even if we had known the way. I had pretended confidence in ourselves, but all my trust was in the assistance I expected to get from these men. I understood so well the slenderness of that hope that I had not dared to mention it to her and to propose she should wait for me on the upland, while I went down by

myself on that quest. I could not bear the fear of returning unsuccessful only to find her dead. That is, if I had the strength to return after such a disappointment.

And the idea of her, waiting for me in vain, then wandering off, perhaps to fall under a bush and die alone, was too appalling to contemplate. That we must keep together, at all costs, was like a point of honour, like an article of faith with us — confirmed by what we had gone through already. It was like a law of existence, like a creed, like a defence which, once broken, would let despair upon our heads. I am sure she would not have consented to even a temporary separation. She had a sort of superstitious feeling that, should we be forced apart, even to the manifest saving of our lives, we would lay ourselves open to some calamity worse than mere death could be.

I loved her enough to share that feeling, but with the addition of a man's half-unconscious selfishness. I needed her indomitable frailness to prop my grosser strength. I needed that something not wholly of this world, which women's more exalted nature infuses into their passions, into their sorrows, into their joys; as if their adventurous souls had the power to range beyond the orbit of the earth for the gathering of their love, their hate — and their charity.

"He calls for death," she said, shrinking with horror and pity before the mutters of the miserable man at our feet. Every moment of daylight was of the utmost importance, if we were to save our freedom, our happiness, our very lives; and we remained rooted to the spot. For it seemed as though, at last, he had attained the end of his enterprise. He had captured us, as if by a very cruel stratagem.

A drowsiness would come at times over those big open eyes, like a film through which a blazing glance would break out now and then. He had recognized us perfectly; but, for the most part, we seemed to him to be the haunting ghosts of his inferno.

"You came from heaven," he raved feebly, rolling his straining eyes towards Seraphina. His internal injuries must have been frightful. Perhaps he dared not shift his head — the only movement that was in his power. "I reached up to the very angels in the inspiration of my song," he droned, "and would be called a demon on earth. Manuel el Demonio. And now precipitated alive... Nothing less. There is a greatness in me. Let some dew fall upon my lips."

He moaned from the very bottom of his heart. His teeth chattered.

"The blessed may not know anything of the cold and thirst of this place. A drop of dew — as on earth you used to throw alms to the poor from your coach — for the love of God."

She sank on the stones nearer to him than I would willingly have done, brave as a woman, only, can be before the atrocious depths of human misery. I leaned my shoulders against the boulder and crossed my arms on my breast, as if giving up an unequal struggle. Her hair was loose, her dress stained with ashes, torn by brambles; the darkness of the cavern seemed to linger in her hollow cheeks, in her sunken temples.

"He is thirsty," she murmured to me.

"Yes," I said.

She tore off a strip of her dress, dipped it in the running water at her side, and approached it, all dripping, to his lips which closed upon it with avidity. The walls of the rock looked on implacably, but the rushing stream seemed to hurry away, as if from an accursed spot.

“Dew from heaven,” he sighed out.

“You are on earth, Manuel,” she said. “You are given time to repent. This is earth.”

“Impossible,” he muttered with difficulty.

He had forced his human fellowship upon us, this man whose ambition it had been to be called demon on the earth. He held us by the humanity of his broken frame, by his human glance, by his human voice. I wonder if, had I been alone, I would have passed on as reason dictated, or have had the courage of pity and finished him off, as he demanded. Whenever he became aware of our presence, he addressed me as “Thou, English ghost,” and directed me, in a commanding voice, to take a stone and crush his head, before I went back to my own torments. I withdrew, at last, where he could not see me; but Seraphina never flinched in her task of moistening his lips with the strip of cloth she dipped in the brook, time after time, with a sublime perseverance of compassion.

It made me silent. Could I have stood there and recited the sinister detail of that man’s crimes, in the hope that she would recoil from him to pursue the road of safety? It was not his evil, but his suffering that confronted us now. The sense of our kinship emerged out of it like a fresh horror after we had escaped the sea, the tempest; after we had resisted untold fatigues, hunger, thirst, despair. We were vanquished by what was in us, not in him. I could say nothing. The light ebbed out of the ravine. The sky, like a thin blue veil stretched between the earth and the spaces of the universe, filtered the gloom of the darkness beyond.

I thought of the invisible sun ready to set into the sea, of the peons riding away, and of our helpless, hopeless state.

“For the love of God,” he mumbled.

“Yes, for the love of God,” I heard her expressionless voice repeat. And then there was only the greedy sound of his lips sucking at the cloth, and the impatient ripple of the stream.

“Come, death,” he sighed.

Yes, come, I thought, to release him and to set us free. All my prayer, now, was that we should be granted the strength to struggle from under the malignant frown of these crags, to close our eyes forever in the open.

And the truth is that, had we gone on, we should have found no one by the sea. The routed Lugareños had been able to embark under cover of a fusillade from those on board the schooner. All that would have met our despair, at the end of our toilsome march, would have been three dead pirates lying on the sand. The main body of the peons had gone, already, up the valley of the river with their few wounded. There would have been nothing for us to do but to stumble on and on upon their track, till

we lay down never to rise again. They did not draw rein once, between the sea and the hacienda, sixteen miles away.

About the time when we began our descent into the ravine, two of the peons, detached from the main body for the purpose of observing the schooner from the upland, had topped the edge of the plain. We had then penetrated into Manuel's inferno, too deep to be seen by them. These men spent some time lying on the grass, and watching over the dunes the course of the schooner on the open sea. Their horses were grazing near them. The wind was light; they waited to see the vessel far enough down the coast to make any intention of return improbable.

It was Manuel who saved our lives, defeating his own aim to the bitter end. Had not his vanity, policy, or the necessity of his artistic soul, induced him to enter the cave; had not his cowardice prevented him joining the Lugareños above, at the moment of the attack; had he not recoiled violently in a superstitious fear before my apparition at the mouth of the cave — we should have been released from our entombment, only to look once more at the sun. He paid the price of our ransom, to the uttermost farthing, in his lingering death. Had he killed himself on the spot, he would have taken our only slender chance with him into that nether world where he imagined himself to have been "precipitated alive." Finding him dead, we should have gone on. Less than ten minutes, no more than another ten paces beyond the spot, we should have been hidden from sight in the thickets of denser growth in the lower part of the ravine. I doubt whether we should have been able to get through; but, even so, we should have been going away from the only help within our reach. We should have been lost.

The two vaqueros, after seeing the schooner hull down under the low, fiery sun of the west, mounted and rode home over the plain, making for the head of the ravine, as their way lay. And, as they cantered along the side opposite to the cave, one of them caught sight of the length of rope dangling down the precipice. They pulled up at once.

The first I knew of their nearness was the snorting of a horse forced towards the edge of the chasm. I saw the animal's forelegs planted tensely on the very brink, and the body of the rider leaning over his neck to look down. And, when I wished to shout, I found I could not produce the slightest sound.

The man, rising in his stirrups, the reins in one hand and turning up the brim of his sombrero with the other, peered down at us over the pricked ears of his horse. I pointed over my head at the mouth of the cave, then down at Seraphina, lifting my hands to show that I was unarmed. I opened my lips wide. Surprise, agitation, weakness, had robbed me of every vestige of my voice. I beckoned downwards with a desperate energy, Horse and rider remained perfectly still, like an equestrian statue set up on the edge of a precipice. Sera-phina had never raised her head.

The man's intent scrutiny could not have mistaken me for a Lugareño. I think he gazed so long because he was amazed to discover down there a woman on her knees, stooping over a prostrate body, and a bareheaded man in a ragged white shirt and black breeches, reeling between the bushes and gesticulating violently, like an excited mute. But how a rope came to hang down from a tree, growing in a position so inaccessible

that only a bird could have attached it there struck him as the most mysterious thing of all. He pointed his finger at it interrogatively, and I answered this inquiring sign by indicating the stony slope of the ravine. It seemed as if he could not speak for wonder. After a while he sat back in his saddle, gave me an encouraging wave of the hand, and wheeled his horse away from the brink.

It was as if we had been casting a spell of extinction on each other's voices. No sooner had he disappeared than I found mine. I do not suppose it was very loud but, at my aimless screech, Seraphina looked upwards on every side, saw no one anywhere, and remained on her knees with her eyes, full of apprehension, fixed upon me.

"No! I am not mad, dearest," I said. "There was a man. He has seen us."

"Oh, Juan!" she faltered out, "pray with me that God may have mercy on this poor wretch and let him die."

I said nothing. My thin, quavering scream after the peon had awakened Manuel from his delirious dream of an inferno. The voice that issued from his shattered body was awfully measured, hollow, and profound.

"You live!" he uttered slowly, turning his eyes full upon my face, and, as if perceiving for the first time in me the appearance of a living man. "Ha! You English walk the earth unscathed."

A feeling of pity came to me — a pity distinct from the harrowing sensations of his miserable end. He had been evil in the obscurity of his life, as there are plants growing harmful and deadly in the shade, drawing poison from the dank soil on which they flourish. He was as unconscious of his evil as they — but he had a man's right to my pity.

"I am b — roken," he stammered out.

Seraphina kept on moistening his lips.

"Repent, Manuel," she entreated fervently. "We have forgiven thee the evil done to us. Repent of thy crimes — poor man."

"Your voice, Señorita. What? You! You yourself bringing this blessing to my lips! In your childhood I cried 'viva' many times before your coach. And now you deign — in your voice — with your hand. Ha! I could improvise — The star stoops to the crushed worm..."

A rising clatter of rolling stones mingled from afar with the broken moanings of his voice. Looking over my shoulder, I saw one peon beginning the descent of the slope, and, higher up, motionless between the heads of two horses, the head of another man — with the purple tint of an enlarged sky beyond, reflecting the glow of an invisible sun setting into the sea.

Manuel cried out piercingly, and we shuddered. Seraphina shrank close to my side, hiding her head on my breast. The peon staggered awkwardly down the slope, descending sideways in small steps, embarrassed by the enormous rowels of his spurs. He had a striped serape over his shoulder, and grasped a broad-bladed machete in his right hand. His stumbling, cautious feet sent into the ravine a crashing sound, as though we were to be buried under a stream of stones.

“Vuestra Señoria” gasped Manuel. “I shall be silent. Pity me! Do not — do not withdraw your hand from my extreme pain.”

I felt she had to summon all her courage to look at him again. She disengaged herself, resolutely, from my enfolding arms.

“No, no; unfortunate man,” she said, in a benumbed voice. “Think of thy end.”

“A crushed worm, senorita,” he mumbled.

The peon, having reached the bottom of the slope, became lost to view amongst the bushes and the great fragments of rocks below. Every sound in the ravine was hushed; and the darkening sky seemed to cast the shadow of an everlasting night into the eyes of the dying man.

Then the peon came out, pushing through, in a great swish of parted bushes. His spurs jingled at every step, his footfalls crunched heavily on the pebbles. He stopped, as if transfixed, muttering his astonishment to himself, but asking no questions. He was a young man with a thin black moustache twisted gallantly to two little points. He looked up at the sheer wall of the precipice; he looked down at the group we formed at his feet. Suddenly, as if returning from an abyss of pain, Manuel declared distinctly:

“I feel in me a greatness, an inspiration...”

These were his last words. The heavy dark lashes descended slowly upon the faint gleam of the eyeballs, like a lowered curtain. The deep folds of the ravine gathered the falling dusk into great pools of absolute blackness, at the foot of the crags.

Rising high above our littleness, that watched, fascinated, the struggle of lights and shadows over the soul entangled in the wreck of a man’s body, the rocks had a monumental indifference. And between their great, stony faces, turning pale in the gloom, with the amazed peon as if standing guard, machete in hand, Manuel’s greatness and his inspiration passed away without as much as an exhaled sigh. I did not even know that he had ceased to breathe, till Seraphina rose from her knees with a low cry, and flung far away from her, nervously, the strip of cloth upon which his parted lips had refused to close.

My arms were ready to receive her. “Ah! At last!” she cried. There was something resentful and fierce in that cry, as though the pity of her woman’s heart had been put to too cruel a test.

I, too, had been humane to that man. I had had his life on the end of my pistol, and had spared him from an impulse that had done nothing but withhold from him the mercy of a speedy death. This had been my pity.

But it was Seraphina’s cry — this “At last,” showing the stress and pain of the ordeal — that shook my faith in my conduct. It had brought upon our heads a retribution of mental and bodily anguish, like a criminal weakness. I was young, and my belief in the justice of life had received a shock. If it were impossible to foretell the consequences of our acts, if there were no safety in the motives within ourselves, what remained for our guidance?

And the inscrutable immobility of towering forms, steeped in the shadows of the chasm, appeared pregnant with a dreadful wisdom. It seemed to me that I would never

have the courage to lift my hand, open my lips, make a step, obey a thought. A long sun-ray shot to the zenith from the beclouded west, crossing obliquely in a faint red bar the purple band of sky above the ravine.

The young vaquero had taken off his hat before the might of death, and made a perfunctory sign of the cross. He looked up and down the lofty wall, as if it could give him the word of that riddle. Twice his spurs clashed softly, and, with one hand grasping the rope, he stooped low in the twilight over the body.

“We looked for this Lugareño,” he said, replacing his hat on his head carelessly. “He was a mad singer, and I saw him once kill one of us very swiftly. They used to call him in jest, El Demonio. Ah! But you... But you...”

His wonder overcame him. His bewildered eyes glimmered, staring at us in the deepening dusk.

“Speak, hombre,” he cried. “Who are you and who is she? Whence came you? Where are you going with this woman?...”

Chapter 11

Not a soul stirred in the one long street of the negro village. The yellow crescent of the diminished moon swam low in the pearly light of the dawn; and the bamboo walls of huts, thatched with palm leaves, glistened here and there through the great leaves of bananas. All that night we had been moving on and on, slowly crossing clear savannas, in which nothing stirred beside ourselves but the escort of our own shadows, or plunging through dense patches of forest of an obscurity so impenetrable that the very forms of our rescuers became lost to us, though we heard their low voices and felt their hands steadying us in our saddles. Then our horses paced softly on the dust of a road, while athwart an avenue of orange trees whose foliage seemed as black as coal, the blind walls of the hacienda shone dead white like a vision of mists. A Brazilian aloe flowered by the side of the gate; we drooped in our saddles; and the heavy knocks against the wooden portal seemed to go on without cause, and stop without reason, like a sound heard in a dream. We entered Seraphina's hacienda. The high walls inclosed a square court deep as the yard of a prison, with flat-roofed buildings all around. It rang with many voices suddenly. Every moment the daylight increased; young négresses in loose gowns ran here and there, cackling like chased hens, and a fat woman waddled out from under the shadow of a veranda.

She was Seraphina's old nurse. She was scolding volubly, and suddenly she shrieked, as though she had been stabbed. Then all was still for a long time. Sitting high on the back of my patient mount, with my fingers twisted in the mane, I saw in a throng of woolly heads and bright garments Seraphina's pale face. An increasing murmur of sobs and endearing names mounted up to me. Her hair hung down, her eyes seemed immense; these people were carrying her off — and a man with a careworn, bilious face and a straight, gray beard, neatly clipped on the edges, stood at the head of my horse, blinking with astonishment.

The fat woman reappeared, rolling painfully along the veranda.

“Enrico! It is her lover! Oh! my treasure, my lamb, my precious child. Do you hear, Enrico? Her lover! Oh! the poor darling of my heart.”

She appeared to be giggling and weeping at the same time. The sky above the yard brightened all at once, as if the sun had emerged with a leap from the distant waters of the Atlantic. She waved her short arms at me over the railing, then plunged her dark fingers in the shock of iron-gray hair gathered on the top of her head. She turned away abruptly, a yellow head-kerchief dodged in her way, a slap resounded, a cry of pain, and a negro girl bolted into the court, nursing her cheek in the palms of her hands.

Doors slammed; other negro girls ran out of the veranda dismayed, and took cover in various directions.

I swayed to and fro in the saddle, but faithful to the plan of our escape, I tried to make clear my desire that these peons should be sworn to secrecy immediately. Meantime, somebody was trying to disengage my feet from the stirrups.

“Certainly. It is as your worship wishes.”

The careworn man at the head of my horse was utterly in the dark.

“Attention!” he shouted. “Catch hold, hombres. Carry the caballero.”

What caballero? A rosy flush tinged a boundless expanse above my face, and then came a sudden contraction of space and dusk. There were big earthenware jars ranged in a row on the floor, and the two vaqueros stood bareheaded, stretching their arms over me towards a black crucifix on a wall, taking their oaths, while I rested on my back. A white beard hovered about my face, a voice said, “It is done,” then called anxiously twice, “Señor! Señor!” and when I had escaped from the dream of a cavern, I found myself with my head pillowed on a fat woman’s breast, and drinking chicken broth out of a basin held to my lips. Her large cheeks quivered, she had black twinkling eyes and slight moustaches at the corners of her lips. But where was her white beard? And why did she talk of an angel, as if she were Manuel?

“Seraphina!” I cried, but Castro’s cloak swooped on my head like a sable wing. It was death. I struggled. Then I died. It was delicious to die. I followed the floating shape of my love beyond the worlds of the universe. We soared together above pain, strife, cruelty, and pity. We had left death behind us and everything of life but our love, which threw a radiant halo around two flames which were ourselves — and immortality inclosed us in a great and soothing darkness.

Nothing stirred in it. We drifted no longer. We hung in it quite still — and the empty husk of my body watched our two flames side by side, mingling their light in an infinite loneliness. There were two candles burning low on a little black table near my head. Enrico, with his white beard and zealous eyes, was bending over my couch, while a chair, on high runners, rocked empty behind him. I stared.

“Señor, the night is far advanced,” he said soothingly, “and Dolores, my wife, watches over Dona Seraphina’s slumbers, on the other side of this wall.”

I had been dead to the world for nearly twenty hours, and the awakening resembled a new birth, for I felt as weak and helpless as an infant.

It is extraordinary how quickly we regained so much of our strength; but I suppose people recover sooner from the effects of privation than from the weakness of disease. Keeping pace with the return of our bodily vigour, the anxieties of mind returned, augmented tenfold by all the weight of our sinister experience. And yet, what worse could happen to us in the future? What other terror could it hold? We had come back from the very confines of destruction. But Seraphina, reclining back in an armchair, very still, with her eyes fixed on the high white wall facing the veranda across the court, would murmur the word “Separation!”

The possibility of our lives being forced apart was terrible to her affection, and intolerable to her pride. She had made her choice, and the feeling she had surrendered herself to so openly must have had a supreme potency. She had disregarded for it all the traditions of silence and reserve. She had looked at me fondly through the very tears of her grief; she had followed me — leaving her dead unburied and her prayers unsaid. What more could she have done to proclaim her love to the world? Could she, after that, allow anything short of death to thwart her fidelity? Never! And if she were to discover that I could, after all, find it in my heart to support an existence in which she had no share, then, indeed, it would be more than enough to make her die of shame.

“Ah, dearest!” I said, “you shall never die of shame.”

We were different, but we had read each other’s natures by a fierce light. I understood the point of honour in her constancy, and she never doubted the scruples of my true devotion, which had brought so many dangers on her head. We were flying not to save our lives, but to preserve inviolate our truth to each other and to ourselves. And if our sentiments appear exaggerated, violent, and overstrained, I must point back to their origin. Our love had not grown like a delicate flower, cherished in tempered sunshine. It had never known the atmosphere of tenderness; our souls had not been awakened to each other by a gentle whisper, but as if by the blast of a trumpet. It had called us to a life whose enemy was not death, but separation.

The enemy sat at the gate of our shelter, as death sits at the gate of life. These high walls could not protect us, nor the tearful mumble of the old woman’s prayers, nor yet the careworn fidelity of Enrico. The couple hung about us, quivering with emotion. They peeped round the corners of the veranda, and only rarely ventured to come out openly. The silent Galician stroked his clipped beard; the obese woman kept on crossing herself with loud, resigned sighs. She would waddle up, wiping her eyes, to stroke Seraphina’s head and murmur endearing names. They waited on us hand and foot, and would stand close together, ready for the slightest sign, in a rapt contemplation. Now and then she would nudge her husband’s ribs with her thick elbow and murmur, “Her lover.”

She was happy when Seraphina let her sit at her feet, and hold her hand. She would pat it with gentle taps, squatting shapelessly on a low stool.

“Why go so far from thy old nurse, darling of my heart? Ah! love is love, and we have only one life to live, but this England is very far — very far away.”

She nodded her big iron-gray head slowly; and to our longing England appeared very distant, too, a fortunate isle across the seas, an abode of peace, a sanctuary of love.

There was no plan open to us but the one laid down by Sebright. The secrecy of our sojourn at the hacienda had, in a measure, failed, though there was no reason to suppose the two peons had broken their oath. Our arrival at dawn had been unobserved, as far as we knew, and the domestic slaves, mostly girls, had been kept from all communication with the field hands outside. All these square leagues of the estate

were very much out of the world, and this isolation had not been broken upon by any of O'Brien's agents coming out to spy. It seemed to be the only part of Seraphina's great possessions that remained absolutely her own.

Not a whisper of any sort of news reached us in our hiding-place till the fourth evening, when one of the vaqueros reported to Enrico that, riding on the inland boundary, he had fallen in with a company of infantry encamped on the edge of a little wood. Troops were being moved upon Rio Medio. He brought a note from the officer in command of that party. It contained nothing but a requisition for twenty head of cattle. The same night we left the hacienda.

It was a starry darkness. Behind us the soft wailing of the old woman at the gate died out:

“So far! So very far!”

We left the long street of the slave village on the left, and walked down the gentle slope of the open glade towards the little river. Seraphina's hair was concealed in the crown of a wide sombrero and, wrapped up in a serape, she looked so much like a cloaked vaquero that one missed the jingle of spurs out of her walk. Enrico had fitted me out in his own clothes from top to toe. He carried a lanthorn, and we followed the circle of light that swayed and trembled upon the short grass. There was no one else with us, the crew of the drogher being already on board to await our coming.

Her mast appeared above the roof of some low sheds grouped about a short wooden jetty. Enrico raised the lamp high to light us, as we stepped on board.

Not a word was spoken; the five negroes of the crew (Enrico answered for their fidelity) moved about noiselessly, almost invisible. Blocks rattled feebly aloft.

“Enrico,” said Seraphina, “do not forget to put a stone cross over poor Castro's grave.”

“No, Señorita. May you know years of felicity. We would all have laid down our lives for you. Remember that, and do not forget the living. Your childhood has been the consolation of the poor woman there for the loss of our little one, your foster brother, who died. We have given to you much of our affection for him who was denied to our old age.”

He stepped back from the rail. “Go with God,” he said.

The faint air filled the sail, and the outlines of wharf and roof fell back into the sombre background of the land, but the lanthorn in Enrico's hand glimmered motionless at the end of the jetty, till a bend of the stream hid it from our sight.

We glided smoothly between the banks. Now and then a stretch of osiers and cane brakes rustled alongside in the darkness. All was strange; the contours of the land melted before our advance. The earth was made of shifting shadows, and only the stars remained in unchanged groups of glitter on the black sky. We floated across the land-locked basin, and under the low headland we had steered for from the sea in the storm. All this, seen only once under streams of lightning, was unrecognizable to us, and seemed plunged in deep slumber. But the fresh feel of the sea air, and the freedom of earth and sky wedded on the sea horizon, returned to us like old friends,

the companions of that time when we communed in words and silences on board the Lion, that fragment of England found in a mist, boarded in battle, with its absurd and warmhearted protection. On our other hand, the rampart of white dunes intruded the line of a ghostly shore between the depth of the sea and the profundity of the sky; and when the faint breeze failed for a moment, the negro crew troubled the silence with the heavy splashes of their sweeps falling in slow and solemn cadence. The rudder creaked gently; the black in command was old and of spare build, resembling Cesar, the major-domo, without the splendour of maroon velvet and gold lace. He was a very good sailor, I believe, taciturn and intelligent. He had seen the Lion frequently on his trips to Havana, and would recognize her, he assured me, amongst a whole host of shipping. When I had explained what was expected of him, according to Sebright's programme, a bizarre grimace of a smile disturbed the bony, mournful cast of his African face.

"Fall on board by accident, Señor. Si! Now, by St. Jago of Compostella, the patron of our hacienda, you shall see this old Pedro — who has been set to sail the craft ever since she was built — as overcome by an accident as a little rascal of a boy that has stolen a boat."

After this wordy declaration he never spoke to us again. He gave his short orders in low undertones, and the others, four stalwart blacks, in the prime of life, executed them in silence. Another night brought the unchanging stars to look at us in their multitudes, till the dawn put them out just as we opened the entrance of the harbour. The daylight discovered the arid colouring of the coast, a castle on a sandy hill, and a few small boats with ragged sails making for the land. A brigantine, that seemed to have carried the breeze with her right in, threw up the Stars and Stripes radiantly to the rising sun, before rounding the point. The sound of bells came out to sea, and met us while we crept slowly on, abreast of the battery at the water's edge.

"A feast-day in the city," said the old negro at the helm. "And here is an English ship of war."

The sun-rays struck from afar full at her belted side; the water was like glass along the shore. She swam into the very shade of the hill, before she wore round, with great deliberation, in an ample sweep of her headgear through a complete half-circle. She came to the wind on the other tack under her short canvas; her lower deck ports were closed, the hammock cloths like a ridge of unmelted snow lying along her rail.

It was evident she was kept standing off and on outside the harbour, as an armed man may pace to and fro before a gate. With the hum of six hundred wakeful lives in her flanks, the tap-tapping of a drum, and the shrill modulations of the boatswain's calls piping some order along her decks, she floated majestically across our path. But the only living being we saw was the red-coated marine on sentry by the lifebuoys, looking down at us over the taffrail. We passed so close to her that I could distinguish the whites of his eyes, and the tompions in the muzzles of her stern-chasers protruding out of the ports belonging to the admiral's quarters.

I knew her. She was Rowley's flagship. She had thrown the shadow of her sails upon the end of my first sea journey. She was the man-of-war going out for a cruise on that

day when Carlos, Tomas, and myself arrived in Jamaica in the old Thames. And there she was meeting me again, after two years, before Havana — the might of the fortunate isle to which we turned our eyes, part and parcel of my inheritance, formidable with the courage of my countrymen, humming with my native speech — and as foreign to my purposes as if I had forfeited forever my birthright in her protection. I had drifted into a sort of outlaw. You may not break the king's peace and be made welcome on board a king's ship. You may not hope to make use of a king's ship for the purposes of an elopement. There was no room on board that seventy-four for our romance.

As it was, I very nearly hailed her. What would become of us if the Lion had already left Havana? I thought. But no. To hail her meant separation — the only forbidden thing to those who, in the strength of youth and love, are permitted to defy the world together.

I did not hail; and the marine dwindled to a red speck upon the noble hull forging away from us on the offshore tack. The brazen clangour of bells seemed to struggle with the sharp puff of the breeze that sent us in.

The shipping in harbour was covered with bunting in honour of the feast-day; for the same reason, there was not a sign of the usual crowd of small boats that give animation to the waters of a port; the middle of the harbour was strangely empty. A solitary bumboat canoe, with a yellow bunch of bananas in the bow, and an old negro woman dipping a languid paddle at the stern, were all that met my eye. Presently, however, a six-oared custom-house galley darted out from the tier of ships, pulling for the American brigantine. I noticed in her, beside the ordinary port officials, several soldiers, and a person astonishingly like the alguazil of the illustrations to Spanish romances. One of the uniformed sitters waved his hand at us, recognizing an estate drogher, and shouted some directions, of which we only caught the words:

“Steps — examination — to-morrow.”

Our steersman took off his old hat humbly, to hail back, “Muy bien, Señor.”

I breathed freely, for they gave us no more of their attention. Soldiers, alguazil, and custom-house officers were swarming aboard the American, as if bent on ransacking her from stem to stern in the shortest possible time, so as not to be late for the procession.

The absence of movement in the harbour, the festive and idle appearance of the ships, with the flutter of innumerable flags on the forest of masts, and the great uproar of church bells in the air, made an impressive greeting for our eyes and ears. And the deserted aspect of the harbour front of the city was very striking, too. The feast had swept the quays of people so completely that the tiny pair of sentries at the foot of a tall yellow building caught the eye from afar. Sera-phina crouched on a coil of rope under the bulwark; old Pedro, at the tiller, peered about from under his hand, and I, trying to expose myself to view as little as possible, helped him to look for the Lion. There she is. Yes! No! There she was. A crushing load fell off my chest. We had made her out together, old Pedro and I.

And then the last part of Sebright's plan had to be carried out at once. The foresheet of the drogher appeared to part, our mainsail shook, and before I could gasp twice,

we had drifted stern foremost into the Lion's mizzen chains with a crash that brought a genuine expression of concern to the old negro's face. He had managed the whole thing with a most convincing skill, and without even once glancing at the ship. We had done our part, but the people of the Lion seemed to fail in theirs unaccountably. Of all the faces that crowded her rail at the shock, not one appeared with a glimmer of intelligence. All the cargo ports were down. Their surprise and their swearing appeared to me alarmingly unaffected; with a most imbecile alacrity they exerted themselves, with small spars and boathooks, to push the drogher off. Nobody seemed to recognize me; Seraphina might have been a peon sitting on deck, cloaked from neck to heels and under a sombrero. I dared not shout to them in English, for fear of being heard on board the other ships around. At last Sebright himself appeared on the poop.

He gave one look over the side.

"What the devil..." he began. Was he blind, too?

Suddenly I saw him throw up his arms above his head. He vanished. A port came open with a jerk at the last moment. I lifted Seraphina up: two hands caught hold of her, and, in my great hurry to scramble up after her, I barked my shins cruelly. The port fell; the drogher went on bumping alongside, completely disregarded. Seraphina dropped the cloak at her feet and flung off her hat.

"Good-morning, amigos," she said gravely.

A hissed "Damn you fools — keep quiet!" from Sebright, stifled the cheer in all those bronzed throats. Only a thin little poor "hooray" quavered along the deck. The timid steward had not been able to overcome his enthusiasm. He slapped his head in despair, and rushed away to bury himself in his pantry.

"Turned up, by heavens!... Go in... Good God!... Bucketfuls of tears..." stammered Sebright, pushing us into the cuddy. "Go in! Go in at once!"

Mrs. Williams rose from behind the table wide-eyed, clasping her hands, and stumbled twice as she ran to us.

"What have you done to that child, Mr. Kemp!" she cried insanely at me. "Oh, my dear, my dear! You look like your own ghost."

Sebright, burning with impatience, pulled me away. The cabin door fell upon the two women, locked in a hug, and, stepping into his stateroom, we could do nothing at first but slap each other on the back and ejaculate the most unmeaning exclamations, like a couple of jocular idiots. But when, in the expansion of my heart, I tried to banter him about not keeping his word to look out for us, he bent double in trying to restrain his hilarity, slapped his thighs, and grew red in the face.

The excellent joke was that, for the past six days, we had been supposed to be dead — drowned; at least Dona Seraphina had been provided with that sort of death in her own name; I was drowned, too, but in the disguise of a piratical young English nobleman.

"There's nothing too bad for them to believe of us," he commented, and guffawed in his joy at seeing me unscathed. "Dead! Drowned! Ha! Ha! Good, wasn't it?"

Mrs. Williams — he said — had been weeping her eyes out over our desolate end; and even the skipper had sulked with his food for a day or two.

“Ha! Ha! Drowned! Excellent!” He shook me by the shoulders, looking me straight in the eyes — and the bizarre, nervous hilarity of my reception, so unlike his scornful attitude, proved that he, too, had believed the rumour. Indeed, nothing could have been more natural, considering my inexperience in handling boats and the fury of the norther. It had sent the *Lion* staggering into Havana in less than twenty hours after we had parted from her on the coast.

Suddenly a change came over him. He pushed me on to the settee.

“Speak! Talk! What has happened? Where have you been all this time? Man, you look ten years older.”

“Ten years. Is that all?” I said.

And after he had heard the whole story of our passages he appeared greatly sobered.

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” he muttered, lost in deep thought, till I reminded him it was his turn, now, to speak.

“You are the talk of the town,” he said, recovering his elasticity of spirit as he went on. The death of Don Balthasar had been the first great sensation of Havana, but it seemed that O’Brien had kept that news to himself, till he heard by an overland messenger that Sera-phina and I had escaped from Casa Riego.

Then he gave it to the world; he let it be inferred that he had the news of both events together. The story, as sworn to by various suborned rascals, and put out by his creatures, ran that an English desperado, arriving in Rio Medio with some Mexicans in a schooner, had incited the rabble of the place to attack the Casa Riego. Don Balthasar had been shot while defending his house at the head of his negroes; and Don Balthasar’s daughter had been carried off by the English pirate.

The amazement and sensation were extreme. Several of the first families went into mourning. A service for the repose of Don Balthasar’s soul was sung in the Cathedral. Captain Williams went there out of curiosity, and returned full of the magnificence of the sight; nave draped in black, an enormous catafalque, with silver angels, more than life-size, kneeling at the four corners with joined hands, an amazing multitude of lights. A demonstration of unbounded grief from the Judge of the Marine Court had startled the distinguished congregation. In his place amongst the body of higher magistrature, Don Patricio O’Brien burst into an uncontrollable paroxysm of sobs, and had to be assisted out of the church.

It was almost incredible, but I could well believe it. With the thunderous strains of *Dies Irae* rolling over his bowed head, amongst all these symbols and trappings of woe, he must have seen, in the black anguish of his baffled passion, the true image of death itself, and tasted all the profound deception of life. Who could tell how much secret rage, jealousy, regret, and despair had gone to that outburst of grief, whose truth had fluttered a distinguished company of mourners, and had nearly interrupted their official supplications for the repose of that old man, who had been dead to the world for so many years? I believe that, on that very day, just as he was going to the

service, O'Brien had received the news of our supposed death by drowning. The music, the voices, the lights of the grave, the pomp of mourning, awe, and supplication crying for mercy upon the dead, had been too much for him. He had presumed too much upon his fortitude. He wept aloud for his love lost, for his vengeance defeated, for the dreams gone out of his life, for the inaccessible consummation of his desire.

"And, you know, with all these affairs, he feels himself wobbling in his socket," Sebright began again, after musing for a while. Indeed, the last events in Rio Medio were endangering his position. He could no more present his reports upon the state of the province with incidental reflections upon the bad faith of the English Government (who encouraged the rebels against the Catholic king), the arrogance of the English admiral, and concluding with the loyalty and honesty of the Rio Medio population, "who themselves suffered many acts of molestation from the Mexican pirates." The most famous of these papers, printed at that time in the official Gazette, had recommended that the loyal town should be given a battery of thirty-six pounders for purposes of self-defence. They had been given them just in time to be turned on Rowley's boats; it is known with what deadly effect. O'Brien's report after that event had made it clear that that virtuous population of the bay, exasperated by the intrusions of the Mexicanos upon their peaceful state, and abhorring in their souls the rebellion trying to lift its envenomed head, etc., etc.,... heroically manned the battery to defend their town from the boats which they took to be these very pirates the British admiral was in search of. He pleaded for them the uncertain light of the early morning, the ardour of citizens, valorous, but naturally inexperienced in matters of war, and the impossibility to suppose that the admiral of a friendly power would dispatch an armed force to land on these shores. I have read these things with my own eyes; there were old files of the Gazette on board, and Sebright, who had been reading up his O'Brien, pointed them out to me with his finger, muttering:

"Here — look there. Pretty, ain't it?"

But that was all over. The bubble had burst. It was reported in town that the private audience the Juez had lately from the Captain-General was of a most stormy description. They say old Marshal What-d'ye-call-'um ended by flinging his last report in his face, and asking him how dared he work his lawyer's tricks upon an old soldier. Good old fighting cock. But stupid. All these old soldiers were stupid, Sebright declared. Old admirals, too. However, the land troops had arrived in Rio Medio by this time; the Tornado frigate, too, no doubt, having sailed four days ago, with orders to burn the villages to the ground; and the good Lugareños must be catching colds trying to hide from the carabineers in the deep, damp woods.

Our admiral was awaiting the issue of that expedition. Returning home under a cloud, Rowley wanted to take with him the assurance of the pirate nest being destroyed at last, as a sort of diplomatic feather in his cap.

"He may think," Sebright commented, "that it's his sailorly bluff that has done it, but, as far as I can see, nobody but you yourself, Kemp, had anything to do with bringing it about. Funny, is it not? Old Rowley keeps his ship dodging outside because

it's cooler at sea than stewing in this harbour, but he sends in a boat for news every morning. What he is most anxious for is to get the notorious Nichols into his hands; take him home for a hanging. It seems clear to me that they are humbugging him ashore. Nichols! Where's Nichols? There are people here who say that Nichols has had free board and lodging in Havana jail for the last six months. Others swear that it is Nichols who has killed the old gentleman, run off with Dona Seraphina, and got drowned. Nichols! Who's Nichols? On that showing you are Nichols. Anybody may be Nichols. Who has ever seen him outside Rio Medio? I used to believe in him at one time, but, upon my word I begin to doubt whether there ever was such a man."

"But the man existed, at any rate," I said. "I knew him — I've talked with him. He came out second mate in the same ship with me — in the old Thames. Ramon took charge of him in Kingston, and that's the last positive thing I can swear to, of him. But that he was in Rio Medio for two years, and vanished from there almost directly after that unlucky boat affair, I am absolutely certain."

"Well, I suppose O'Brien knows where to lay his hand on him. But no matter where the fellow is, in jail or out of it, the admiral will never get hold of him. If they had him they could not think of giving him up. He knows too much of the game; and remember that O'Brien, if he wobbles in the socket, is by no means down yet. A man like that doesn't get knocked over like a ninepin. You may be sure he has twenty skeletons put away in good places, that he will haul out one by one, rather than let himself be squashed. He's not going to give in. A few days ago, a priest — your priest, you know — turned up here on foot from Rio Medio, and went about wringing his hands, declaring that he knew all the truth, and meant to make a noise about it, too. O'Brien made short work of him, though; got the archbishop to send him into retreat, as they call it, to a Franciscan convent a hundred miles from here. These things are whispered about all along the gutters of this place."

I imagined the poor Father Antonio, with his simple resignation, mourning for us in his forced retreat, brokenhearted, and murmuring, "Inscrutable, inscrutable." I should have liked to see the old man.

"I tell you the town is fairly buzzing with the atrocities of this business," Sebright went on. "It's the thing for fashionable people to go and see what I may call the relics of the crime. They are on show in the waiting-hall of the Palace of Justice. Why, I went there myself. You go through a swing door into a big place that, for cheerfulness, is no better than a monster coal cellar, and there you behold, laid out on a little black table, Mrs. Williams' woollen shawl, your Señorita's tortoise-shell comb, that had got entangled in it somehow, and my old cap that I lent you — you remember. I assure you, it gave me the horrors to see the confounded things spread out there in that dim religious light. Dash me, if I didn't go queer all over. And all the time swell carriages stopping before the portico, dressed-up women walking up in pairs and threes, sighing before the missus' shawl, turning up their eyes, 'Ah! Pobrecita! Pobrecita! But what a strange wrap for her to have. It is very coarse. Perished in the flower of her youth. Incredible! Oh, the savage, cruel Englishman.' The funniest thing in the world."

But if this was so, Manuel's Lugareños were now in Havana. Sebright pointed out that, as things stood, it was the safest place for them, under the wing of their patron. Sebright had recognized the schooner at once. She came in very early one morning, and hauled herself unostentatiously out of sight amongst a ruck of small craft moored in the lower part of the harbour. He took the first opportunity to ask one of the guards on the quay what was that pretty vessel over there, just to hear what the man would say. He was assured that she was a Porto Rico trader of no consequence, well known in the port.

"Never mind the scoundrels; they can do nothing more to you."

Sebright dismissed the Lugareños out of my life. The unfavourable circumstance for us was that the captain had gone ashore. The ship was ready for sea; absolutely cleared; papers on board; could go in an hour if it came to that; but, at any rate, next morning at daylight, before O'Brien could get wind of the Riego drogher arriving. Every movement in port was reported to the Juez; but this was a feast, and he would not hear of it probably till next day. Even fiestas had their uses sometimes. In his anxiety to discover Seraphina, O'Brien had played such pranks amongst the foreign shipping (after the *Lion* had been drawn blank) that the whole consular body had addressed a joint protest to the Governor, and the Juez had been told to moderate his efforts. No ship was to be visited more than once. Still I had seen, myself, soldiers going in a boat to board the American brigantine: a garlic-eating crew, poisoning the cabins with their breath, and poking their noses everywhere. Of course, since our supposed drowning, there had been a lull; but the least thing might start him off again. He was reputed to be almost out of his mind with sorrow, arising from his great attachment for the family. He walked about as if distracted, suffered from insomnia, and had not been fit to preside in his court for over a week, now.

"But don't you expect Williams back on board directly?"

He shook his head.

"No. Not even to-night. He told the missus he was going to spend the day out of town with his consignee, but he tipped me the wink. This evening he will send a note that the consignee detains him for the night, because the letters are not ready, and I'll have to go to her and lie, the best I am able, that it's quite the usual thing. Damn!"

I was appalled. This was too bad. And, as I raged against the dissolute habits of the man, Sebright entreated me to moderate my voice so as not to be heard in the cabin. Did I expect the man to change his skin? He had been doing the gay bachelor about here all his life; had never suspected he was doing anything particularly scandalous either.

"He married the old girl out of chivalry, — the romantic fat beggar, — and never realized what it meant till she came out with him," Sebright went on whispering to me. "He loves and honours her more than you may think. That is so, for all your shrugs, Mr. Kemp. It is not so easy to break the old connection as you imagine. Why, the other evening, two of his dissolute habits (as you call them) came off, with mantillas over their heads, in a boat, in company with a male scallawag of sorts, pinching a mandolin,

and serenaded the ship for him. We were all in the cabin after supper, and poor Mrs. Williams, with her eyes still red from weeping over you people, says to us, 'How sweet and melancholy that sounds,' says she. You should have seen the skipper rolling his eyes at me. The perspiration of fright was simply pouring down his face. I rushed on deck, and it took me all my Spanish to stop them from coming aboard. I had to swear by all the saints, and the honour of a caballero, that there was a wife. They went away laughing at last. They did not want to make trouble. They simply had not believed the tale before. Thought it was some dodge of his. I could hear their peals of laughter all the way up the harbour. These are the difficulties we have. The old girl must be protected from that sort of eye-opener, if I've to forswear my soul. I've been keeping guard over her ever since we arrived here — besides looking out for you people, as long as there was any hope."

I was greatly cast down. Perhaps Williams was justified in making concessions to the associates of his former jolly existence to save some outrage to the feelings of his consort. I did not want to criticise his motives — but what about getting him back on board at once?

Sebright was biting his lip. The necessity was pressing, he admitted.

He had an idea where to find him. But for himself he could not go — that was evident. Neither would I wish him to leave the ship, even for a moment, now Seraphina was on board. An unexpected visit from some zealous police understrapper, a momentary want of presence of mind on the part of the timid steward; there was enough to bring about our undoing. Moreover, as he had said, he must remain on guard over the missus. But whom to send? There was not a single boatman about. The harbour was a desert of water and dressed ships; but even the crews of most of them were ashore — "on a regular spree of praying," as he expressed it vexedly. As to our own crew, not one of them knew anything more of Spanish than a few terms of abuse, perhaps. Their hearts were in the right place, but as to their wits, he wouldn't trust a single one of them by himself — no, not an inch away from the ship. How could he send one of them ashore with the wineshops yawning wide on all sides, and not enough lingo to ask for the way. Sure to get drunk, to get lost, to get into trouble in some way, and in the end get picked up by the police. The slightest hitch of that sort would call attention upon the ship — and with O'Brien to draw inferences... He rubbed his head.

"I suppose I'll have to go," he grunted. "But I am known; I may be followed. They may wonder why I rush to fetch my skipper. And yet I feel this is the time. The very time. Between now and four o'clock to-morrow morning we have an almost absolute certitude of getting away with you two. This is our chance and your chance."

He was lost in perplexity. Then, as if inspired, I cried:

"I will go!"

"The devil!" he said, amazed. "Would you?"

I rushed at him with arguments. No one would know me. My clothes were all right and clean enough for a feast-day. I could slip through the crowds un-perceived. The principal thing was to get Seraphina out of O'Brien's reach. At the worst, I could

always find means to get away from Cuba by myself. There was Mrs. Williams to look after her, and if I missed Williams by some mischance, and failed to make my way back to the ship in time, I charged them solemnly not to wait, but sail away at the earliest possible moment.

I said much more than this. I was eloquent. I became as if suddenly intoxicated by the nearness of freedom and safety. The thought of being at sea with her in a few hours away from all trouble of mind or heart, made my head swim. It seemed to me I should go mad if I was not allowed to go. My limbs tingled with eagerness. I stuttered with excitement.

“Well — after all!” Sebright mumbled.

“I must go in and tell her,” I said.

“No. Don’t do that,” said that wise young man. “Have you made up your mind?”

“Yes, I have,” I answered. “But she’s reasonable.”

“Still,” he argued, “the old girl is sure to say that nothing of the kind is necessary. The captain told her that he was coming back for tea. What could we say to that? We can’t explain the true state of the case, and if you persist in going, it will look like pig-headed folly on your part.”

He threw his writing-desk open for me.

“Write to her. Write down your arguments — what you have been telling me. It’s a fact that the door stands open for a few hours. As to the rest,” he pursued, with a weary sigh, “I’ll do the lying to pass it off with Mrs. Williams.”

Thus it came about that, with only two flimsy bulkheads between us, I wrote my first letter to Seraphina, while Sebright went on deck to make arrangements to send me ashore. He was some time away; long enough for me to pour out on paper the exultation of my thought, the confidence of my hope, my desire to have her safe at last with me upon the blue sea. One must seize a propitious moment lest it should slip away and never return, I wrote. I begged her to believe I was acting for the best, and only from my great love, that could not support the thought of her being so near O’Brien, the arch-enemy of our union. There was no separation on the sea.

Sebright came in brusquely.

“Come along.”

The American brigantine was berthed by then, close astern of the Lion, and Sebright had the idea of asking her mate to let his boat (it was in the water) put ashore a visitor he had on board. His own were hoisted, he explained, and there were no boatmen plying for hire.

His request was granted. I was pulled ashore by two American sailors, who never said a word to each other, and evidently took me for a Spaniard.

It was an excellent idea. By borrowing the Yankee’s boat, the track of my connection with the Lion was covered. The silent seamen landed me, as asked by Sebright, near the battery on the sand, quite clear of the city.

I thanked them in Spanish, and, traversing a piece of open ground, made a wide circle to enter the town from the land side, to still further cover my tracks. I passed

through a sort of squalid suburb of huts, hovels, and negro shanties. I met very few people, and these mostly old women, looking after the swarms of children of all colours and sizes, playing in the dust. Many curs sunned themselves among heaps of rubbish, and took not the trouble to growl at me. Then I came out upon a highroad, and turned my face towards the city lying under a crude sunshine, and in a ring of metallic vibrations.

Better houses with plastered fronts washed yellow or blue, and even pinky red, alternated with tumble-down wooden structures. A crenellated squat gateway faced me with a carved shield of stone above the open gloom. A young smooth-faced mulatto, in some sort of dirty uniform, but wearing new straw slippers with blue silk rosettes over his naked feet, lounged cross-legged at the door of a kind of guardroom. He held a big cigar tilted up between his teeth, and ogled me, like a woman, out of the corners of his languishing eyes. He said not a word.

Fortunately my face had tanned to a dark hue. Enrico's clothes would not attract attention to me, of course. The light colour of my hair was concealed by the handkerchief bound under my hat; my footsteps echoed loudly under the vault, and I penetrated into the heart of the city.

And directly, it seemed to me, I had stepped back three hundred years. I had never seen anything so old; this was the abandoned inheritance of an adventurous race, that seemed to have thrown all its might, all its vigour, and all its enthusiasm into one supreme effort of valour and greed. I had read the history of the Spanish Conquest; and, looking at these great walls of stone, I felt my heart moved by the same wonder, and by the same sadness. With what a fury of heroism and faith had this whole people flung itself upon the opulent mystery of the New World. Never had a nation clasped closer to its heart its dream of greatness, of glory, and of romance. There had been a moment in its destiny, when it could believe that Heaven itself smiled upon its massacres. I walked slowly, awed by the solitude. They had conquered and were no more, and these wrought stones remained to testify gloomily to the death of their success. Heavy houses, immense walls, pointed arches of the doorways, cages of iron bars projecting balcony wise around each square window. And not a soul in sight, not a head looking out from these dwellings, these houses of men, these ancient abodes of hate, of base rivalries, of avarice, of ambitions — these old nests of love, these witnesses of a great romance now past and gone below the horizon. They seemed to return mournfully my wondering glances; they seemed to look at me and say, "What do you here? We have seen other men, heard other footsteps!" The peace of the cloister brooded over these aged blocks of masonry, stained with the green trails of mosses, infiltrated with shadows.

At times the belfry of a church would volley a tremendous crash of bronze into the narrow streets; and between whiles I could hear the faint echoes of far-off chanting, the brassy distant gasps of trombones. A woman in black whisked round a corner, hurrying towards the route of the procession. I took the same direction. From a wine-shop, yawning like a dirty cavern in the basement of a palatial old building, issued

suddenly a brawny ruffian in rags, wiping his thick beard with the back of a hairy paw. He lurched a little, and began to walk before me hastily. I noticed the glitter of a gold earring in the lobe of his huge ear. His cloak was frayed at the bottom into a perfect fringe and, as he flung it about, he showed a good deal of naked skin under it. His calves were bandaged crosswise; his peaked hat seemed to have been trodden upon in filth before he had put it on his head. Suddenly I stopped short. A *Lugareño*!

We were then in the empty part of a narrow street, whose lower end was packed, close with a crowd viewing the procession which was filing slowly past, along the wide thoroughfare. It was too late for me to go back. Moreover, the ruffian paid no attention to me. It was best to go on. The people, packed between the houses with their backs to us, blocked our way. I had to wait.

He took his position near me in the rear of the last rank of the crowd. He must have been inclined to repentance in his cups, because he began to mumble and beat his breast. Other people in the crowd were also beating their breasts. In front of me I had the façade of a building which, according to the little plan of my route Sebright drew for me, was the Palace of Justice. It had a peristyle of ugly columns at the top of a flight of steps. A cordon of infantry kept the roadway clear. The singing went on without interruption; and I saw tall saints of wood, gilt and painted red and blue, pass, borne shoulder-high, swaying and pitching above the heads of the crowd like the masts of boats in a seaway. Crucifixes were carried, flashing in the sun; an enormous Madonna, which must have weighed half a ton, tottered across my line of sight, dressed up in gold brocade and with a wreath of paper roses on her head. A military band sent a hurricane blast of brasses as it went by. Then all was still at once, except the silvery tinkling of hand-bells. The people before me fell on their knees together and left me standing up alone.

As a matter of fact I had been caught gaping at the ceremony quite new to me, and had not expected a move of that sort. The ruffian kneeling within a foot of me thumped and bellowed in an ecstasy of piety. As to me, I own I stood there looking with impatience at a passing canopy that seemed all gold, with three priests in gorgeous capes walking slowly under it, and I absolutely forgot to take off my hat. The bearded ruffian looked up from the midst of his penitential exercises, and before I realized I was outraging his or anybody else's feelings, leaped up with a yell, "Thou sacrilegious infidel," and sent my hat flying off my head.

Just then the band crashed again, the bells pealed out, and no one heard his shout. With one blow of my fist I sent him staggering backwards. The procession had passed; people were rising from their knees and pouring out of the narrow street. Swearing, he fumbled under his cloak; I watched him narrowly; but in a moment he sprang away and lost himself amongst the moving crowd. I picked up my hat.

For a time I stood very uneasy, and then retreated under a doorway. Nothing happened, and I was anxious to get on. It was possible to cross the wide street now. That *Lugareño* did not know me. He was a *Lugareño*, though. No doubt about it. I would

make a dash now; but first I stole a hasty glance at the plan of my route which I kept in the hollow of my palm.

“Señor,” said a voice. I lifted my head.

An elderly man in black, with a white moustache and imperial, stood before me. The ruffian was stalking up to his side, and four soldiers with an officer were coming behind. I took in the whole disaster at a glance.

“The Señor is no doubt a foreigner — perhaps an Englishman,” said the official in black. He had a lace collar, a chain on his neck, velvet breeches, a well-turned leg in black stockings. His voice was soft.

I was so disconcerted that I nodded at him.

“The Señor is young and inconsiderate. Religious feelings ought to be respected.” The official in black was addressing me in sad and measured tones. “This good Catholic,” he continued, eyeing the bearded ruffian dubiously, “has made a formal statement to me of your impious demonstration.”

What a fatal accident, I thought, appalled; but I tried to explain the matter. I expressed regret. The other gazed at me benevolently.

“Nevertheless, Señor, pray follow me. Even for your own safety. You must give some account of yourself.”

This I was firmly resolved not to give. But the Lugareño had been going through a pantomime of scrutinizing my person. He crouched up, stepped back, then to one side.

“This worthy man,” began the official in black, “complains of your violence, too...”

“This worthy man,” I shouted stupidly, “is a pirate. He is a Rio Medio Lugareño. He is a criminal.”

The official seemed astounded, and I saw my idiotic mistake at once — too late!

“Strange,” he murmured, and, at the same time, the ruffianly wretch began to shout:

“It is he! The traitor! The heretic! I recognize him!”

“Peace, peace!” said the man in black.

“I demand to be taken before the Juez Don Patricio for a deposition,” shrieked the Lugareño. A crowd was beginning to collect.

The official and the officer exchanged consulting glances. At a word from the latter, the soldiers closed upon me.

I felt utterly overcome, as if the earth had crumbled under my feet, and the heavens had been rent in twain.

I walked between my captors across the street amongst hooting knots of people, and up the steps of the portico, as if in a frightful dream.

In the gloomy, chilly hall they made me wait. A soldier stood on each side of me, and there, absolutely before my eyes on a little table, reposed Mrs. Williams’ shawl and Sebright’s cap. This was the very hall of the Palace of Justice of which Sebright had spoken. It was more than ever like an absurd dream, now. But I had the leisure to collect my wits. I could not claim the Consul’s protection simply because I should have to give him a truthful account of myself, and that would mean giving up Seraphina. The Consul could not protect her. But the Lion would sail on the morrow. Sebright would

understand it if Williams did not. I trusted Sebright's sagacity. Yes, she would sail tomorrow evening. A day and a half. If I could only keep the knowledge of Seraphina from O'Brien till then — she was safe, and I should be safe, too, for my lips would be unsealed. I could claim the protection of my Consul and proclaim the villainy of the Juez.

“Go in there now, Señor, to be confronted with your accuser,” said the official in black, appearing before me. He pointed at a small door to the left. My heart was beating steadily. I felt a sort of intrepid resignation.

Part 5 — The Lot of Man

Chapter 1

“Why have I been brought here, your worships?” I asked, with a great deal of firmness.

There were two figures in black, the one beside, the other behind a large black table. I was placed in front of them, between two soldiers, in the centre of a large, gaunt room, with bare, dirty walls, and the arms of Spain above the judge’s seat.

“You are before the Juez de la Primera Instancia,” said the man in black beside the table. He wore a large and shadowy tricorn. “Be silent, and respect the procedure.”

It was, without doubt, excellent advice. He whispered some words in the ear of the Judge of the First Instance. It was plain enough to me that the judge was a quite inferior official, who merely decided whether there were any case against the accused; he had, even to his clerk, an air of timidity, of doubt.

I said, “But I insist on knowing...”

The clerk said, “In good time...” And then, in the same tone of disinterested official routine, he spoke to the Lugareño, who, from beside the door, rolled very frightened eyes from the judges and the clerk to myself and the soldiers — ”Advance.”

The judge, in a hurried, perfunctory voice, put questions to the Lugareño; the clerk scratched with a large quill on a sheet of paper.

“Where do you come from?”

“The town of Rio Medio, Excellency.”

“Of what occupation?”

“Excellency — a few goats...”

“Why are you here?”

“My daughter, Excellency, married Pepe of the posada in the Calle...”

The judge said, “Yes, yes,” with an unsanguine impatience. The Lugareño’s dirty hands jumped nervously on the large rim of his limp hat.

“You lodge a complaint against the senor there.”

The clerk pointed the end of his quill towards me.

“I? God forbid, Excellency,” the Lugareño bleated. “The Alguazil of the Criminal Court instructed me to be watchful.

“You lodge an information, then?” the juez said.

“Maybe it is an information, Excellency,” the Lugareño answered, “as regards the senor there.”

The Alguazil of the Criminal Court had told him, and many other men of Rio Medio, to be on the watch for me, “undoubtedly touching what had happened, as all the world knew, in Rio Medio.”

He looked me full in the face with stupid insolence, and said:

“At first I much doubted, for all the world said this man was dead — though others said worse things. Perhaps, who knows?”

He had seen me, he said, many times in Rio Medio, outside the Casa; on the balcony of the Casa, too. And he was sure that I was a heretic and an evil person.

It suddenly struck me that this man — I was undoubtedly familiar with his face — must be the lieutenant of Manuel-del-Popolo, his boon companion. Without doubt, he had seen me on the balcony of the Casa.

He had gained a lot of assurance from the conciliatory manner of the Juez, and said suddenly, in a tentative way:

“An evil person; a heretic? Who knows? Perhaps it was he who incited some people there to murder his señoría, the illustrious Don.”

I said almost contemptuously, “Surely the charge against me is most absurd? Everyone knows who I am.”

The old judge made a gentle, tired motion with his hand.

“Señor,” he said, “there is no charge against you — except that no one knows who you are. You were in a place where very lamentable and inexplicable things happened; you are now in Havana: you have no passport. I beg of you to remain calm. These things are all in order.”

I hadn’t any doubt that, as far as he knew, he was speaking the truth. He was a man, very evidently, of a weary and naïve simplicity. Perhaps it was really true — that I should only have to explain; perhaps it was all over.

O’Brien came into the room with the casual step of an official from an office entering another’s room.

It was as if seeing me were a thing that he very much disliked — that he came because he wanted to satisfy himself of my existence, of my identity, and my being alone. The slow stare that he gave me did not mitigate the leisureliness of his entry. He walked behind the table; the judge rose with immense deference; with his eternal smile, and no word spoken, he motioned the judge to resume the examination; he stood looking at the clerk’s notes meditatively, the smile still round lips that had a nervous tremble, and eyes that had dark marks beneath them. He seemed as if he were still smiling just after having been violently shaken.

The judge went on examining the Lugareño.

“Do you know whence the señor came?”

“Excellency, Excellency...” The man stuttered, his eyes on O’Brien’s face.

“Nor how long he was in the town of Rio Medio?” the judge went on.

O’Brien suddenly drooped towards his ear. “All those things are known, señor, my colleague,” he said, and began to whisper.

The old judge showed signs of very naïve astonishment and joy.

“Is it possible?” he exclaimed. “This man? He is very young to have committed such crimes.”

The clerk hurriedly left the room. He returned with many papers. O'Brien, leaning over the judge's shoulder, emphasized words with one finger. What new villainies could O'Brien be meditating? It wasn't possibly the Lugareño's suggestion that I had lured men to murder Don Balthasar? Was it merely that I had infringed some law in carrying off Seraphina?

The old judge said, "How lucky, Don Patricio! We may now satisfy the English admiral. What good fortune!"

He suddenly sat straight in his chair; O'Brien behind him scrutinized my face — to see how I should bear what was coming.

"What is your name?" the judge asked peremptorily.

I said, "Juan — John Kemp. I am of noble English family; I am well enough known. Ask the Señor O'Brien."

On O'Brien's shaken face the smile hardened.

"I heard that in Rio Medio the senior was called... was called..." He paused and appealed to the Lugareño.

"What was he called — the capataz the man who led the picaroons?"

The Lugareño stammered, "Nikola... Nikola el Escoces, Señor Don Patricio."

"You hear?" O'Brien asked the judge. "This villager identifies the man."

"Undoubtedly — undoubtedly," the Juez said. "We need no more evidence... You, Señor, have seen this villain in Rio Medio, this villager identifies him by name."

I said, "This is absurd. A hundred witnesses can say that I am John Kemp..."

"That may be true," the Juez said dryly, and then to his clerk:

"Write here, 'John Kemp, of noble British family, called, on the scene of his crimes, Nikola el Escoces, otherwise El Demonio.'"

I shrugged my shoulders. I did not, at the moment, realize to what this all tended.

The judge said to the clerk, "Read the Act of Accusation. Read here..." He was pointing to a paragraph of the papers the clerk had brought in. They were the Act of Accusation, prepared long before, against the man Nichols.

This particular villainy suddenly became grotesquely and portentously plain. The clerk read an appalling catalogue of sordid crimes, working into each other like kneaded dough — the testimony of witnesses who had signed the record. Nikola had looted fourteen ships, and had apparently murdered twenty-two people with his own hand — two of them women — and there was the affair of Rowley's boats. "The pinnacle," the clerk read, "of the British came within ten yards. The said Nikola then exclaimed, 'Curse the bloodthirsty hounds,' and fired the grapeshot into the boat. Seven were killed by that discharge. This I saw with my own eyes... Signed, Isidoro Alemanno." And another swore, "The said Nikola was below, but he came running up, and with one blow of his knife severed the throat of the man who was kneeling on the deck..."

There was no doubt that Nikola had committed these crimes; that the witnesses had sworn to them and signed the deposition... The old judge had evidently never seen him, and now O'Brien and the Lugareño had sworn that I was Nikola el Escoces, alias El Demonio.

My first impulse was to shout with rage; but I checked it because I knew I should be silenced. I said:

“I am not Nikola el Escoces. That I can easily prove.”

The Judge of the First Instance shrugged his shoulders and looked, with implicit trust, up into O’Brien’s face.

“That man,” I pointed at the Lugareño, “is a pirate. And, what is more, he is in the pay of the Señor Juez O’Brien. He was the lieutenant of a man called Manuel-del-Popolo, who commanded the Lugareños after Nikola left Rio Medio.”

“You know very much about the pirates,” the Juez said, with the sardonic air of a very stupid man. “Without doubt you were intimate with them. I sign now your order for committal to the carcel of the Marine Court.”

I said, “But I tell you I am not Nikola...”

The Juez said impassively, “You pass out of my hands into those of the Marine Court. I am satisfied that you are a person deserving of a trial. That is the limit of my responsibility.”

I shouted then, “But I tell you this O’Brien is my personal enemy.”

The old man smiled acidly.

“The señor need fear nothing of our courts. He will be handed over to his own countrymen. Without doubt of them he will obtain justice.” He signed to the Lugareño to go, and rose, gathering up his papers; he bowed to O’Brien. “I leave the criminal at the disposal of your worship,” he said, and went out with his clerk.

O’Brien sent out the two soldiers after him, and stood there alone. He had never been so near his death. But for sheer curiosity, for my sheer desire to know what he could say, I would have smashed in his brains with the clerk’s stool. I was going to do it; I made one step towards the stool. Then I saw that he was crying.

“The curse — the curse of Cromwell on you,” he sobbed suddenly. “You send me back to hell again.” He writhed his whole body. “Sorrow!” he said, “I know it. But what’s this? What’s this?”

The many reasons he had for sorrow flashed on me like a procession of sombre images.

“Dead and done with a man can bear,” he muttered. “But this — Not to know — perhaps alive — perhaps hidden — She may be dead...” With a change like a flash he was commanding me.

“Tell me how you escaped.”

I had a vague inspiration of the truth.

“You aren’t fit for a decent man’s speaking to,” I said.

“You let her drown.”

It gave me suddenly the measure of his ignorance; he did not know anything — nothing. His hell was uncertainty. Well, let him stay there.

“Where is she?” he said. “Where is she?”

“Where she’s no need to fear you,” I answered.

He had a sudden convulsive gesture, as if searching for a weapon.

"If you'll tell me she's alive..." he began.

"Oh, I'm not dead," I answered.

"Never a drowned puppy was more," he said, with a flash of vivacity. "You hang here — for murder — or in England for piracy."

"Then I've little to want to live for," I sneered at him.

"You let her drown," he said. "You took her from that house, a young girl, in a little boat. And you can hold up your head."

"I was trying to save her from you," I answered.

"By God," he said. "These English — I've seen them, spit the child on the mother's breast. I've seen them set fire to the thatch of the widow and childless. But this... But this... I can save you, I tell you."

"You can't make me go through worse than I've borne," I answered. Sorrow and all he might wish on my head, my life was too precious to him till I spoke. I wasn't going to speak.

"I'll search every ship in the harbour," he said passionately.

"Do," I said. "Bring your *Lugareños* to the task."

Upon the whole, I wasn't much afraid. Unless he got definite evidence he couldn't — in the face of the consul's protests, and the presence of the admiral — touch the *Lion* again. He fixed his eyes intently upon me.

"You came in the American brigantine," he said. "It's known you landed in her boat."

I didn't answer him; it was plain enough that the drogher's arrival had either not been reported to him, or it had been searched in vain.

"In her boat," he repeated. "I tell you I know she is not dead; even you, an Englishman, must have a different face if she were."

"I don't at least ask you for life," I said, "to enjoy with her."

"She's alive," he said. "Alive! As for where, it matters little. I'll search every inch of the island, every road, every hacienda. You don't realize my power."

"Then search the bottom of the sea," I shouted.

"Let's look at the matter in the right light."

He had mastered his grief, his incertitude. He was himself again, and the smile had returned — as if at the moment he forced his features to their natural lines.

"Send one of your friars to heaven — you'll never go there yourself to meet her."

"If you will tell me she's alive, I'll save you."

I made a mute, obstinate gesture.

"If she's alive, and you don't tell me, I can't but find her. And I'll make you know the agonies of suspense — a long way from here."

I was silent.

"If she's dead, and you'll tell me, I'll save you some trouble. If she's dead and you don't, you'll have your own remorse and the rest, too."

I said, "You're too Irish mysterious for me to understand. But you've a choice of four evils for me — choose yourself."

He continued with a quivering, taut good-humour: "Prove to me she's dead, and I'll let you die sharply and mercifully."

"You won't believe!" I said; but he took no notice.

"I tell you plainly," he smiled. "If we find... if we find her dear body — and I can't help; but I've men on the watch all along the shores — I'll give you up to your admiral for a pirate. You'll have a long slow agony of a trial; I know what English justice is. And a disgraceful felon's death."

I was thinking that, in any case, a day or so might be gained, the Lion would be gone; they could not touch her while the flagship remained outside. I certainly didn't want to be given up to the admiral; I might explain the mistaken identity. But there was the charge of treason in Jamaica. I said:

"I only ask to be given up; but you daren't do it for your own credit. I can show you up."

He said, "Make no mistake! If he gets you, he'll hang you. He's going home in disgrace. Your whole blundering Government will work to hang you."

"They know pretty well," I answered, "that there are queer doings in Havana. I promise you, I'll clear things up. I know too much..."

He said, with a sudden, intense note of passion, "Only tell me where her grave is, I'll let you go free. You couldn't, you dare not, dastard that you are, go away from where she died — without... without making sure."

"Then search all the new graves in the island," I said, "I'll tell you nothing... Nothing!"

He came at me again and again, but I never spoke after that. He made all the issues clearer and clearer — his own side involuntarily and all the griefs I had to expect. As for him, he dared not kill me — and he dared not give me up to the admiral. In his suspense, since, for him, I was the only person in the world who knew Seraphina's fate, he dared not let me out of his grip. And all the while he had me he must keep the admiral there, waiting for the surrender either of myself or of some other poor devil whom he might palm off as Nikola el Escoces. While the admiral was there the Lion was pretty safe from molestation, and she would sail pretty soon.

At the same time, except for the momentary sheer joy of tormenting a man whom I couldn't help regarding as a devil, I had more than enough to fear. I had suffered too much; I wanted rest, woman's love, slackening off. And here was another endless coil — endless. If it didn't end in a knife in the back, he might keep me for ages in Havana; or he might get me sent to England, where it would take months, an endless time, to prove merely that I wasn't Nikola el Escoces. I should prove it; but, in the meantime, what would become of Sera-phina? Would she follow me to England? Would she even know that I had gone there? Or would she think me dead and die herself? O'Brien knew nothing; his spies might report a hundred uncertainties. He was standing rigidly still now, as if afraid to move for fear of breaking down. He said suddenly:

"You came in some ship; you can't deceive me, I shall have them all searched again."

I said desperately, "Search and be damned — whatever ships you like."

“You cold, pitiless, English scoundrel,” he shrieked suddenly. The breaking down of his restraint had let him go right into madness. “You have murdered her. You cared nothing; you came from nowhere. A beggarly fool, too stupid to be even an adventurer. A miserable blunderer, coming in blind; coming out blind; and leaving ruin and worse than hell. What good have you done yourself? What could you? What did you see? What did you hope?... Sorrow? Ruin? Death? I am acquainted with them. It is in the blood; ‘tis in the tone; in the entrails of us, in our mother’s milk. Your accursed land has brought always that on our own dear and sorrowful country... You waste, you ruin, you spoil. What for?... Tell me what for? Tell me? Tell me? What did you gain? What will you ever gain? An unending curse!... But, ah, ye’ve no souls.”

He called very loudly, as if with a passionate relief, his voice giving life to an unsuspected, misgiving echo:

“Guards! Soldiers!... You shall be shot, now!”

He was going to cut the knot that way. Two soldiers pushed the door noisily open, their muskets advanced. He took no notice of them; and they retained an attitude of military stupidity, their eyes upon him. He whispered:

“No, no! Not yet!”

Then he looked at me searchingly, as if he still hoped to get some certainty from my face, some inkling, perhaps some inspiration of what would persuade me to speak. Then he shook his wrists violently, as if in fear of himself.

“Take him away,” he said. “Away! Out of reach of my hands. Out of reach of my hands.”

I was trembling a good deal; when the soldiers entered I thought I had got to my last minute. But, as it was, he had not learnt a thing from me. Not a thing. And I did not see where else he could go for information.

Chapter 2

The entrance to the common prison of Havana was a sort of lofty tunnel, finished by great, iron-rusted, wooden gates. A civil guard was exhibiting the judge's warrant for my committal to a white-haired man, with a red face and blue eyes, that seemed to look through tumbled bushes of silver eyebrows — the alcaide of the prison. He bowed, and rattled two farcically large keys. A practicable postern was ajar on the yellow wood of the studded gates. It was as if it afforded a glimpse of the other side of the world. The venerable turnkey, a gnome in a steeple-crowned hat, protruded a blood-red hand backwards in the direction of the postern.

“Señor Caballero,” he croaked, “I pray you to consider this house your own. My servants are yours.”

Within was a gravel yard, shut in by portentous lead-white house-sides with black window holes. Under each row of windows was a vast vaulted tunnel, caged with iron bars, for all the world like beasts' dens. It being day, the beasts were out and lounging about the patio. They had an effect of infinite tranquillity, as if they were ladies and gentlemen parading in a Sunday avenue. Perhaps twenty of them, in snowy white shirts and black velvet knee-breeches, strutted like pigeons in a knot, some with one woman on the arm, some with two. Bundles of variegated rags lay against the walls, as if they were sweepings. Well, they were the sweepings of Havana jail. The men in white and black were the great thieves... and there were children, too — the place was the city orphanage. For the fifth part of a second my advent made no difference. Then, at the far end, one of the men in black and white separated himself, and came swiftly to me across the sunny patio. The others followed slowly, with pea-fowl steps, their women hanging to them and whispering. The bundles of rags rose up towards me; others slunk furtively out of the barred dens. The man who was approaching had the head of a Julius Cæsar of fifty, for all the world as if he had stolen a bust and endowed it with yellow skin and stubby gray and silver hair. He saluted me with intense gravity and an imperial glance of yellow eyes along a hooked nose. His linen was the most spotless brodered and embossed stuff; from the crimson scarf round his waist protruded the shagreen and silver handle of a long dagger. He said:

“Señor, I have the honour to salute you. I am Crisostomo Garcia. I ask the courtesy of your trousers.”

I did not answer him. I did not see what he wanted with my trousers, which weren't anyway as valuable as his own. The others were closing in on me like a solid wall. I leant back against the gate; I was not frightened, but I was mightily excited. The

man like Cæsar looked fiercely at me, swayed a long way back on his haunches, and imperiously motioned the crowd to recede.

“Señor Inglesito,” he said, “the gift I have the honour to ask of you is the price of my protection. Without it these, my brothers, will tear you limb from limb, there will nothing of you remain.”

His brothers set up a stealthy, sinister growl, that went round among the heads like the mutter of an obscene echo among the mountain-tops. I wondered whether this, perhaps, was the man who, O’Brien said, would put a knife in my back. I hadn’t any knife; I might knock the fellow’s teeth down his throat, though.

The alcayde thrust his immense hat, blood-red face, and long, ragged, silver locks out of the little door. His features were convulsed with indignation. He had been whispering with the Civil Guard.

“Are you mad, gentlemen?” he said. “Do you wish to visit hell before your times? Do you know who the senor is? Did you ever hear of Carlos el Demonio? This is the Inglesito of Rio Medio!”

It was plain that my deeds, such as they were, reported by O’Brien spies, by the Lugareños, by all sorts of credulous gossipers, had got me the devil of a reputation in the patio of the jail. Men detached themselves from the crowd, and went running about to announce my arrival. The alcayde drew his long body into the patio, and turned to lock the little door with an immense key. In the crowd all sorts of little movements happened. Women crossed themselves, and furtively thrust pairs of crooked, skinny, brown, black-nailed fingers in my direction. The man like Cæsar said:

“I ask your pardon, Señor Caballero. I did not know. How could I tell? You are free of all the patios in this land.”

The tall alcayde finished grinding the immense key in the lock, and touched me on the arm.

“If the senor will follow me,” he said. “I will do the honours of this humble mansion, and indicate a choice of rooms where he may be free from the visits of these gentry.”

We went up steps, and through long, shadowy corridors, with here and there a dark, lounging figure, like a stag seen in the dim aisles of a wood. The alcayde threw open a door.

The room was like a blazing oblong-box, filled with light, but without window or chimney. Two men were fencing in the illumination of some twenty candles stuck all round the mildewed white walls on lumps of clay. There was a blaze of silver things, like an altar of a wealthy church, from a black, carved table in the far corner. The two men, in shirts and breeches, revolved round each other, their rapiers clinking, their left arms scarved, holding buttoned daggers. The alcayde proclaimed:

“Don Vincente Salazar, I have the honour to announce an English senor.”

The man with his face to me tossed his rapier impatiently into a corner. He was a plump, dark Cuban, with a brooding truculence. The other faced round quickly. His cheeks shone in the candle-light like polished yellow leather, his eyes were narrow slits, his face lugubrious. He scrutinized me intently, then drawled:

“My! You?... Hang me if I didn’t think it would be you!”

He had the air of surveying a monstrosity, and pulled the neck of his dirty print shirt open, panting. He slouched out into the corridor, and began whispering eagerly to the alcaide. The little Cuban glowered at me; I said I had the honour to salute him.

He muttered something contemptuous between his teeth. Well, if he didn’t want to talk to me, I didn’t want to talk to him. It had struck me that the tall, sallow man was undoubtedly the second mate of the Thames. Nicholas, the real Nikola el Escoces! The Cuban grumbled suddenly:

“You, Señor, are without doubt one of the spies of that friend of the priests, that O’Brien. Tell him to beware — that I bid him beware. I, Don Vincente Salazar de Valdepeñas y Forli y...”

I remembered the name; he was once the suitor of Seraphina — the man O’Brien had put out of the way. He continued with a grotesque frown of portentous significance:

“To-morrow I leave this place. And your compatriot is very much afraid, Señor. Let him fear! Let him fear! But a thousand spies should not save him.”

The tall alcaide came hurriedly back and stood bowing between us. He apologized abjectly to the Cuban for intruding me upon him. But the room was the best in the place at the disposal of the prisoners of the Juez O’Brien. And I was a noted caballero. Heaven knows what I had not done in Rio Medio. Burnt, slain, ravished... The Señor Juez was understood to be much incensed against me. The gloomy Cuban at once rushed upon me, as if he would have taken me into his arms.

“The Inglesito of Rio Medio!” he said. “Ha, ha! Much have I heard of you. Much of the señor’s valiance! Many tales! That foul eater of the carrion of the priests wishes your life! Ah, but let him beware! I shall save you, Señor — I, Don Vincente Salazar.”

He presented me with the room — a remarkably bare place but for his properties: silver branch candlesticks, a silver chafing-dish as large as a basin. They might have been chased by Cellini — one used to find things like that in Cuba in those days, and Salazar was the person to have them. Afterwards, at the time of the first insurrection, his eight-mule harness was sold for four thousand pounds in Paris — by reason of the gold and pearls upon it. The atmosphere, he explained, was fetid, but his man was coming to burn sandal-wood and beat the air with fans.

“And to-morrow!” he said, his eyes rolling. Suddenly he stopped. “Señor,” he said, “is it true that my venerated friend, my more than father, has been murdered — at the instigation of that fiend? Is it true that the señorita has disappeared? These tales are told.”

I said it was very true.

“They shall be avenged,” he declared, “to-morrow! I shall seek out the señorita. I shall find her. I shall find her! For me she was destined by my venerable friend.”

He snatched a black velvet jacket from the table and put it on.

“Afterwards, Señor, you shall relate. Have no fear. I shall save you. I shall save all men oppressed by this scourge of the land. For the moment afford me the opportunity to meditate.” He crossed his arms, and dropped his round head. “Alas, yes!” he meditated.

Suddenly he waved towards the door. "Señor," he said swiftly, "I must have air; I stifle. Come with me to the corridor..."

He went towards the window giving on to the patio; he stood in the shadow, his arms folded, his head hanging dejectedly. At the moment it grew suddenly dark, as if a veil had been thrown over a lamp. The sun had set outside the walls. A drum began to beat. Down below in the obscurity the crowd separated into three strings and moved slowly towards the barren tunnels. Under our feet the white shirts disappeared; the ragged crowd gravitated to the left; the small children strung into the square cage-door. The drum beat again and the crowd hurried. Then there was a clang of closing grilles and lights began to show behind the bars from deep recesses. In a little time there was a repulsive hash of heads and limbs to be seen under the arches vanishing a long way within, and a little light washed across the gravel of the patio from within.

"Señor," the Cuban said suddenly, "I will pronounce his panegyric. He was a man of a great gentleness, of an inevitable nobility, of an invariable courtesy. Where, in this degenerate age, shall we find the like!" He stopped to breathe a sound of intense exasperation.

"When I think of these Irish,..." he said. "Of that O'Brien..." A servant was arranging the shining room that we had left. Salazar interrupted himself to give some orders about a banquet, then returned to me. "I tell you I am here for introducing my knife to the spine of some sort of Madrid embustero, a man who was insolent to my amiga Clara. Do you believe that for that this O'Brien, by the influence of the priests whose soles he licks with his tongue, has had me inclosed for many months? Because he feared me! Aha! I was about to expose him to the noble don who is now dead! I was about to wed the Señorita who has disappeared. But to-morrow... I shall expose his intrigue to the Captain-General. You, Señor, shall be my witness! I extend my protection to you..." He crossed his arms and spoke with much deliberation. "Señor, this Irishman incommodes me, Don Vincente Salazar de Valdepeñas y Forli..." He nodded his head expressively. "Señor, we offered these Irish the shelter of our robe for that your Government was making martyrs of them who were good Christians, and it behoves us to act in despite of your Government, who are heretics and not to be tolerated upon God's Christian earth. But, Señor, if they incommoded your Government as they do us, I do not wonder that there was a desire to remove them. Señor, the life of that man is not worth the price of eight mules, which is the price I have paid for my release. I might walk free at this moment, but it is not fitting that I should slink away under cover of darkness. I shall go out in the daylight with my carriage. And I will have an offering to show my friends who, like me, are incommoded by this..." The man was a monomaniac; but it struck me that, if I had been O'Brien, I should have felt uncomfortable.

In the dark of the corridor a long shape appeared, lounging. The Cuban beside me started hospitably forward.

"Vamos," he said briskly; "to the banquet..." He waved his hand towards the shining door and stood aside. We entered.

The other man was undoubtedly the Nova Scotian mate of the Thames, the man who had dissuaded me from following Carlos on the day we sailed into Kingston Harbour. He was chewing a toothpick, and at the ruminant motion of his knife-jaws I seemed to see him, sitting naked to the waist in his bunk, instead of upright there in red trousers and a blue shirt — an immense lank-length of each. I pieced his history together in a sort of flash. He was the true Nikola el Escoces; his name was Nichols, and he came from Nova Scotia. He had been the chief of O'Brien's Lugareños. He surveyed me now with a twinkle in his eyes, his yellow jaws as shiny-shaven as of old; his arms as much like a semaphore. He said mockingly:

"So you went there, after all?"

But the Cuban was pressing us towards his banquet; there was gaspacho in silver plates, and a man in livery holding something in a napkin. It worried me. We surveyed each other in silence. I wondered what Nichols knew; what it would be safe to tell him; how much he could help me? One or other of these men undoubtedly might. The Cuban was an imbecile; but he might have some influence — and if he really were going out on the morrow, and really did go to the Captain-General, he certainly could further his own revenge on O'Brien by helping me... But as for Nichols...

Salazar began to tell a long, exaggerated story about his cook, whom he had imported from Paris.

"Think," he said; "I bring the fool two thousand miles — and then — not even able to begin on a land-crab. A fool!"

The Nova Scotian cast an uninterested side glance at him, and said in English, which Salazar did not understand:

"So you went there, after all? And now he's got you." I did not answer him. "I know all about you," he added.

"It's more than I do about you," I said.

He rose and suddenly jerked the door open, peered on each side of the corridor, and then sat down again.

"I'm not afraid to tell," he said defiantly. "I'm not afraid of anything. I'm safe."

The Cuban said to me in Spanish: "This senor is my friend. Everyone who hates that devil is my friend."

"I'm safe," Nichols repeated. "I know too much about our friend the raparee." He lowered his voice. "They say you're to be given up for piracy, eh?" His eyes had an extraordinarily anxious leer. "You are now, eh? For how much? Can't you tell a man? We're in the same boat! I kin help you!"

Salazar accidentally knocked a silver goblet off the table and, at the sound, Nichols sprang half off his chair. He glared in a wild stare around him then grasped at a flagon of aguardiente and drank.

"I'm not afraid of any damn thing" he said. "I've got a hold on that man. He dursen't give me up. I kin see! He's going to give you up and say you're responsible for it all."

"I don't know what he's going to do," I answered.

“Will you not, Señor,” Salazar said suddenly, “relate, if you can without distress, the heroic death of that venerated man?”

I glanced involuntarily at Nichols. “The distress,” I said, “would be very great. I was Don Balthasar’s kinsman. The Señor O’Brien had a great fear of my influence in the Casa. It was in trying to take me away that Don Balthasar, who defended me, was slain by the Lugareños of O’Brien.”

Salazar said, “Aha! Aha! We are kindred spirits. Hated and loved by the same souls. This fiend, Señor. And then...”

“I escaped by sea — in an open boat, in the confusion. When I reached Havana, the Juez had me arrested.”

Salazar raised both hands; his gestures, made for large, grave men, were comic in him. They reduced Spanish manners to absurdity. He said:

“That man dies. That man dies. To-morrow I go to the Captain-General. He shall hear this story of yours, Señor. He shall know of these machinations which bring honest men to this place. We are a band of brothers...”

“That’s what I say.” Nichols leered at me. “We’re all in the same boat.”

I expect he noticed that I wasn’t moved by his declaration. He said, still in English:

“Let us be open. Let’s have a council of war. This O’Brien hates me because I wouldn’t fire on my own countrymen.” He glanced furtively at me. “I wouldn’t,” he asserted; “he wanted me to fire into their boats; but I wouldn’t. Don’t you believe the tales they tell about me! They tell worse about you. Who says I would fire on my countrymen? Where’s the man who says it?” He had been drinking more brandy and glared ferociously at me. “None of your tricks, my hearty,” he said. “None of your getting out and spreading tales. O’Brien’s my friend; he’ll never give me up. He dursen’t. I know too much. You’re a pirate! No doubt it was you who fired into them boats. By God I’ll be witness against you if they give me up. I’ll show you up.”

All the while the little Cuban talked swiftly and with a saturnine enthusiasm. He passed the wine rapidly.

“My own countrymen!” Nichols shouted. “Never! I shot a Yankee lieutenant — Allen he was — with my own hand. That’s another thing. I’m not a man to trifle with. No, sir. Don’t you try it... Why, I’ve papers that would hang O’Brien. I sent them home to Halifax. I know a trick worth his. By God, let him try it! Let him only try it. He dursen’t give me up...”

The man in livery came in to snuff the candles. Nichols sprang from his seat in a panic and drew his knife with frantic haste. He continued, glaring at me from the wall, the knife in his hand:

“Don’t you dream of tricks. I’ve cut more throats than you’ve kissed gals in your little life.”

Salazar himself drew an immense pointed knife with a shagreen hilt. He kissed it rapturously.

“Aha!... Aha!” he said, “bear this kiss into his ribs at the back.” His eyes glistened with this mania. “I swear it; when I next see this dog; this friend of the priests.” He threw the knife on the table. “Look,” he said, “was ever steel truer or more thirsty?”

“Don’t you make no mistake,” Nichols continued to me. “Don’t you think to presume. O’Brien’s my friend. I’m here snug and out of the way of the old fool of an admiral. That’s why he’s kept waiting off the Morro. When he goes, I walk out free. Don’t you try to frighten me. I’m not a man to be frightened.”

Salazar bubbled: “Ah, but now the wine flows and is red. We are a band of brothers, each loving the other. Brothers, let us drink.”

The air of close confinement, the blaze, the feel of the jail, pressed upon me, and I felt sore, suddenly, at having eaten and drunk with those two. The idea of Seraphina, asleep perhaps, crying perhaps, something pure and distant and very blissful, came in upon me irresistibly.

The little Cuban said, “We have had a very delightful conversation. It is very plain this O’Brien must die.”

I rose to my feet. “Gentlemen,” I said in Spanish, “I am very weary; I will go and sleep in the corridor.”

The Cuban sprang towards me with an immense anxiety of hospitableness. I was to sleep on his couch, the couch of cloth of gold. It was impossible, it was insulting, that I should think of sleeping in the corridor. He thrust me gently down upon it, making with his plump hands the motions of smoothing it to receive me. I lay down and turned my face to the wall.

It wasn’t possible to sleep, even though the little Cuban, with a tender solicitude, went round the walls blowing out the candles. He might be useful to me, might really explain matters to the Captain-General, or might even, as a last resource, take a letter from me to the British Consul. But I should have to be alone with him. Nichols was an abominable scoundrel; bloodthirsty to the defenceless; a liar; craven before the ghost of a threat. No doubt O’Brien did not want to give him up. Perhaps he had papers. And no doubt, once he could find a trace of Seraphina’s whereabouts, O’Brien would give me up. All I could do was to hope for a gain of time. And yet, if I gained time, it could only mean that I should in the end be given up to the admiral.

And Seraphina’s whereabouts. It came over me lamentably that I myself did not know. The Lion might have sailed. It was possible. She might be at sea. Then, perhaps, my only chance of ever seeing her again lay in my being given up to the admiral, to stand in England a trial, perhaps for piracy, perhaps for treason. I might meet her only in England, after many years of imprisonment. It wasn’t possible. I would not believe in the possibility. How I loved her! How wildly, how irrationally — this woman of another race, of another world, bound to me by sufferings together, by joys together. Irrationally! Looking at the matter now, the reason is plain enough. Before then I had not lived. I had only waited — for her and for what she stood for. It was in my blood, in my race, in my tradition, in my training. We, all of us for generations, had made for efficiency, for drill, for restraint. Our Romance was just this very Spanish contrast,

this obliquity of vision, this slight tilt of the convex mirror that shaped the same world so differently to onlookers at different points of its circle.

I could feel a little of it even then, when there was only the merest chance of my going back to England and getting back towards our old position on the rim of the mirror. The deviousness, the wayward passion, even the sempiternal abuses of the land were already beginning to take the aspect of something like quaint impotence. It was charm that, now I was on the road away, was becoming apparent. The inconveniences of life, the physical discomforts, the smells of streets, the heat, dropped into the background. I felt that I did not want to go away, irrevocably from a land sanctioned by her presence, her young life. I turned uneasily to the other side. At the heavy black table, in the light of a single candle, the Cuban and the Nova Scotian were discussing, their heads close together.

"I tell you no," Nichols was saying in a fluent, abominable, literal translation into Spanish. "Take the knife so... thumb upwards. Stab down in the soft between the neck and the shoulder-blade. You get right into the lungs with the point. I've tried it: ten times. Never stick the back. The chances are he moves, and you hit a bone. There are no bones there. It's the way they kill pigs in New Jersey."

The Cuban bent his brows as if he were reflecting over a chessboard. "Ma..." he pondered. His knife was lying on the table. He unsheathed it, then got up, and moved behind the seated Nova Scotian.

"You say... there?" he asked, pressing his little finger at the base of Nichols' skinny column of a neck. "And then..." He measured the length of the knife on Nichols' back twice with elaborate care, breathing through his nostrils. Then he said with a convinced, musing air, "It is true. It would go down into the lungs."

"And there are arteries and things," Nichols said.

"Yes, yes," the Cuban answered, sheathing the knife and thrusting it into his belt.

"With a knife that length it's perfect." Nichols waved his shadowy hand towards Salazar's scarf. Salazar moved off a little.

"I see the advantages," he said. "No crying out, because of the blood in the lungs. I thank you Señor Escoces."

Nichols rose, lurching to his full height, and looked in my direction. I closed my eyes. I did not wish him to talk to me. I heard him say:

"Well, hasta mas ver. I shall get away from here. Good-night."

He swayed an immense shadow through the door. Salazar took the candle and followed him into the corridor.

Yes, that was it, why she was so great a part, a whole wall, a whole beam of my life's house. I saw her suddenly in the blackness, her full red lips, her quivering nostrils, the curve of her breasts, her lithe movements from the hips, the way she set her feet down, the white flower waxen in the darkness of her hair, and the robin-wing flutter of her lids over her gray eyes when she smiled. I moved convulsively in my intense desire. I would have given my soul, my share of eternity, my honour, only to see that flutter of the lids over the shining gray eyes. I never felt I was beneath the imponderable pressure

of a prison's wall till then. She was infinite miles away; I could not even imagine what inanimate things surrounded her. She must be talking to someone else; fluttering her lids like that. I recognized with a physical agony that was more than jealousy how slight was my hold upon her. It was not in her race, in her blood as in mine, to love me and my type. She had lived all her life in the middle of Romance, and the very fire and passion of her South must make me dim prose to her. I remember the flicker of Salazar's returning candle, cast in lines like an advancing scythe across the two walls from the corridor. I slept.

I had the feeling of appalled horror suddenly invading my sleep; a vast voice seemed to be exclaiming:

"Tell me where she is!"

I looked at the glowing horn of a lanthorn. It was O'Brien who held it. He stood over me, very sombre.

"Tell me where she is," he said, the moment my eyes opened.

I said, "She's... she's — — — I don't know."

It appalls me even now to think how narrow was my escape. It was only because I had gone to sleep in the thought that I did not know, that I answered that I did not know. Ah — he was a cunning devil! To suddenly wake one; to get one's thoughts before one had had time to think! I lay looking at him, shivering. I couldn't even see much of his face.

"Where is she?" he said again. "Where? Dead? Dead? God have mercy on your soul if the child is dead!"

I was still trembling. If I had told him! — I could hardly believe I had not. He continued bending over me with an attitude that hideously mocked solicitude.

"Where is she?" he asked again.

"Ransack the island," I said. He glared at me, lifting the lamp. "The whole earth, if you like."

He ground his teeth, bending very low over me; then stood up, raising his head into the shadow above the lamp.

"What do I care for all the admirals?" he was speaking to himself. "No ship shall leave Havana till..." He groaned. I heard him slap his forehead, and say distractedly, "But perhaps she is not in a ship."

There was a silence in which I heard him breathe heavily, and then he amazed me by saying:

"Have pity."

I laughed, lying on my back. "On you!"

He bent down. "Fool! on yourself."

A vast and towering shadow ran along the wall.

There wasn't a sound. The face of Salazar appeared behind him, and an uplifted hand grasping a knife. O'Brien saw the horror in my eyes. I gasped to him: "Look..." and before he could move the knife went softly home between neck and shoulder. Salazar glided to the door and turned to wave his hand at me. O'Brien's lips were pressed

tightly together, the handle of the knife was against his ear, the lanthorn hung at the end of his rigid arm for a moment. As he lowered it, the blood spurted from his shoulder as if from a burst stand-pipe, only black and warm. It fell over my face, over my hands, everywhere. For a minute of eternity his agonized eyes searched my features, as if to discern whether I had connived, whether I condoned.

I had started up, my face coming right against his. I felt an immense horror. What did it mean? What had he done? He had been such a power for so long, so inevitably, over my whole life that I could not even begin to understand that this was not some new subtle villainy of his. He shook his head slowly, his ear disturbing the knife.

Then he turned jerkily on his heel, the lanthorn swinging round and leaving me in his shadow. There were ten paces to reach the door. It was like the finish of a race whether he would cover the remaining seven after the first three steps. The dangling lanthorn shed small patches of light through the holes in the metal top, like sunlight through leaves, upon the gloom of the remote ceiling. At the fifth step he pressed his hand spasmodically to his mouth; at the sixth he wavered to one side. I made a sudden motion as if to save him from falling. He was dying! He was dying! I hardly realized what it meant. This immense weight was being removed from me. I had no need to fear him any more. I couldn't understand, I could only look. This was his passing. This...

He sank, knelt down, placing the lanthorn on the floor. He covered his face with his hands and began to cough incessantly, like a man dying of consumption. The glowing top of the lanthorn hissed and sputtered out in little sharp blows, like hammer strokes... Carlos had coughed like that. Carlos was dead. Now O'Brien! He was going. I should escape. It was all over. Was it all over? He bowed stiffly forward, placing his hands on the stones, then lay over on his side with his face to the light, his eyes glaring at it. I sat motionless, watching him. The lanthorn lit the carved leg of the black table and a dusty circle of the flags. The spurts of blood from his shoulder grew less long in answer to the pulsing of his heart; his fists unclenched, he drew his legs up to his body, then sank down. His eyes looked suddenly at mine and, as the features slowly relaxed, the smile seemed to come back, enigmatic, round his mouth.

He was dead; he was gone; I was free! He would never know where she was; never! He had gone, with the question on his lips; with the agony of uncertainty in his eyes. From the door came an immense, grotesque, and horrible chuckle.

"Aha!-Aha! I have saved you, Señor, I have protected you. We are as brothers."

Against the tenuous blue light of the dawn Salazar was gesticulating in the doorway. I felt a sudden repulsion; a feeling of intense disgust. O'Brien lying there, I almost wished alive again — I wanted to have him again, rather than that I should have been relieved of him by that atrocious murder. I sat looking at both of them.

Saved! By that lunatic? I suddenly appreciated the agony of mind that alone could have brought O'Brien, the cautious, the all-seeing, into this place — . to ask me a question that for him was answered now. Answered for him more than for me.

Where was Seraphina? Where? How should I come to her? O'Brien was dead. And I... Could I walk out of this place and go to her? O'Brien was dead. But I...

I suddenly realized that now I was the pirate Nikola el Escoces — that now he was no more there, nothing could save me from being handed over to the admiral. Nothing. Salazar outside the door began to call boastfully towards the sound of approaching footsteps.’

“Aha! Aha! Come all of you! See what I have done! Come, Señor Alcayde! Come, brave soldiers...”

In that way died this man whose passion had for so long hung over my life like a shadow. Looking at the matter now, I am, perhaps, glad that he fell neither by my hand nor in my quarrel. I assuredly had injured him the first; I had come upon his ground; I had thwarted him; I had been a heavy weight at a time when his fortunes had been failing. Failing they undoubtedly were. He had run his course too far.

And, if his death removed him out of my path, the legacy of his intrigue caused me suffering enough. Had he lived, there is no knowing what he might have done. He was bound to deliver someone to the British — either myself or Nichols. Perhaps, at the last moment, he would have kept me in Havana. There is no saying.

Undoubtedly he had not wished to deliver Nichols; either because he really knew too much or because he had scruples. Nichols had certainly been faithful to him. And, with his fine irony, it was delightful to him to think that I should die a felon’s death in England. For those reasons he had identified me with Nikola el Escoces, intending to give up whichever suited him at the last moment.

Now that was settled for him and for me. The delivery was to take place at dawn, and O’Brien not to be found, the old Judge of the First Instance had been sent to identify the prisoner. He selected me, whom, of course, he recognized. There was no question of Nichols, who had been imprisoned on a charge of theft trumped up by O’Brien.

Salazar, whether he would have gone to the Captain-General or not, was now entirely useless. He was retained to answer the charge of murder. And to any protestations I could make, the old Juez was entirely deaf.

“The senor must make representations to his own authorities,” he said. “I have warrant for what I have done.”

It was impossible to expose O’Brien to him. The soldiers of the escort, in the dawn before the prison gates, simply laughed at me.

They marched me down through the gray mists, to the water’s edge. Two soldiers held my arms; O’Brien’s blood was drying on my face and on my clothes. I was, even to myself, a miserable object. Among the *négresses* on the slimy boat-steps a thick, short man was asking questions. He opened amazed eyes at the sight of me. It was Williams — the Lion was not yet gone then. If he spoke to me, or gave token of connection with Seraphina, the Spaniards would understand. They would take her from him certainly; perhaps immure her in a convent. And now that I was bound irrevocably for England, she must go, too. He was shouldering his way towards my guards.

“Silence!” I shouted, without looking at him. “Go away, make sail... Tell Sebright...”

My guards seemed to think I had gone mad; they laid hands upon me. I didn't struggle, and we passed down towards the landing steps, brushing Williams aside. He stood perturbedly gazing after me; then I saw him asking questions of a civil guard. A man-of-war's boat, the ensign trailing in the glassy water, the glazed hats of the seamen bobbing like clockwork, was flying towards us. Here was England! Here was home! I should have to clear myself of felony, to strain every nerve and cheat the gallows. If only Williams understood, if only he did not make a fool of himself. I couldn't see him any more; a jabbering crowd all round us was being kept at a distance by the muskets of the soldiers. My only chance was Sebright's intelligence. He might prevent Williams making a fool of himself. The commander of the guard said to the lieutenant from the flagship, who had landed, attended by the master-at-arms:

"I have the honour to deliver to your worship's custody the prisoner promised to his excellency the English admiral. Here are the papers disclosing his crimes to the justice. I beg for a receipt."

A shabby scrivano from the prison advanced bowing, with an inkhorn, shaking a wet goose-quill. A guardia civil offered his back. The lieutenant signed a paper hastily, then looking hard at me, gave the order:

"Master-at-arms, handcuff one of the prisoner's hands to your own wrist. He is a desperate character."

Chapter 3

The first decent word I had spoken to me after that for months came from my turnkey at Newgate. It was when he welcomed me back from my examination before the Thames Court magistrate. The magistrate, a bad-tempered man, snuffy, with red eyes, and the air of being a piece of worn and dirty furniture of his court, had snapped at me when I tried to speak:

“Keep your lies for the Admiralty Session. I’ve only time to commit you. Damn your Spaniards; why can’t they translate their own papers;” had signed something with a squeaky quill, tossed it to his clerk, and grunted, “Next case.”

I had gone back to Newgate.

The turnkey, a man with the air of an innkeeper, bandy-legged, with a bulbous, purple-veined nose and watering eyes, slipped out of the gatehouse door, whilst the great, hollow-sounding gate still shook behind me. He said:

“If you hurries up you’ll see a bit of life... Do you good. Condemned sermon. Being preached in the chapel now; sheriffs and all. They swing tomorrow — three of them. Quick with the stumps.”

He hurried me over the desolate mossy-green cobbles of the great solitary yard into a square, tall, bare, whitewashed place. Already from the outside one caught a droning voice. There might have been three hundred people there, boxed off in pews, with turnkeys at each end. A vast king’s arms, a splash of red and blue gilt, sprawled above a two-tiered pulpit that was like the trunk of a large broken tree. The turnkey pulled my hat off, and nudged me into a box beside the door.

“Kneel down,” he whispered hoarsely.

I knelt. A man with a new wig was droning out words, waving his hands now and then from the top of the tall pulpit. Beneath him a smaller man in an old wig was dozing, his head bent forward. The place was dirty, and ill-lighted by the tall, grimy windows, heavily barred. A pair of candles flickered beside the preacher’s right arm...

“They that go down to the sea in ships, my poor brethren,” he droned, “lying under the shadow...”

He directed his hands towards a tall deal box painted black, isolated in the centre of the lower floor. A man with a red head sat in it, his arms folded; another had his arms covering his head, which leant abjectly forward on the rail in front. There were large rusty gyves upon his wrists.

“But observe, my poor friends,” the chaplain droned on, “the psalmist saith, ‘At the last He shall bring them unto the desired haven.’ Now...”

The turnkey whispered suddenly into my ear: "Them's the condemned he's preaching at, them in the black pew. See Roguey Cullen wink at the woman prisoners up there in the gallery... Him with the red hair... All swings to-morrow."

"After they have staggered and reeled to and fro, and been amazed... observe. After they have been tempted; even after they have fallen..."

The sheriffs had their eyes decorously closed. The clerk reached up from below the preacher, and snuffed one of the candles. The preacher paused to rearrange his shining wig. Little clouds of powder flew out where he touched it. He struck his purple velvet cushion, and continued:

"At the last, I say, He shall bring them to the haven they had desired."

A jarring shriek rose out of the black pew, and an insensate jangling of irons rattled against the hollow wood. The ironed man, whose head had been hidden, was writhing in an epileptic fit. The governor began signalling to the jailers, and the whole dismal assembly rose to its feet, and craned to get a sight. The jailers began hurrying them out of the building. The redheaded man was crouching in the far corner of the black box.

The turnkey caught the end of my sleeve, and hurried me out of the door.

"Come away," he said. "Come out of it... Damn my good nature."

We went swiftly through the tall, gloomy, echoing stone passages. All the time there was the noise of the prisoners being marshalled somewhere into their distant yards and cells. We went across the bottom of a well, where the weeping December light struck ghastly down on to the stones, into a sort of rabbit-warren of black passages and descending staircases, a horror of cold, solitude, and night. Iron door after iron door clanged to behind us in the stony blackness. After an interminable traversing, the turnkey, still with his hand on my sleeve, jerked me into my familiar cell. I hadn't thought to be glad to get back to that dim, frozen, damp-chilled little hole; with its hateful stone walls, stone ceiling, stone floor, stone bed-slab, and stone table; its rope mat, foul stable-blanket, its horrible sense of eternal burial, out of sound, out of sight under a mined mountain of black stones. It was so tiny that the turnkey, entering after me, seemed to be pressed close up to my chest, and so dark that I could not see the colour of the dirty hair that fell matted from the bald patch on the top of his skull; so familiar that I knew the feel of every little worming of rust on the iron candlestick. He wiped his face with a brown rag of handkerchief, and said:

"Curse me if ever I go into that place again." After a time he added: "Unless 'tis a matter of duty."

I didn't say anything; my nerves were still jangling to that shrieking, and to the clang of the iron doors that had closed behind me. I had an irresistible impulse to get hold of the iron candlestick and smash it home through the skull of the turnkey — as I had done to the men who had killed Seraphina's father... to kill this man, then to creep along the black passages and murder man after man beside those iron doors until I got to the open air.

He began again. "You'd think we'd get used to it — you'd think we would — but 'tis a strain for us. You never knows what the prisoners will do at a scene like that there. It drives 'em mad. Look at this scar. Machell the forger done that for me, 'fore he was condemned, after a sermon like that — a quiet, gentlemanly man, much like you. Lord, yes, 'tis a strain..." He paused, still wiping his face, then went on: "And I swear that when I sees them men sit there in that black pew, an' hev heard the hammers going clack, clack on the scaffolding outside, and knew that they hadn't no more chance than you have to get out of there..." He pointed his short thumb towards the handkerchief of an opening, where the little blurr of blue light wavered through the two iron frames crossed in the nine feet of well. "Lord, you never gets used to it. You wants them to escape; 'tis in the air through the whole prison, even the debtors. I tells myself again and again, 'You're a fool for your pains.' But it's the same with the others — my mates. You can't get it out of your mind. That little kid now. I've seen children swing; but that little kid — as sure to swing as what... as what you are..."

"You think I am going to swing?" I asked.

I didn't want to kill him any more; I wanted too much to hear him talk. I hadn't heard anything for months and months of solitude, of darkness — on board the admiral's ship, stranded in the guardship at Plymouth, bumping round the coast, and now here in Newgate. And it had been darkness all the time. Jove! That Cuban time, with its movements, its pettiness, its intrigue, its warmth, even its villainies showed plainly enough in the chill of that blackness. It had been romance, that life.

Little, and far away, and irrevocably done with, it showed all golden. There wasn't any romance where I lay then; and there had been irons on my wrists; gruff hatred, the darkness, and always despair.

On board the flagship coming home I had been chained down in the cable-tier — a place where I could feel every straining of the great ship. Once these had risen to a pandemonium, a frightful tumult. There was a great gale outside. A sailor came down with a lanthorn, and tossed my biscuit to me.

"You d — — — d pirate," he said, "maybe it's you saving us from drowning."

"Is the gale very bad?" I had called.

He muttered — and the fact that he spoke to me at all showed how great the strain of the weather must have been to wring any words out of him:

"Bad — there's a large Indiaman gone. We saw her one minute and then..." He went away, muttering.

And suddenly the thought had come to me. What if the Indiaman were the Lion — the Lion with Seraphina on board? The man would not speak to me when he came again. No one would speak to me; I was a pirate who had fired on his own countrymen. And the thought had pursued me right into Newgate — if she were dead; if I had taken her from that security, from that peace, to end there... And to end myself.

"Swing!" the turnkey said; "you'll swing right enough." He slapped the great key on his flabby hand. "You can tell that by the signs. You, being an Admiralty case, ought to have been in the Marshalsea. And you're ordered solitary cell, and I'm tipped the

straight wink against your speaking a blessed word to a blessed soul. Why don't they let you see an attorney? Why? Because they mean you to swing."

I said, "Never mind that. Have you heard of a ship called the Lion? Can you find out about her?"

He shook his head cunningly, and did not answer. If the Lion had been here, I must have heard. They couldn't have left me here.

I said, "For God's sake find out. Get me a shipping gazette."

He affected not to hear.

"There's money in plenty," I said.

He winked ponderously and began again. "Oh, you'll swing all right. A man with nothing against him has a chance; with the rhino he has it, even if he's guilty. But you'll swing. Charlie, who brought you back just now, had a chat with the 'Torney-General's devil's clerk's clerk, while old Nog o' Bow Street was trying to read their Spanish. He says it's a Gov'nment matter. They wants to hang you bad, they do, so's to go to the Jacky Spaniards and say, 'He were a nob, a nobby nob.' (So you are, aren't you? One uncle an earl and t'other a dean, if so be what they say's true.) 'He were a nobby nob and we swung 'im. Go you'n do likewise.' They want a striking example t' keep the West India trade quiet..." He wiped his forehead and moved my water jug of red earth on the dirty deal table under the window, for all the world like a host in front of a guest. "They means you to swing," he said. "They've silenced the Thames Court reporters. Not a noospaper will publish a correct report t'morrer. And you haven't see nobody, nor you won't, not if I can help it."

He broke off and looked at me with an expression of candour.

"Mind you," he said, "I'm not uffish. To 'n ornery gentleman — of the road or what you will — I'm not, if so be he's the necessary. I'd take a letter like another. But for you, no — fear. Not that I've my knife into you. What I can do to make you comfor'ble I will do, both now an' hereafter. But when I gets the wink, I looks after my skin. So'd any man. You don't see nobody, nor you won't; nor your nobby relations won't have the word. Till the Hadmir'lty trile. Charlie says it's unconstitutional, you ought to see your 'torney, if you've one, or your father's got one. But Lor', I says, 'Charlie, if they wants it they gets it. This ain't no habeas carpis, give-the-man-a-chance case. It's the Hadmir'lty. And not a man tried for piracy this thirty year. See what a show it gives them, what bloody Radicle knows or keeres what the perceedin's should be? Who's a-goin' t' make a question out of it? Go away,' says I to Charlie. And that's it straight."

He went towards the door, then turned.

"You should be in the Marshalsea common yard; even I knows that. But they've the wink there. 'Too full,' says they. Too full be d — — d. I've know'd the time — after the Vansdell smash it were — when they found room for three hundred more improvident debtors over and above what they're chartered for. Too full! Their common yard! They don't want you to speak to a soul, an' you won't till this day week, when the Hadmir'lty Session is in full swing." He went out and locked the door, snorting, "Too full at the Marshalsea!... Go away!"

“Find out about the Lion,” I called, as the door closed.

It cleared the air for me, that speech. I understood that they wanted to hang me, and I wanted not to be hung, desperately, from that moment. I had not much cared before; I had — call it, moped. I had not really believed, really sensed it out. It isn’t easy to conceive that one is going to be hanged, I doubt if one does even with the rope round one’s neck. I hadn’t much wanted to live, but now I wanted to fight — one good fight before I went under for good and all, condemned or acquitted. There wasn’t anything left for me to live for, Seraphina could not be alive. The Lion must have been lost.

But I was going to make a fight for it; curse it, I was going to give them trouble. My “them” was not so much the Government that meant to hang me as the unseen powers that suffered such a state of things, that allowed a number of little meannesses, accidents, fatalities, to hang me. I began to worry the turnkey. He gave me no help, only shreds of information that let me see more plainly than ever how set “they” were on sacrificing me to their exigencies.

The whole West Indian trade in London was in an uproar over the Pirate Question and over the Slave Question. Jamaica was still squealing for Separation before the premonitory grumbles of Abolition. Horton Pen, over there, came back with astonishing clearness before me. I seemed to hear old, wall-eyed, sandy-headed Macdonald, agitating his immense bulk of ill-fitting white clothes in front of his newspaper, and bellowing in his ox-voice:

“Abolition, they give us Abolition... or ram it down our throats. They who haven’t even the spunk to rid us o’ the d — — — d pirates, not the spunk to catch and hang one... Jock, me lahd, we’s abolush them before they sail touch our neegurs... Let them clear oor seas, let them hang one pirate, and then talk.”

I was the one they were going to hang, to consolidate the bond with the old island. The cement wanted a little blood in the mixing. Damn them! I was going to make a fight; they had torn me from Seraphina, to fulfill their own accursed ends. I felt myself grow harsh and strong, as a tree feels itself grow gnarled by winter storms. I said to the turnkey again and again:

“Man, I will promise you a thousand pounds or a pension for life, if you will get a letter through to my mother or Squire Rooksby of Horton.”

He said he daren’t do it; enough was known of him to hang him if he gave offence. His flabby fingers trembled, and his eyes grew large with successive shocks of cupidity. He became afraid of coming near me; of the strain of the temptation. On the next day he did not speak a word, nor the next, nor the next. I began to grow horribly afraid of being hung. The day before the trial arrived. Towards noon he flung the door open.

“Here’s paper, here’s pens,” he said. “You can prepare your defence. You may write letters. Oh, hell! why did not they let it come sooner, I’d have had your thousand pounds. I’ll run a letter down to your people fast as the devil could take it. I know a man, a gentleman of the road. For twenty pun promised, split between us, he’ll travel faster’n Turpin did to York.” He was waving a large sheet of newspaper agitatedly.

“What does it mean?” I asked. My head was whirling.

“Radical papers got a-holt of it,” he said. “Trust them for nosing out. And the Government’s answering them. They say you’re going to suffer for your crimes. Hark to this... um, um... ‘The wretched felon now in Newgate will incur the just penalty...’ Then they slaps the West Indies in the face. ‘When the planters threaten to recur to some other power for protection, they, of course, believe that the loss of the colonies would be severely felt. But...’”

“The Lion’s home,” I said.

It burst upon me that she was — that she must be. Williams — or Sebright — he was the man, had been speaking up for me. Or Seraphina had been to the Spanish ambassador.

She was back; I should see her. I started up.

“The Lion’s home,” I repeated.

The turnkey snarled, “She was posted as overdue three days ago.”

I couldn’t believe it was true.

“I saw it in the papers,” he grumbled on. “I dursn’t tell you.” He continued violently, “Blow my dickey. It would make a cat sick.”

My sudden exaltation, my sudden despair, gave way to indifference.

“Oh, coming, coming!” he shouted, in answer to an immense bellowing cry that loomed down the passage without.

I heard him grumble, “Of course, of course. I shan’t make a penny.” Then he caught hold of my arm. “Here, come along, someone to see you in the press-yard.”

He pulled me along the noisome, black warren of passages, slamming the inner door viciously behind him.

The press-yard — the exercising ground for the condemned — was empty; the last batch had gone out, my batch would be the next to come in, the turnkey said suddenly. It was a well of a place, high black walls going up into the desolate, weeping sky, and quite tiny. At one end was a sort of slit in the wall, closed with tall, immense windows. From there a faint sort of rabbit’s squeak was going up through the immense roll and rumble of traffic on the other side of the wall. The turnkey pushed me towards it.

“Go on,” he said. “I’ll not listen; I ought to. But, curse me, I’m not a bad sort,” he added gloomily; “I dare say you’ll make it worth my while.”

I went and peered through the bars at a faint object pressed against other bars in just another slit across a black passage.

“What, Jackie, boy; what, Jackie?” Blinking his eyes, as if the dim light were too strong for them, a thin, bent man stood there in a brilliant new court coat. His face was meagre in the extreme, the nose and cheekbones polished and transparent like a bigaroon cherry. A thin tuft of reddish hair was brushed back from his high, shining forehead. It was my father. He exclaimed:

“What, Jackie, boy! How old you look!” then waved his arm towards me. “In trouble?” he said. “You in trouble?”

He rubbed his thin hands together, and looked round the place with a cultured man's air of disgust. I said, "Father!" and he suddenly began to talk very fast and agitatedly of what he had been doing for me. My mother, he said, was crippled with rheumatism, and Rooksby and Veronica on the preceding Thursday had set sail for Jamaica. He had read to my mother, beside her bed, the newspaper containing an account of my case; and she had given him money, and he had started with violent haste for London. The haste and the rush were still dazing him. He had lived down there in the farmhouse beneath the downs, with the stackyards under his eyes, with his books of verse and his few prints on the wall — — — My God, how it all came back to me.

In his disjointed speeches, I could see how exactly the same it all remained. The same old surly man with a squint had driven him along the muddy roads in the same ancient gig, past the bare elms, to meet the coach. And my father had never been in London since he had walked the streets with the Prince Regent's friends.

Whilst he talked to me there, lines of verse kept coming to his lips; and, after the habitual pleasure of the apt quotation, he felt acutely shocked at the inappropriateness of the place, the press-yard, with the dim light weeping downwards between immensely high walls, and the desultory snowflakes that dropped between us. And he had tried so hard, in his emergency, to be practical. When he had reached London, before even attempting to see me, he had run from minister to minister trying to influence them in my favour — and he reached me in Newgate with nothing at all effected.

I seemed to know him then, so intimately, so much better than anything else in the world.

He began, "I had my idea in the up-coach last night. I thought, 'A very great personage was indebted to me in the old days (more indebted than you are aware of, Johnnie). I will intercede with him.' That was why my first step was to my old tailor's in Conduit Street. Because... what is fit for a farm for a palace were low." He stopped, reflected, then said, "What is fit for the farm for the palace were low."

He felt across his coat for his breast pocket. It was what he had done years and years ago, and all these years between, inscribe ideas for lines of verse in his pocket-book. I said:

"You have seen the king?"

His face lengthened a little. "Not seen him. But I found one of the duke's secretaries, a pleasant young fellow... not such as we used to be. But the duke was kind enough to interest himself. Perhaps my name has lived in the land. I was called Curricule Kemp, as I may have told you, because I drove a vermilion one with green and gilt wheels..."

His face, peering at me through the bars, had, for a moment, a flush of pride. Then he suddenly remembered, and, as if to propitiate his own reproof, he went on:

"I saw the Secretary of State, and he assured me, very civilly, that not even the highest personage in the land..." He dropped his voice, "Jackie, boy," he said, his narrow-lidded eyes peering miserably across at me, "there's not even hope of a reprieve afterwards."

I leaned my face wearily against the iron bars. What, after all, was the use of fighting if the Lion were not back?

Then, suddenly, as the sound of his words echoed down the bare, black corridors, he seemed to realize the horror of it. His face grew absolutely white, he held his head erect, as if listening to a distant sound. And then he began to cry — horribly, and for a long time.

It was I that had to comfort him. His head had bowed at the conviction of his hopeless uselessness; all through his own life he had been made ineffectual by his indulgence in perfectly innocent, perfectly trivial enjoyments, and now, in this extremity of his only son, he was rendered almost fantastically of no avail.

“No, no, sir! You have done all that any one could; you couldn’t break these walls down. Nothing else would help.”

Small, hopeless sobs shook him continually. His thin, delicate white fingers gripped the black grille, with the convulsive grasp of a very weak man. It was more distressing to me than anything I had ever seen or felt. The mere desire, the intense desire to comfort him, made me get a grip upon myself again. And I remembered that, now that I could communicate with the outer air, it was absolutely easy; he would save my life. I said:

“You have only to go to Clapham, sir.”

And the moment I was in a state to command him, to direct him, to give him something to do, he became a changed man. He looked up and listened. I told him to go to Major Cowper’s. It would be easy enough to find him at Clapham. Cowper, I remembered, could testify to my having been seized by Tomas Castro. He had seen me fight on the decks. And what was more, he would certainly know the addresses of Kingston planters, if any were in London. They could testify that I had been in Jamaica all the while Nikola el Escoces was in Rio Medio. I knew there were some. My father was fidgeting to be gone. He had his name marked for him, and a will directing his own. He was not the same man. But I particularly told him to send me a lawyer first of all.

“Yes, yes!” he said, fidgeting to go, “to Major Cowper’s. Let me write his address.”

“And a solicitor,” I said. “Send him to me on your way there.”

“Yes, yes,” he said, “I shall be able to be of use to the solicitor. As a rule, they are men of no great perspicacity.”

And he went hurriedly away.

The real torture, the agony of suspense began then. I steadied my nerves by trying to draw up notes for my speech to the jury on the morrow. That was the turnkey’s idea.

He said, “Slap your chest, ‘peal to the honour of a British gent, and pitch it in strong.”

It was not much good; I could not keep to any logical sequence of thought, my mind was forever wandering to what my father was doing. I pictured him in his new blue coat, running agitatedly through crowded streets, his coat-tails flying behind his thin

legs. The hours dragged on, and it was a matter of minutes. I had to hold upon the table edge to keep myself from raging about the cell. I tried to bury myself again in the scheme for my defence. I wondered whom my father would have found. There was a man called Cary who had gone home from Kingston. He had a bald head and blue eyes; he must remember me. If he would corroborate! And the lawyer, when he came, might take another line of defence. It began to fall dusk slowly, through the small barred windows.

The entire night passed without a word from my father. I paced up and down the whole time, composing speeches to the jury. And then the day broke. I calmed myself with a sort of frantic energy.

Early the jailer came in, and began fussing about my cell.

“Case comes on about one,” he said. “Grand jury at half after twelve. No fear they won’t return a true bill. Grand jury, five West India merchants. They means to have you. ‘Torney-General, S’lic’tor-General. S’r Robert Mead, and five juniors agin you... You take my tip. Throw yourself on the mercy of the court, and make a rousing speech with a young ‘ooman in it. Not that you’ll get much mercy from them. They Admir’lty judges is all hangers. ‘S we say, ‘Oncet the anchor goes up in the Old Bailey, there ain’t no hope. We begins to clean out the c’ndemned cell, here. Sticks the anchor up over their heads, when it is Hadmir’lty case,” he commented.

I listened to him with strained attention. I made up my mind to miss not a word uttered that day. It was my only chance.

“You don’t know any one from Jamaica?” I asked.

He shook his bullet head, and tapped his purple nose. “Can’t be done,” he said. “You’d get a ornery hallybi fer a guinea a head, but they’d keep out of this case. They’ve necks like you and me.”

Whilst he was speaking, the whole of the outer world, as far as it affected me, came suddenly in upon me — that was what I meant to the great city that lay all round, the world, in the centre of which was my cell. To the great mass, I was matter for a sensation; to them I might prove myself beneficial in this business. Perhaps there were others who were thinking I might be useful in one way or another. There were the ministers of the Crown, who did not care much whether Jamaica separated or not. But they wanted to hang me because they would be able to say disdainfully to the planters, “Separate if you like; we’ve done our duty, we’ve hanged a man.”

All those people had their eyes on me, and they were about the only ones who knew of my existence. That was the end of my Romance! Romance! The broadsheet sellers would see to it afterwards with a “Dying confession.”

Chapter 4

I never saw my father again until I was in the prisoner's anteroom at the Old Bailey. It was full of lounging men, whose fleshy limbs bulged out against the tight, loud checks of their coats and trousers. These were jailers waiting to bring in their prisoners. On the other side of one black door the Grand Jury was deliberating on my case, behind another the court was in waiting to try me. I was in a sort of tired lull. All night I had been pacing up and down, trying to bring my brain to think of points — points in my defence. It was very difficult. I knew that I must keep cool, be calm, be lucid, be convincing; and my brain had reeled at times, even in the darkness of the cell. I knew it had reeled, because I remembered that once I had fallen against the stone of one of the walls, and once against the door. Here, in the light, with only a door between myself and the last scene, I regained my hold. I was going to fight every inch from start to finish. I was going to let no chink of their armour go untried. I was going to make a good fight. My teeth chattered like castanets, jarring in my jaws until it was painful. But that was only with the cold.

A hubbub of expostulation was going on at the third door. My turnkey called suddenly:

“Let the genman in, Charlie. Pal o’ ourn,” and my father ran huntedly into the room. He began an endless tale of a hackney coachman who had stood in front of the door of his coach to prevent his number being taken; of a crowd of caddee-smashers, who had hustled him and filched his purse. “Of course, I made a fight for it,” he said, “a damn good fight, considering. It’s in the blood. But the watch came, and, in short — on such an occasion as this there is no time for words — I passed the night in the watch-house. Many and many a night I passed there when I and Lord — — — But I am losing time.”

“You ain’t fit to walk the streets of London alone, sir,” the turnkey said.

My father gave him a corner of his narrow-lidded eyes. “My man,” he said, “I walked the streets with the highest in the land before your mother bore you in Bridewell, or whatever jail it was.”

“Oh, no offence,” the turnkey muttered.

I said, “Did you find Cowper, sir? Will he give evidence?”

“Jackie,” he said agitatedly, as if he were afraid of offending me, “he said you had filched his wife’s rings.”

That, in fact, was what Major Cowper had said — that I had dropped into their ship near Port Royal Heads, and had afterwards gone away with the pirates who had filched his wife’s rings. My father, in his indignation, had not even deigned to ask him

for the address of Jamaica planters in London; and on his way back to find a solicitor he had come into contact with those street rowdies and the watch. He had only just come from before the magistrates.

A man with one eye poked his head suddenly from behind the Grand Jury door. He jerked his head in my direction.

“True bill against that ‘ere,” he said, then drew his head in again.

“Jackie, boy,” my father said, putting a thin hand on my wrist, and gazing imploringly into my eyes, “I’m... I’m ... I can’t tell you how...”

I said, “It doesn’t matter, father.” I felt a foretaste of how my past would rise up to crush me. Cowper had let that wife of his coerce him into swearing my life away. I remembered vividly his blubbing protestations of friendship when I persuaded Tomas Castro to return him his black deed-box with the brass handle, on that deck littered with rubbish... “Oh, God bless you, God bless you. You have saved me from starvation...” There had been tears in his old blue eyes. “If you need it I will go anywhere... do anything to help you. On the honour of a gentleman and a soldier.” I had, of course, recommended his wife to give up her rings when the pirates were threatening her in the cabin. The other door opened, another man said:

“Now, then, in with that carrion. D’you want to keep the judges waiting?”

I stepped through the door straight down into the dock; there was a row of spikes in the front of it. I wasn’t afraid; three men in enormous wigs and ermine robes faced me; four in short wigs had their heads together like parrots on a branch. A fat man, bareheaded, with a gilt chain round his neck, slipped from behind into a seat beside the highest placed judge. He was wiping his mouth and munching with his jaws. On each side of the judges, beyond the short-wigged assessors, were chairs full of ladies and gentlemen. They all had their eyes upon me. I saw it all very plainly. I was going to see everything, to keep my eyes open, not to let any chance escape. I wondered why a young girl with blue eyes and pink cheeks tittered and shrugged her shoulders. I did not know what was amusing. What astonished me was the smallness, the dirt, the want of dignity of the room itself. I thought they must be trying a case of my importance there by mistake.

Presently I noticed a great gilt anchor above the judges’ heads. I wondered why it was there, until I remembered it was an Admiralty Court. I thought suddenly, “Ah! if I had thought to tell my father to go and see if the Lion had come in in the night!”

A man was bawling out a number of names... “Peter Plimley, gent., any challenge... Lazarus Cohen, merchant, any challenge...”

The turnkey beside me leant with his back against the spikes. He was talking to the man who had called us in.

“Lazarus Cohen, West Indian merchant... Lord, well, I’d challenge...”

The other man said, “S — sh.”

“His old dad give me five shiners to put him up to a thing if I could,” the turnkey said again.

I didn't catch his meaning until an old man with a very ragged gown was handing up a book to a row of others in a box so near that I could almost have touched them. Then I realized that the turnkey had been winking to me to challenge the jury. I called out at the highest of the judges:

"I protest against that jury. It is packed. Half of them, at least, are West Indian merchants."

There was a stir all over the court. I realized then that what had seemed only a mass of stuffs of some sort were human beings all looking at me. The judge I had called to opened a pair of dim eyes upon me, clasped and unclasped his hands, very dry, ancient, wrinkled. The judge on his right called angrily:

"Nonsense, it is too late... They are being sworn. You should have spoken when the names were read." Underneath his wig was an immensely broad face with glaring yellow eyes.

I said, "It is scandalous. You want to murder me, How should I know what you do in your courts? I say the jury is packed."

The very old judge closed his eyes, opened them again, then gasped out:

"Silence. We are here to try you. This is a court of law."

The turnkey pulled my sleeve under cover of the planking. "Treat him civil," he whispered, "Lord Justice Stowell of the Admiralty. 'Tother's Baron Garrow of the Common Law; a beast; him as hanged that kid. You can sass him; it doesn't matter."

Lord Stowell waved his hand to the clerk with the ragged gown; the book passed from hand to hand along the faces of the jury, the clerk gabbling all the while. The old judge said suddenly, in an astonishingly deep, majestic voice:

"Prisoner at the bar, you must understand that we are here to give you an impartial trial according to the laws of this land. If you desire advice as to the procedure of this court you can have it."

I said, "I still protest against that Jury. I am an innocent man, and — — —"

He answered querulously, "Yes, yes, afterwards." And then creaked, "Now the indictment..."

Someone hidden from me by three barristers began to read in a loud voice not very easy to follow. I caught:

"For that the said John Kemp, alias Nichols, alias Nikola el Escoces, alias el Demonio, alias el Diablotto, on the twelfth of May last, did feloniously and upon the high seas piratically seize a certain ship called the Victoria... um... um, the properties of Hyman Cohen and others... and did steal and take therefrom six hundred and thirty barrels of coffee of the value of... um... um... um... one hundred and one barrels of coffee of the value of... ninety-four half kegs... and divers others..."

I gave an immense sigh... That was it, then. I had heard of the Victoria; it was when I was at Horton that the news of her loss reached us. Old Macdonald had sworn; it was the day a negro called Apollo had taken to the bush. I ought to be able to prove that. Afterwards, one of the judges asked me if I pleaded guilty or not guilty. I began

a long wrangle about being John Kemp but not Nikola el Escoces. I was going to fight every inch of the way. They said:

“You will have your say afterwards. At present, guilty or not guilty?”

I refused to plead at all; I was not the man. The third judge woke up, and said hurriedly:

“That is a plea of not guilty, enter it as such.” Then he went to sleep again. The young girl on the bench beside him laughed joyously, and Mr. Baron Garrow nodded round at her, then snapped viciously at me:

“You don’t make your case any better by this sort of foolery.” His eyes glared at me like an awakened owl’s.

I said, “I’m fighting for my neck... and you’ll have to fight, too, to get it.”

The old judge said angrily, “Silence, or you will have to be removed.”

I said, “I am fighting for my life.”

There was a sort of buzz all round the court.

Lord Stowell said, “Yes, yes;” and then, “Now, Mr. King’s Advocate, I suppose Mr. Alfonso Jervis opens for you.”

A dusty wig swam up from just below my left hand, almost to a level with the dock.

The old judge shut his eyes, with an air of a man who is going a long journey in a post-chaise. Mr. Baron Garrow dipped his pen into an invisible ink-pot, and scratched it on his desk. A long story began to drone from under the wig, an interminable farrago of dull nonsense, in a hypochondriacal voice; a long tale about piracy in general; piracy in the times of the Greeks, piracy in the times of William the Conqueror... pirata nequissima Eustachio, and thanking God that a case of the sort had not been heard in that court for an immense lapse of years. Below me was an array of wigs, on each side a compressed mass of humanity, squeezed so tight that all the eyeballs seemed to be starting out of the heads towards me. From the wig below, a translation of the florid phrases of the Spanish papers was coming:

“His very Catholic Majesty, out of his great love for his ancient friend and ally, his Britannic Majesty, did surrender the body of the notorious El Demonio, called also...”

I began to wonder who had composed that precious document, whether it was the Juez de la Primera Instancia, bending his yellow face and sloe-black eyes above the paper, over there in Havana — or whether it was O’Brien, who was dead since the writing.

All the while the barrister was droning on. I did not listen because I had heard all that before — in the room of the Judge of the First Instance at Havana. Suddenly appearing behind the backs of the row of gentlefolk on the bench was the pale, thin face of my father. I wondered which of his great friends had got him his seat. He was nodding to me and smiling faintly. I nodded, too, and smiled back. I was going to show them that I was not cowed. The voice of the barrister said:

“M’luds and gentlemen of the jury, that finishes the Spanish evidence, which was taken on commission on the island of Cuba. We shall produce the officer of H. M. S. Elephant, to whom he was surrendered by the Spanish authorities at Havana, thus

proving the prisoner to be the pirate Nikola, and no other. We come, now, to the specific instance, m'luds and gentlemen, an instance as vile..."

It was some little time before I had grasped how absolutely the Spanish evidence damned me. It was as if, once I fell into the hands of the English officer on Havana quays, the identity of Nikola could by no manner of means be shaken from round my neck. The barrister came to the facts.

A Kingston ship had been boarded... and there was the old story over again. I seemed to see the Rio Medio schooner rushing towards where I and old Cowper and old Lumsden looked back from the poop to see her come alongside; the strings of brown pirates pour in empty-handed, and out laden. Only in the case of the Victoria there were added the ferocities of "the prisoner at the bar, m'luds and gentlemen of the jury, a fiend in human shape, as we shall prove with the aid of the most respectable witnesses..."

The man in the wig sat down, and, before I understood what was happening, a fat, rosy man — the Attorney-General — whose cheerful gills gave him a grotesque resemblance to a sucking pig, was calling "Edward Sadler," and the name blared like sudden fire leaping up all over the court. The Attorney-General wagged his gown into a kind of bunch behind his hips, and a man, young, fair, with a reddish beard and a shiny suit of clothes, sprang into a little box facing the jury. He bowed nervously in several directions, and laughed gently; then he looked at me and scowled. The Attorney-General cleared his throat pleasantly...

"Mr. Edward Sadler, you were, on May 25th, chief mate of the good ship Victoria..."

The fair man with the beard told his story, the old story of the ship with its cargo of coffee and dye-wood; its good passage past the Gran Caymanos; the becalming off the Cuban shore in latitude so and so, and the boarding of a black schooner, calling itself a Mexican privateer. I could see all that.

"The prisoner at the bar came alongside in a boat, with seventeen Spaniards," he said, in a clear, expressionless voice, looking me full in the face.

I called out to the old judge, "My Lord... I protest. This is perjury. I was not the man. It Was Nichols, a Nova Scotian."

Mr. Baron Garrow roared, "Silence," his face suffused with blood.

Old Lord Stowell quavered, "You must respect the procedure..."

"Am I to hear my life sworn away without a word?" I asked.

He drew himself frostily into his robes. "God forbid," he said; "but at the proper time you can cross-examine, if you think fit."

The Attorney-General smiled at the jury-box and addressed himself to Sadler, with an air of patience very much tried:

"You swear the prisoner is the man?"

The fair man turned his sharp eyes upon me. I called, "For God's sake, don't perjure yourself. You are a decent man."

“No, I won’t swear,” he said slowly. “I think he was. He had his face blacked then, of course. When I had sight of him at the Thames Court I thought he was; and seeing the Spanish evidence, I don’t see where’s the room...”

“The Spanish evidence is part of the plot,” I said.

The Attorney-General snickered. “Go on, Mr. Sadler,” he said. “Let’s have the rest of the plot unfolded.”

A juryman laughed suddenly, and resumed an abashed sudden silence. Sadler went on to tell the old story... I saw it all as he spoke; only gaunt, shiny-faced, yellow Nichols was chewing and hitching his trousers in place of my Tomas, with his sanguine oaths and jerked gestures. And there was Nichol’s wanton, aimless ferocity.

“He had two pistols, which he fired twice each, while we were hoisting the studding-sails by his order, to keep up with the schooner. He fired twice into the crew. One of the men hit died afterwards...”

Later, another vessel, an American, had appeared in the offing, and the pirates had gone in chase of her. He finished, and Lord Stowell moved one of his ancient hands. It was as if a gray lizard had moved on his desk, a little toward me.

“Now, prisoner,” he said.

I drew a deep breath. I thought for a minute that, after all, there was a little fair play in the game — that I had a decent, fair, blue-eyed man in front of me. He looked hard at me; I hard at him; it was as if we were going to wrestle for a belt. The young girl on the bench had her lips parted and leant forward, her head a little on one side.

I said, “You won’t swear I was the man... Nikola el Escoces?”

He looked meditatively into my eyes; it was a duel between us.

“I won’t swear,” he said. “You had your face blacked, and didn’t wear a beard.”

A soft growth of hair had come out over my cheeks whilst I lay in prison. I rubbed my hand against it, and thought that he had drawn first blood.

“You must not say ‘you,’” I said. “I swear I was not the man. Did he talk like me?”

“Can’t say that he did,” Sadler answered, moving from one foot to the other.

“Had he got eyes like me, or a nose, or a mouth?”

“Can’t say,” he answered again. “His face was blacked.”

“Didn’t he talk Blue Nose — in the Nova Scotian way?”

“Well, he did,” Sadler assented slowly. “But any one could for a disguise. It’s as easy as...”

Beside me, the turnkey whispered suddenly, “Pull him up; stop his mouth.”

I said, “Wasn’t he an older man? Didn’t he look between forty and fifty?”

“What do you look like?” the chief mate asked.

“I’m twenty-four,” I answered; “I can prove it.”

“Well, you look forty and older,” he answered negligently. “So did he.”

His cool, disinterested manner overwhelmed me like the blow of an immense wave; it proved so absolutely that I had parted with all semblance of youth. It was something added to the immense waste of waters between myself and Seraphina; an immense waste of years. I did not ask much of the next witness; Sadler had made me afraid.

Septimus Hearn, the master of the *Victoria*, was a man with eyes as blue and as cold as bits of round blue pebble; a little goat's beard, iron-gray; apple-coloured cheeks, and small gold earrings in his ears. He had an extraordinarily mournful voice, and a retrospective melancholy of manner. He was just such another master of a trader as Captain Lumsden had been, and it was the same story over again, with little different touches, the hard blue eyes gazing far over the top of my head; the gnarled hands moving restlessly on the rim of his hat.

"Afterwards the prisoner ordered the steward to give us a drink of brandy. A glass was offered me, but I refused to drink it, and he said, 'Who is it that refuses to drink a glass of brandy?' He asked me what countryman I was, and if I was an American."

There were two others from the unfortunate *Victoria* — a Thomas Davis, boatswain, who had had one of Nikola's pistol-balls in his hip; and a sort of steward — I have forgotten his name — who had a scar of a cutlass wound on his forehead.

It was horrible enough; but what distressed me more was that I could not see what sort of impression I was making. Once the judge who was generally asleep woke up and began to scratch furiously with his quill; once three of the assessors — the men in short wigs — began an animated conversation; one man with a thin, dark face laughed noiselessly, showing teeth like a white waterfall. A man in the body of the court on my left had an enormous swelling, blood-red, and looking as if a touch must burst it, under his chin; at one time he winked his eyes furiously for a long time on end. It seemed to me that something in the evidence must be affecting all these people. The turnkey beside me said to his mate, "Twig old Justice Best making notes in his stud-calendar," and suddenly the conviction forced itself upon me that the whole thing, the long weary trial, the evidence, the parade of fairness, was being gone through in a spirit of mockery, as a mere formality; that the judges and the assessors, and the man with the goitre took no interest whatever in my case. It was a foregone conclusion.

A tiny, fair man, with pale hair oiled and rather long for those days, and with green and red signet rings on fingers that he was forever running through that hair, came mincingly into the witness-box. He held for a long time what seemed to be an amiable conversation with Sir Robert Gifford, a tall, portentous-looking man, who had black beetling brows, like tufts of black horsehair sticking in the crannies of a cliff. The conversation went like this:

"You are the Hon. Thomas Oldham?"

"Yes, yes."

"You know Kingston, Jamaica, very well?"

"I was there four years — two as the secretary to the cabinet of his Grace the Duke of Manchester, two as civil secretary to the admiral on the station."

"You saw the prisoner?"

"Yes, three times."

I drew an immense breath; I thought for a moment that they had delivered themselves into my hands. The thing must prove of itself that I had been in Jamaica, not in Rio Medio, through those two years. My heart began to thump like a great solemn

drum, like Paul's bell when the king died — solemn, insistent, dominating everything. The little man was giving an account of the “bawminable” state of confusion into which the island's trade was thrown by the misdeeds of a pirate called Nikola el Demonio.

“I assure you, my luds,” he squeaked, turning suddenly to the judges, “the island was wrought up into a pitch of... ah... almost disloyalty. The... ah... planters were clamouring for... ah... separation. And, to be sure, I trust you'll hang the prisoner, for if you don't...”

Lord Stowell shivered, and said suddenly with haste, “Mr. Oldham, address yourself to Sir Robert.”

I was almost happy; the cloven hoof had peeped so damningly out. The little man bowed briskly to the old judge, asked for a chair, sat himself down, and arranged his coat-tails.

“As I was saying,” he prattled on, “the trouble and the worry that this man caused to His Grace, myself, and Admiral Rowley were inconceivable. You have no idea, you... ah... can't conceive. And no wonder, for, as it turned out, the island was simply honey-combed by his spies and agents. You have no idea; people who seemed most respectable, people we ourselves had dealings with...”

He rattled on at immense length, the barrister taking huge pinches of yellow snuff, and smiling genially with the air of a horse-trainer watching a pony go faultlessly through difficult tricks. Every now and then he flicked his whip.

“Mr. Oldham, you saw the prisoner three times. If it does not overtax your memory pray tell us.” And the little creature pranced off in a new direction.

“Tax my memory! Gad, I like that. You remember a man who has had your blood as near as could be, don't you?”

I had been looking at him eagerly, but my interest faded away now. It was going to be the old confusing of my identity with Nikola's. And yet I seemed to know the little beggar's falsetto; it was a voice one does not forget.

“Remember!” he squeaked. “Gad, gentlemen of the jury, he came as near as possible — — — You have no idea what a ferocious devil it is.”

I was wondering why on earth Nichols should have wanted to kill such a little thing. Because it was obvious that it must have been Nichols.

“As near as possible murdered myself and Admiral Rowley and a Mr. Topnambo, a most enlightened and loyal... ah... inhabitant of the island, on the steps of a public inn.”

I had it then. It was the little man David Mac-donald had rolled down the steps with, that night at the Ferry Inn on the Spanish Town road.

“He was lying in wait for us with a gang of assassins. I was stabbed on the upper lip. I lost so much blood... had to be invalided... cannot think of horrible episode without shuddering.”

He had seen me then, and when Ramon (“a Spaniard who was afterwards proved to be a spy of El Demonio's — of the prisoner's. He was hung since”) had driven me from the place of execution after the hanging of the seven pirates; and he had come into

Ramon's store at the moment when Carlos ("a piratical devil if ever there was one," the little man protested) had drawn me into the back room, where Don Balthasar and O'Brien and Seraphina sat waiting. The men who were employed to watch Ramon's had never seen me leave again, and afterwards a secret tunnel was discovered leading down to the quay.

"This, apparently, was the way by which the prisoner used to arrive and quit the island secretly," he finished his evidence in chief, and the beetle-browed, portly barrister sat down. I was not so stupid but what I could see a little, even then, how the most innocent events of my past were going to rise up and crush me; but I was certain I could twist him into admitting the goodness of my tale which hadn't yet been told. He knew I had been in Jamaica, and, put what construction he liked on it, he would have to admit it. I called out:

"Thank God, my turn's come at last!"

The faces of the Attorney-General, the King's Advocate, Sir Robert Gifford, Mr. Lawes, Mr. Jervis, of all the seven counsel that were arrayed to crush me, lengthened into simultaneous grins, varying at the jury-box. But I didn't care; I grinned, too. I was going to show them.

It was as if I flew at the throat of that little man. It seemed to me that I must be able to crush a creature whose malice was as obvious and as nugatory as the green and red rings that he exhibited in his hair every few minutes. He wanted to show the jury that he had rings; that he was a mincing swell; that I hadn't and that I was a bloody pirate. I said:

"You know that during the whole two years Nichols was at Rio I was an improver at Horton Pen with the Macdonalds, the agents of my brother-in-law, Sir Ralph Rooksby. You must know these things. You were one of the Duke of Manchester's spies."

We used to call the Duke's privy council that. "I certainly know nothing of the sort," he said, folding his hands along the edge of the witness-box, as if he had just thought of exhibiting his rings in that manner. He was abominably cool. I said:

"You must have heard of me. The Topnambos knew me."

"The Topnambos used to talk of a blackguard with a name like Kemp who kept himself mighty out of the way in the Vale."

"You knew I was on the island," I pinned him down.

"You used to come to the island," he corrected. "I've just explained how. But you were not there much, or we should have been able to lay hands on you. We wanted to. There was a warrant out after you tried to murder us. But you had been smuggled away by Ramon."

I tried again:

"You have heard of my brother-in-law, Sir Ralph Rooksby?"

I wanted to show that, if I hadn't rings, I had relations.

"Nevah heard of the man in my life," he said.

"He was the largest land proprietor on the island," I said.

“Dessay,” he said; “I knew forty of the largest. Mostly sharpers in the boosing-kens.” He yawned.

I said viciously:

“It was your place to know the island. You knew Horton Pen — the Macdonalds?”

The face of jolly old Mrs. Mac. came to my mind — the impeccable, Scotch, sober respectability.

“Oh, I knew the Macdonalds,” he said — ”of them. The uncle was a damn rebellious, canting, planting Scotchman. Horton Pen was the centre of the Separation Movement. We could have hung him if we’d wanted to. The nephew was the writer of an odious blackmailing print. He calumniated all the decent, loyal inhabitants. He was an agent of you pirates, too. We arrested him — got his papers; know all about your relations with him.”

I said, “That’s all nonsense. Let us hear” — the Attorney-General had always said that — ”what you know of myself.”

“What I know of you,” he sniffed, “if it’s a pleasuah, was something like this. You came to the island in a mysterious way, gave out that you were an earl’s son, and tried to get into the very excellent society of... ah... people like my friends, the Topnambos. But they would not have you, and after that you kept yourself mighty close; no one ever saw you but once or twice, and then it was riding about at night with that humpbacked scoundrel of a blackmailer.

“You, in fact, weren’t on the island at all, except when you came to spy for the pirates. You used to have long confabulations with that scoundrel Ramon, who kept you posted about the shipping. As for the blackmailer, with the humpback, David Macdonald, you kept him, you... ah... subsidized his filthy print to foment mutiny and murder among the black fellows, and preach separation. You wanted to tie our hands, and prevent our... ah... prosecuting the preventive measures against you. When you found that it was no good you tried to murder the admiral and myself, and that very excellent man Topnambo, coming from a ball. After that you were seen encouraging seven of your... ah... pirate fellows whom we were hanging, and you drove off in haste with your agent, Ramon, before we could lay hands on you, and vanished from the island.”

I didn’t lose my grip; I went at him again, blindly, as if I were boxing with my eyes full of blood, but my teeth set tight. I said:

“You used to buy things yourself of old Ramon; bought them for the admiral to load his frigates with; things he sold at Key West.”

“That was one of the lies your scoundrel David Macdonald circulated against us.”

“You bought things... even whilst you were having his store watched.”

“Upon my soul!” he said.

“You used to buy things...” I pinned him. He looked suddenly at the King’s Advocate, then dropped his eyes.

“Nevah bought a thing in my life,” he said.

I knew the man had; Ramon had told me of his buying for the admiral more than three hundred barrels of damaged coffee for thirty pounds. I was in a mad temper. I smashed my hand upon the spikes of the rail in front of me, and although I saw hands move impulsively towards me all over the court, I did not know that my arm was impaled and the blood running down.

“Perjurer,” I shouted, “Ramon himself told me.”

“Ah, you were mighty thick with Ramon...” he said.

I let him stand down. I was done. Someone below said harshly, “That closes our case, m'luds,” and the court rustled all over. Old Lord Stowell in front of me shivered a little, looked at the window, and then said:

“Prisoner at the bar, our procedure has it that if you wish to say anything, you may now address the jury. Afterwards, if you had a counsel, he could call and examine your witnesses, if you have any.”

It was growing very dark in the court. I began to tell my story; it was so plain, so evident, it shimmered there before me... and yet I knew it was so useless.

I remembered that in my cell I had reasoned out that I must be very constrained; very lucid about the opening. “On such and such a day I landed at Kingston, to become an improver on the estate of my brother-in-law. He is Sir Ralph Rooksby of Horton Priory in Kent.” I did keep cool; I was lucid; I spoke like that. I had my eyes fixed on the face of the young girl upon the bench. I remember it so well. Her eyes were fixed, fascinated, upon my hand. I tried to move it, and found that it was stuck upon the spike on which I had jammed it. I moved it carelessly away, and only felt a little pain, as if from a pin-prick; but the blood was dripping on to the floor, pat, pat. Later on, a man lit the candles on the judge's desk, and the court looked different. There were deep shadows everywhere; and the illuminated face of Lord Stowell looked grimmer, less kind, more ancient, more impossible to bring a ray of sympathy to. Down below, the barristers of the prosecution leaned back with their arms all folded, and the air of men resting in an interval of cutting down a large tree. The barristers who were, merely listeners looked at me from time to time. I heard one say, “That man ought to have his hand bound up.” I was telling the story of my life, that was all I could do.

“As for Ramon, how could I know he was in the pay of the pirates, even if he were? I swear I did not know. Everyone on the island had dealings with him, the admiral himself. That is not calumny. On my honour, the admiral did have dealings. Some of you have had dealings with forgers, but that does not make you forgers.”

I warmed to it; I found words. I was telling the story for that young girl. Suddenly I saw the white face of my father peep at me between the head of an old man with an enormous nose, and a stout lady in a brown cloak that had a number of little watchmen's capes. He smiled suddenly, and nodded again and again, opened his eyes, shut them; furtively waved a hand. It distracted me, threw me off my balance, my coolness was gone. It was as if something had snapped. After that I remembered very little; I think I may have quoted “The Prisoner of Chillon,” because he put it into my head.

I seemed to be back again in Cuba. Down below me the barristers were talking. The King's Advocate pulled out a puce-coloured bandanna, and waved it abroad preparatorily to blowing his nose. A cloud of the perfume of a West Indian bean went up from it, sweet and warm. I had smelt it last at Rio, the sensation was so strong that I could not tell where I was.

The candles made a yellow glow on the judge's desk; but it seemed to be the blaze of light in the cell where Nichols and the Cuban had fenced. I thought I was back in Cuba again. The people in the court disappeared in the deepening shadows. At times I could not speak. Then I would begin again.

If there were to be any possibility of saving my life, I had to tell what I had been through — and to tell it vividly — I had to narrate the story of my life; and my whole life came into my mind. It was Seraphina who was the essence of my life; who spoke with the voice of all Cuba, of all Spain, of all Romance. I began to talk about old Don Balthasar Riego. I began to talk about Manuel-del-Popolo, of his red shirt, his black eyes, his mandolin; I saw again the light of his fires flicker on the other side of the ravine in front of the cave.

And I rammed all that into my story, the story I was telling to that young girl. I knew very well that I was carrying my audience with me; I knew how to do it, I had it in the blood. The old pale, faded, narrow-lidded father who was blinking and nodding at me had been one of the best raconteurs that ever was. I knew how. In the black shadows of the wall of the court I could feel the eyes upon me; I could see the parted lips of the young girl as she leaned further towards me. I knew it because, when one of the barristers below raised his voice, someone hissed "S — sh" from the shadows. And suddenly it came into my head, that even if I did save my life by talking about these things, it would be absolutely useless. I could never go back again; never be the boy again; never hear the true voice of the Ever Faithful Island. What did it matter even if I escaped; even if I could go back? The sea would be there, the sky, the silent dim hills, the listless surge; but I should never be there, I should be altered for good and all. I should never see the breathless dawn in the pondwater of Havana harbour, never be there with Seraphina close beside me in the little drogher. All that remained was to see this fight through, and then have done with fighting. I remember the intense bitterness of that feeling and the oddity of it all; of the one "I" that felt like that, of the other that was raving in front of a lot of open-eyed idiots, three old judges, and a young girl. And, in a queer way, the thoughts of the one "I" floated through into the words of the other, that seemed to be waving its hands in its final struggle, a little way in front of me.

"Look at me... look at what they have made of me, one and the other of them. I was an innocent boy. What am I now? They have taken my life from me, let them finish it how they will, what does it matter to me, what do I care?"

There was a rustle of motion all round the court. On board Rowley's flagship the heavy irons had sawed open my wrists. I hadn't been ironed in Newgate, but the things

had healed up very little. I happened to look down at my claws of hands with the grime of blood that the dock spikes had caused.

“What sort of a premium is it that you set on sticking to the right? Is this how you are going to encourage the others like me? What do I care about your death? What’s life to me? Let them get their scaffold ready. I have suffered enough to be put out of my misery. God, I have suffered enough with one and another. Look at my hands, I say. Look at my wrists, and say if I care any more.” I held my ghastly paws high, and the candle light shone upon them.

Out of the black shadows came shrieks of women and curses. I saw my young girl put her hands over her face and slip slowly, very slowly, from her chair, down out of sight. People were staggering in different directions. I had had more to say, but I forgot in my concern for the young girl. The turnkey pulled my sleeve and said:

“I say, that ain’t true, is it, it ain’t true?” Because he seemed not to want it to have been true, I glowed for a moment with the immense pride of my achievement. I had made them see things.

A minute after, I understood how futile it was. I was not a fool even in my then half-mad condition. The real feeling of the place came back upon me, the “Court of Law” of it. The King’s Advocate was whispering to the Attorney-General, he motioned with his hand, first in my direction, then towards the jury; then they both laughed and nodded. They knew the ropes too well for me, and there were seven West India merchants up there who would remember their pockets in a minute. But I didn’t care. I had made them see things.

Chapter 5

I had shot my bolt and I was going to die; I could see it in the way the King's Advocate tossed his head back, fluttered his bands, looked at the jury-box, and began to play with the seals on his fob. The court had resumed its stillness. A man in some sort of livery passed a square paper to the Lord Mayor, the Lord Mayor passed it to Lord Stowell, who opened it with a jerking motion of an ancient fashion that impressed me immensely. It was as if I, there at the end of my life, were looking at a man opening a letter of the reign of Queen Anne. The shadows of his ancient, wrinkled face changed as he read, raising his eyebrows and puckering his mouth. He handed the unfolded paper to Mr. Baron Garrow, then with one wrinkled finger beckoned the Attorney-General to him. The third judge was still asleep.

"What the devil's this?" the turnkey beside me said to his companion.

I was in a good deal of pain, and felt sickly that every pulse of my heart throbbed in my mangled hand. The other spat straight in front of him.

"Damme if I know," he said. "This cursed business ought to have been over and done with an hour ago. I told Jinks to have my rarebit and noggin down by the gate-house fire at half-past five, and it's six now."

They began an interminable argument under their breaths.

"It's that wager of Lord March's... run a mile, walk a mile, eat five pounds of mutton, drink five pints of claret. No, it ain't.. Medmenham coach ain't in yet... roads too heavy... It is. What else would stop the Court at this time of night? It isn't, or Justice Best 'd be awake and hedging his bets."

In a dizzy way I noted the Attorney-General making his way carefully back between the benches to his knot of barristers, and their wigs went all together in a bunch like ears of corn drawn suddenly into a sheaf. The heads of the other barristers were like unreaped ears. A man with a face like a weasel's called to a man with a face like a devil's — he was leaving the court — something about an ambassador. The other stopped, turned, and deposited his bag again. I heard the deep voice of Sir Robert Gifford say: "What!... Never!... too infamous..." and then the interest and the light seemed to flicker out together. I could hardly see. Voices called out to each other, harsh, dry, as if their owners had breathed nothing but dust for years and years.

One loud one barked, "You can't hear him, m'luds; in *Rex v. Marsupenstein*..."

A lot began calling all together, "Ah, but that was different, Mr. Attorney. You couldn't subpoena him, he being in the position of extra lege commune. But if he offers a statement..."

The candles seemed to be waving deliberately like elm-tops in a high wind.

Someone called, "Clerk, fetch me volume xiii... I think we shall find there... You recollect the case of Hildesheim v. Roe... Wasn't it Hildegaulen and another, m'lud?"... "I tried the case myself. The Prussian Plenipotentiary..."

I wanted to call out to them that it was not worth while to try their dry throats any more; that having shot my bolt, I gave in. But I could not think of any words, I was so tired. "I didn't sleep at all last night," I found myself saying to myself.

The sleeping judge woke up suddenly and snarled, "Why in Heaven's name don't we get on? We shall be all night. Let him call the second name on the list. We can take the Spanish ambassador when you have settled. For my part I think we ought to hear him..."

Lord Stowell said suddenly, "Prisoner at the bar, some gentlemen have volunteered statements on your behalf. If you wish it, they can be called."

I didn't answer; I did not understand; I wanted to tell him I did not care, because the Lion was posted as overdue and Seraphina was drowned. The Court seemed to be moving slowly up and down in front of me like the deck of a ship. I thought I was bound again, and on the sofa in the gorgeous cabin of the Madre-de-Dios. Someone seemed to be calling, "Prisoner at the bar... Prisoner at the bar..." It was as if the candles had been lit in front of the Madonna with the pink child, only she had a gilt anchor instead of the spiky gilt glory above her head. Somebody was saying, "Hello there... Hold up!... Here, bring a chair,..." and there were arms around me. Afterwards I sat down. A very old judge's voice said something rather kindly, I thought. I knew it was the very old judge, because he was called the star of Cuban law. Someone would be bending over me soon, with a lanthorn, and I should be wiping the flour out of my eyes and blinking at the red velvet and gilding of the cabin ceiling. In a minute Carlos and Castro would come... or was it O'Brien who would come? No, O'Brien was dead; stabbed, with a knife in his neck; the blood was still sticky between my first and second fingers. I could feel it. I ought to have been allowed to wash my hands before I was tried; or was it before I spoke to the admiral? One would not speak to a man with hands like that.

A loud, high-pitched voice called from up in the air, "I will give any of you gentlemen of the robe down there fifty pounds to conduct the remainder of the case for him. I am the prisoner's father."

My father's voice broke the spell. I was in the court; the candles were still burning; all the faces, lit up or in the shadow, were bunched together in little groups; hands waved. The barrister whose face was like the devil's under his wig held in his hands the paper that had been handed to Lord Stowell; my father was talking to him from the bench. The barrister, tall, his robes old and ragged, silhouetted against the light, glanced down the paper, fluttered it in his hand, nodded to my father, and began a grotesque, nasal drawl:

"M'luds, I will conduct the case for the prisoner, if your lordships will bear with me a little. He obviously can't call his own witnesses. If he has been treated as he says, it has been one of the most abominable..."

Old Lord Stowell said, "Ch't, ch't, Mr. Walker; you know you must not make a speech for the prisoner. Call your witness. It is all that is needed."

I wondered what he meant by that. The barrister was calling a man of the name of Williams. I seemed to know the name. I seemed to know the man, too.

"Owen Williams, Master of the ship Lion... Coffee and dye-wood... Just come in under a jury-rig. Had been dismasted and afterwards becalmed. Heard of this trial from the pilot in Graves-end. Had taken post-chaises..."

I only heard snatches of his answers.

"On the twenty-fifth of August last I was close in with the Cuban coast... The mate, Sebright, got boiling water for them... Afterwards a heavy fog. They boarded us in many boats..." He was giving all the old evidence over again, fastening another stone around my neck. But suddenly he said: "This gentleman came alongside in a leaky dinghy. A dead shot. He saved all our lives."

His bullet-head, the stare of his round blue eyes seemed to draw me out of a delirium. I called out:

"Williams, for God's sake, Williams, where is Seraphina? Did she come with you?" There was an immense roaring in my head, and the ushers were shouting, "Silence! Silence!" I called out again.

Williams was smiling idiotically; then he shook his head and put his finger to his mouth to warn me to keep silence. I only noted the shake of the head. Sera-phina had not come. The Havana people must have taken her. It was all over with me. The roaring noise made me think that I was on a beach by the sea, with the smugglers, perhaps, at night down in Kent. The silence that fell upon the court was like the silence of a grave. Then someone began to speak in measured, portentous Spanish, that seemed a memory of the past.

"I, the ambassador of his Catholic Majesty, being here upon my honour and on my oath, demand the re-surrender of this gentleman, whose courage equals his innocence. Documents which have just reached my hands establish clearly the mistake of which he is the victim. The functionary who is called Alcayde of the carcel at Havana confused the men. Nikola el Escoces escaped, having murdered the judge whose place it was to identify. I demand that the prisoner be set at liberty..."

A long time after a harsh voice said:

"Your Excellency, we retire, of course, from the prosecution."

A different one directed:

"Gentlemen of the jury, you will return a verdict of 'Not Guilty'..."

Down below they were cheering uproariously because my life was saved. But it was I that had to face my saved life. I sat there, my head bowed into my hands. The old judge was speaking to me in a tone of lofty compassion:

"You have suffered much, as it seems, but suffering is the lot of us men. Rejoice now that your character is cleared; that here in this public place you have received the verdict of your countrymen that restores you to the liberties of our country and the

affection of your kindred. I rejoice with you who am a very old man, at the end of my life...”

It was rather tremendous, his deep voice, his weighted words. Suffering is the lot of us men!... The formidable legal array, the great powers of a nation, had stood up to teach me that, and they had taught me that — suffering is the lot of us men!

It takes long enough to realize that someone is dead at a distance. I had done that. But how long, how long it needs to know that the life of your heart has come back from the dead. For years afterwards I could not bear to have her out of my sight.

Of our first meeting in London all I remember is a speechlessness that was like the awed hesitation of our overtried souls before the greatness of a change from the verge of despair to the opening of a supreme joy.

The whole world, the whole of life, with her return, had changed all around me; it enveloped me, it enfolded me so lightly as not to be felt, so suddenly as not to be believed in, so completely that that whole meeting was an embrace, so softly that at last it lapsed into a sense of rest that was like the fall of a beneficent and welcome death.

For suffering is the lot of man, but not inevitable failure or worthless despair which is without end — suffering, the mark of manhood, which bears within its pain a hope of felicity like a jewel set in iron...

Her first words were:

“You broke our compact. You went away from me whilst I was sleeping.” Only the deepness of her reproach revealed the depth of her love, and the suffering she too had endured to reach a union that was to be without end — and to forgive.

And, looking back, we see Romance — that subtle thing that is mirage — that is life. It is the goodness of the years we have lived through, of the old time when we did this or that, when we dwelt here or there. Looking back, it seems a wonderful enough thing that I who am this, and she who is that, commencing so far away a life that, after such sufferings borne together and apart, ended so tranquilly there in a world so stable — that she and I should have passed through so much, good chance and evil chance, sad hours and joyful, all lived down and swept away into the little heap of dust that is life. That, too, is Romance!

Nostromo

A Tale of the Seaboard

This 1904 novel is set in the fictitious South American republic of “Costaguana.” and was originally published serially in two volumes of T.P.’s Weekly. Nostromo is believed by some to be the best novel of the 20th century.

The first edition

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To John Galsworthy

“So foul a sky clears not without a storm.” — SHAKESPEARE

Author's Note

"Nostromo" is the most anxiously meditated of the longer novels which belong to the period following upon the publication of the "Typhoon" volume of short stories.

I don't mean to say that I became then conscious of any impending change in my mentality and in my attitude towards the tasks of my writing life. And perhaps there was never any change, except in that mysterious, extraneous thing which has nothing to do with the theories of art; a subtle change in the nature of the inspiration; a phenomenon for which I can not in any way be held responsible. What, however, did cause me some concern was that after finishing the last story of the "Typhoon" volume it seemed somehow that there was nothing more in the world to write about.

This so strangely negative but disturbing mood lasted some little time; and then, as with many of my longer stories, the first hint for "Nostromo" came to me in the shape of a vagrant anecdote completely destitute of valuable details.

As a matter of fact in 1875 or '6, when very young, in the West Indies or rather in the Gulf of Mexico, for my contacts with land were short, few, and fleeting, I heard the story of some man who was supposed to have stolen single-handed a whole lighter-full of silver, somewhere on the Tierra Firme seaboard during the troubles of a revolution.

On the face of it this was something of a feat. But I heard no details, and having no particular interest in crime qua crime I was not likely to keep that one in my mind. And I forgot it till twenty-six or seven years afterwards I came upon the very thing in a shabby volume picked up outside a second-hand book-shop. It was the life story of an American seaman written by himself with the assistance of a journalist. In the course of his wanderings that American sailor worked for some months on board a schooner, the master and owner of which was the thief of whom I had heard in my very young days. I have no doubt of that because there could hardly have been two exploits of that peculiar kind in the same part of the world and both connected with a South American revolution.

The fellow had actually managed to steal a lighter with silver, and this, it seems, only because he was implicitly trusted by his employers, who must have been singularly poor judges of character. In the sailor's story he is represented as an unmitigated rascal, a small cheat, stupidly ferocious, morose, of mean appearance, and altogether unworthy of the greatness this opportunity had thrust upon him. What was interesting was that he would boast of it openly.

He used to say: "People think I make a lot of money in this schooner of mine. But that is nothing. I don't care for that. Now and then I go away quietly and lift a bar of silver. I must get rich slowly — you understand."

There was also another curious point about the man. Once in the course of some quarrel the sailor threatened him: "What's to prevent me reporting ashore what you have told me about that silver?"

The cynical ruffian was not alarmed in the least. He actually laughed. "You fool, if you dare talk like that on shore about me you will get a knife stuck in your back. Every man, woman, and child in that port is my friend. And who's to prove the lighter wasn't sunk? I didn't show you where the silver is hidden. Did I? So you know nothing. And suppose I lied? Eh?"

Ultimately the sailor, disgusted with the sordid meanness of that impenitent thief, deserted from the schooner. The whole episode takes about three pages of his autobiography. Nothing to speak of; but as I looked them over, the curious confirmation of the few casual words heard in my early youth evoked the memories of that distant time when everything was so fresh, so surprising, so venturesome, so interesting; bits of strange coasts under the stars, shadows of hills in the sunshine, men's passions in the dusk, gossip half-forgotten, faces grown dim. . . . Perhaps, perhaps, there still was in the world something to write about. Yet I did not see anything at first in the mere story. A rascal steals a large parcel of a valuable commodity — so people say. It's either true or untrue; and in any case it has no value in itself. To invent a circumstantial account of the robbery did not appeal to me, because my talents not running that way I did not think that the game was worth the candle. It was only when it dawned upon me that the purloiner of the treasure need not necessarily be a confirmed rogue, that he could be even a man of character, an actor and possibly a victim in the changing scenes of a revolution, it was only then that I had the first vision of a twilight country which was to become the province of Sulaco, with its high shadowy Sierra and its misty Campo for mute witnesses of events flowing from the passions of men short-sighted in good and evil.

Such are in very truth the obscure origins of "Nostromo" — the book. From that moment, I suppose, it had to be. Yet even then I hesitated, as if warned by the instinct of self-preservation from venturing on a distant and toilsome journey into a land full of intrigues and revolutions. But it had to be done.

It took the best part of the years 1903-4 to do; with many intervals of renewed hesitation, lest I should lose myself in the ever-enlarging vistas opening before me as I progressed deeper in my knowledge of the country. Often, also, when I had thought myself to a standstill over the tangled-up affairs of the Republic, I would, figuratively speaking, pack my bag, rush away from Sulaco for a change of air and write a few pages of the "Mirror of the Sea." But generally, as I've said before, my sojourn on the Continent of Latin America, famed for its hospitality, lasted for about two years. On my return I found (speaking somewhat in the style of Captain Gulliver) my family all well, my wife heartily glad to learn that the fuss was all over, and our small boy considerably grown during my absence.

My principal authority for the history of Costaguana is, of course, my venerated friend, the late Don Jose Avellanos, Minister to the Courts of England and Spain, etc.,

etc., in his impartial and eloquent "History of Fifty Years of Misrule." That work was never published — the reader will discover why — and I am in fact the only person in the world possessed of its contents. I have mastered them in not a few hours of earnest meditation, and I hope that my accuracy will be trusted. In justice to myself, and to allay the fears of prospective readers, I beg to point out that the few historical allusions are never dragged in for the sake of parading my unique erudition, but that each of them is closely related to actuality; either throwing a light on the nature of current events or affecting directly the fortunes of the people of whom I speak.

As to their own histories I have tried to set them down, Aristocracy and People, men and women, Latin and Anglo-Saxon, bandit and politician, with as cool a hand as was possible in the heat and clash of my own conflicting emotions. And after all this is also the story of their conflicts. It is for the reader to say how far they are deserving of interest in their actions and in the secret purposes of their hearts revealed in the bitter necessities of the time. I confess that, for me, that time is the time of firm friendships and unforgotten hospitalities. And in my gratitude I must mention here Mrs. Gould, "the first lady of Sulaco," whom we may safely leave to the secret devotion of Dr. Monygham, and Charles Gould, the Idealist-creator of Material Interests whom we must leave to his Mine — from which there is no escape in this world.

About Nostromo, the second of the two racially and socially contrasted men, both captured by the silver of the San Tome Mine, I feel bound to say something more.

I did not hesitate to make that central figure an Italian. First of all the thing is perfectly credible: Italians were swarming into the Occidental Province at the time, as anybody who will read further can see; and secondly, there was no one who could stand so well by the side of Giorgio Viola the Garibaldino, the Idealist of the old, humanitarian revolutions. For myself I needed there a Man of the People as free as possible from his class-conventions and all settled modes of thinking. This is not a side snarl at conventions. My reasons were not moral but artistic. Had he been an Anglo-Saxon he would have tried to get into local politics. But Nostromo does not aspire to be a leader in a personal game. He does not want to raise himself above the mass. He is content to feel himself a power — within the People.

But mainly Nostromo is what he is because I received the inspiration for him in my early days from a Mediterranean sailor. Those who have read certain pages of mine will see at once what I mean when I say that Dominic, the padrone of the Tremolino, might under given circumstances have been a Nostromo. At any rate Dominic would have understood the younger man perfectly — if scornfully. He and I were engaged together in a rather absurd adventure, but the absurdity does not matter. It is a real satisfaction to think that in my very young days there must, after all, have been something in me worthy to command that man's half-bitter fidelity, his half-ironic devotion. Many of Nostromo's speeches I have heard first in Dominic's voice. His hand on the tiller and his fearless eyes roaming the horizon from within the monkish hood shadowing his face, he would utter the usual exordium of his remorseless wisdom: "Vous autres gentilhommes!" in a caustic tone that hangs on my ear yet. Like Nostromo! "You hombres finos!" Very

much like Nostromo. But Dominic the Corsican nursed a certain pride of ancestry from which my Nostromo is free; for Nostromo's lineage had to be more ancient still. He is a man with the weight of countless generations behind him and no parentage to boast of. . . . Like the People.

In his firm grip on the earth he inherits, in his improvidence and generosity, in his lavishness with his gifts, in his manly vanity, in the obscure sense of his greatness and in his faithful devotion with something despairing as well as desperate in its impulses, he is a Man of the People, their very own unenvious force, disdainful to lead but ruling from within. Years afterwards, grown older as the famous Captain Fidanza, with a stake in the country, going about his many affairs followed by respectful glances in the modernized streets of Sulaco, calling on the widow of the cargador, attending the Lodge, listening in unmoved silence to anarchist speeches at the meeting, the enigmatical patron of the new revolutionary agitation, the trusted, the wealthy comrade Fidanza with the knowledge of his moral ruin locked up in his breast, he remains essentially a Man of the People. In his mingled love and scorn of life and in the bewildered conviction of having been betrayed, of dying betrayed he hardly knows by what or by whom, he is still of the People, their undoubted Great Man — with a private history of his own.

One more figure of those stirring times I would like to mention: and that is Antonia Avellanos — the “beautiful Antonia.” Whether she is a possible variation of Latin-American girlhood I wouldn't dare to affirm. But, for me, she is. Always a little in the background by the side of her father (my venerated friend) I hope she has yet relief enough to make intelligible what I am going to say. Of all the people who had seen with me the birth of the Occidental Republic, she is the only one who has kept in my memory the aspect of continued life. Antonia the Aristocrat and Nostromo the Man of the People are the artisans of the New Era, the true creators of the New State; he by his legendary and daring feat, she, like a woman, simply by the force of what she is: the only being capable of inspiring a sincere passion in the heart of a trifler.

If anything could induce me to revisit Sulaco (I should hate to see all these changes) it would be Antonia. And the true reason for that — why not be frank about it? — the true reason is that I have modelled her on my first love. How we, a band of tallish schoolboys, the chums of her two brothers, how we used to look up to that girl just out of the schoolroom herself, as the standard-bearer of a faith to which we all were born but which she alone knew how to hold aloft with an unflinching hope! She had perhaps more glow and less serenity in her soul than Antonia, but she was an uncompromising Puritan of patriotism with no taint of the slightest worldliness in her thoughts. I was not the only one in love with her; but it was I who had to hear oftenest her scathing criticism of my levities — very much like poor Decoud — or stand the brunt of her austere, unanswerable invective. She did not quite understand — but never mind. That afternoon when I came in, a shrinking yet defiant sinner, to say the final good-bye I received a hand-squeeze that made my heart leap and saw a tear that took my breath away. She was softened at the last as though she had suddenly perceived (we were such

children still!) that I was really going away for good, going very far away — even as far as Sulaco, lying unknown, hidden from our eyes in the darkness of the Placid Gulf.

That's why I long sometimes for another glimpse of the "beautiful Antonia" (or can it be the Other?) moving in the dimness of the great cathedral, saying a short prayer at the tomb of the first and last Cardinal-Archbishop of Sulaco, standing absorbed in filial devotion before the monument of Don Jose Avellanos, and, with a lingering, tender, faithful glance at the medallion-memorial to Martin Decoud, going out serenely into the sunshine of the Plaza with her upright carriage and her white head; a relic of the past disregarded by men awaiting impatiently the Dawns of other New Eras, the coming of more Revolutions.

But this is the idlest of dreams; for I did understand perfectly well at the time that the moment the breath left the body of the Magnificent Capataz, the Man of the People, freed at last from the toils of love and wealth, there was nothing more for me to do in Sulaco.

J. C.

October, 1917.

Part 1 — the Silver of the Mine

Chapter 1

In the time of Spanish rule, and for many years afterwards, the town of Sulaco — the luxuriant beauty of the orange gardens bears witness to its antiquity — had never been commercially anything more important than a coasting port with a fairly large local trade in ox-hides and indigo. The clumsy deep-sea galleons of the conquerors that, needing a brisk gale to move at all, would lie becalmed, where your modern ship built on clipper lines forges ahead by the mere flapping of her sails, had been barred out of Sulaco by the prevailing calms of its vast gulf. Some harbours of the earth are made difficult of access by the treachery of sunken rocks and the tempests of their shores. Sulaco had found an inviolable sanctuary from the temptations of a trading world in the solemn hush of the deep Golfo Placido as if within an enormous semi-circular and unroofed temple open to the ocean, with its walls of lofty mountains hung with the mourning draperies of cloud.

On one side of this broad curve in the straight seaboard of the Republic of Costaguana, the last spur of the coast range forms an insignificant cape whose name is Punta Mala. From the middle of the gulf the point of the land itself is not visible at all; but the shoulder of a steep hill at the back can be made out faintly like a shadow on the sky.

On the other side, what seems to be an isolated patch of blue mist floats lightly on the glare of the horizon. This is the peninsula of Azuera, a wild chaos of sharp rocks and stony levels cut about by vertical ravines. It lies far out to sea like a rough head of stone stretched from a green-clad coast at the end of a slender neck of sand covered with thickets of thorny scrub. Utterly waterless, for the rainfall runs off at once on all sides into the sea, it has not soil enough — it is said — to grow a single blade of grass, as if it were blighted by a curse. The poor, associating by an obscure instinct of consolation the ideas of evil and wealth, will tell you that it is deadly because of its forbidden treasures. The common folk of the neighbourhood, peons of the estancias, vaqueros of the seaboard plains, tame Indians coming miles to market with a bundle of sugar-cane or a basket of maize worth about threepence, are well aware that heaps of shining gold lie in the gloom of the deep precipices cleaving the stony levels of Azuera. Tradition has it that many adventurers of olden time had perished in the search. The story goes also that within men's memory two wandering sailors — Americanos, perhaps, but gringos of some sort for certain — talked over a gambling, good-for-nothing mozo, and

the three stole a donkey to carry for them a bundle of dry sticks, a water-skin, and provisions enough to last a few days. Thus accompanied, and with revolvers at their belts, they had started to chop their way with machetes through the thorny scrub on the neck of the peninsula.

On the second evening an upright spiral of smoke (it could only have been from their camp-fire) was seen for the first time within memory of man standing up faintly upon the sky above a razor-backed ridge on the stony head. The crew of a coasting schooner, lying becalmed three miles off the shore, stared at it with amazement till dark. A negro fisherman, living in a lonely hut in a little bay near by, had seen the start and was on the lookout for some sign. He called to his wife just as the sun was about to set. They had watched the strange portent with envy, incredulity, and awe.

The impious adventurers gave no other sign. The sailors, the Indian, and the stolen burro were never seen again. As to the mozo, a Sulaco man — his wife paid for some masses, and the poor four-footed beast, being without sin, had been probably permitted to die; but the two gringos, spectral and alive, are believed to be dwelling to this day amongst the rocks, under the fatal spell of their success. Their souls cannot tear themselves away from their bodies mounting guard over the discovered treasure. They are now rich and hungry and thirsty — a strange theory of tenacious gringo ghosts suffering in their starved and parched flesh of defiant heretics, where a Christian would have renounced and been released.

These, then, are the legendary inhabitants of Azuera guarding its forbidden wealth; and the shadow on the sky on one side with the round patch of blue haze blurring the bright skirt of the horizon on the other, mark the two outermost points of the bend which bears the name of Golfo Placido, because never a strong wind had been known to blow upon its waters.

On crossing the imaginary line drawn from Punta Mala to Azuera the ships from Europe bound to Sulaco lose at once the strong breezes of the ocean. They become the prey of capricious airs that play with them for thirty hours at a stretch sometimes. Before them the head of the calm gulf is filled on most days of the year by a great body of motionless and opaque clouds. On the rare clear mornings another shadow is cast upon the sweep of the gulf. The dawn breaks high behind the towering and serrated wall of the Cordillera, a clear-cut vision of dark peaks rearing their steep slopes on a lofty pedestal of forest rising from the very edge of the shore. Amongst them the white head of Higueroa rises majestically upon the blue. Bare clusters of enormous rocks sprinkle with tiny black dots the smooth dome of snow.

Then, as the midday sun withdraws from the gulf the shadow of the mountains, the clouds begin to roll out of the lower valleys. They swathe in sombre tatters the naked crags of precipices above the wooded slopes, hide the peaks, smoke in stormy trails across the snows of Higueroa. The Cordillera is gone from you as if it had dissolved itself into great piles of grey and black vapours that travel out slowly to seaward and vanish into thin air all along the front before the blazing heat of the day. The wasting edge of the cloud-bank always strives for, but seldom wins, the middle of the gulf. The

sun — as the sailors say — is eating it up. Unless perchance a sombre thunder-head breaks away from the main body to career all over the gulf till it escapes into the offing beyond Azuera, where it bursts suddenly into flame and crashes like a sinister pirate-ship of the air, hove-to above the horizon, engaging the sea.

At night the body of clouds advancing higher up the sky smotheres the whole quiet gulf below with an impenetrable darkness, in which the sound of the falling showers can be heard beginning and ceasing abruptly — now here, now there. Indeed, these cloudy nights are proverbial with the seamen along the whole west coast of a great continent. Sky, land, and sea disappear together out of the world when the Placido — as the saying is — goes to sleep under its black poncho. The few stars left below the seaward frown of the vault shine feebly as into the mouth of a black cavern. In its vastness your ship floats unseen under your feet, her sails flutter invisible above your head. The eye of God Himself — they add with grim profanity — could not find out what work a man's hand is doing in there; and you would be free to call the devil to your aid with impunity if even his malice were not defeated by such a blind darkness.

The shores on the gulf are steep-to all round; three uninhabited islets basking in the sunshine just outside the cloud veil, and opposite the entrance to the harbour of Sulaco, bear the name of "The Isabels."

There is the Great Isabel; the Little Isabel, which is round; and Hermosa, which is the smallest.

That last is no more than a foot high, and about seven paces across, a mere flat top of a grey rock which smokes like a hot cinder after a shower, and where no man would care to venture a naked sole before sunset. On the Little Isabel an old ragged palm, with a thick bulging trunk rough with spines, a very witch amongst palm trees, rustles a dismal bunch of dead leaves above the coarse sand. The Great Isabel has a spring of fresh water issuing from the overgrown side of a ravine. Resembling an emerald green wedge of land a mile long, and laid flat upon the sea, it bears two forest trees standing close together, with a wide spread of shade at the foot of their smooth trunks. A ravine extending the whole length of the island is full of bushes; and presenting a deep tangled cleft on the high side spreads itself out on the other into a shallow depression abutting on a small strip of sandy shore.

From that low end of the Great Isabel the eye plunges through an opening two miles away, as abrupt as if chopped with an axe out of the regular sweep of the coast, right into the harbour of Sulaco. It is an oblong, lake-like piece of water. On one side the short wooded spurs and valleys of the Cordillera come down at right angles to the very strand; on the other the open view of the great Sulaco plain passes into the opal mystery of great distances overhung by dry haze. The town of Sulaco itself — tops of walls, a great cupola, gleams of white miradors in a vast grove of orange trees — lies between the mountains and the plain, at some little distance from its harbour and out of the direct line of sight from the sea.

Chapter 2

The only sign of commercial activity within the harbour, visible from the beach of the Great Isabel, is the square blunt end of the wooden jetty which the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company (the O.S.N. of familiar speech) had thrown over the shallow part of the bay soon after they had resolved to make of Sulaco one of their ports of call for the Republic of Costaguana. The State possesses several harbours on its long seaboard, but except Cayta, an important place, all are either small and inconvenient inlets in an iron-bound coast — like Esmeralda, for instance, sixty miles to the south — or else mere open roadsteads exposed to the winds and fretted by the surf.

Perhaps the very atmospheric conditions which had kept away the merchant fleets of bygone ages induced the O.S.N. Company to violate the sanctuary of peace sheltering the calm existence of Sulaco. The variable airs sporting lightly with the vast semicircle of waters within the head of Azuera could not baffle the steam power of their excellent fleet. Year after year the black hulls of their ships had gone up and down the coast, in and out, past Azuera, past the Isabels, past Punta Mala — disregarding everything but the tyranny of time. Their names, the names of all mythology, became the household words of a coast that had never been ruled by the gods of Olympus. The Juno was known only for her comfortable cabins amidships, the Saturn for the geniality of her captain and the painted and gilt luxuriousness of her saloon, whereas the Ganymede was fitted out mainly for cattle transport, and to be avoided by coastwise passengers. The humblest Indian in the obscurest village on the coast was familiar with the Cerberus, a little black puffer without charm or living accommodation to speak of, whose mission was to creep inshore along the wooded beaches close to mighty ugly rocks, stopping obligingly before every cluster of huts to collect produce, down to three-pound parcels of indiarubber bound in a wrapper of dry grass.

And as they seldom failed to account for the smallest package, rarely lost a bullock, and had never drowned a single passenger, the name of the O.S.N. stood very high for trustworthiness. People declared that under the Company's care their lives and property were safer on the water than in their own houses on shore.

The O.S.N.'s superintendent in Sulaco for the whole Costaguana section of the service was very proud of his Company's standing. He resumed it in a saying which was very often on his lips, "We never make mistakes." To the Company's officers it took the form of a severe injunction, "We must make no mistakes. I'll have no mistakes here, no matter what Smith may do at his end."

Smith, on whom he had never set eyes in his life, was the other superintendent of the service, quartered some fifteen hundred miles away from Sulaco. "Don't talk to me of your Smith."

Then, calming down suddenly, he would dismiss the subject with studied negligence. "Smith knows no more of this continent than a baby."

"Our excellent Senor Mitchell" for the business and official world of Sulaco; "Fussy Joe" for the commanders of the Company's ships, Captain Joseph Mitchell prided

himself on his profound knowledge of men and things in the country — cosas de Costaguana. Amongst these last he accounted as most unfavourable to the orderly working of his Company the frequent changes of government brought about by revolutions of the military type.

The political atmosphere of the Republic was generally stormy in these days. The fugitive patriots of the defeated party had the knack of turning up again on the coast with half a steamer's load of small arms and ammunition. Such resourcefulness Captain Mitchell considered as perfectly wonderful in view of their utter destitution at the time of flight. He had observed that "they never seemed to have enough change about them to pay for their passage ticket out of the country." And he could speak with knowledge; for on a memorable occasion he had been called upon to save the life of a dictator, together with the lives of a few Sulaco officials — the political chief, the director of the customs, and the head of police — belonging to an overturned government. Poor Senor Ribiera (such was the dictator's name) had come pelting eighty miles over mountain tracks after the lost battle of Socorro, in the hope of out-distancing the fatal news — which, of course, he could not manage to do on a lame mule. The animal, moreover, expired under him at the end of the Alameda, where the military band plays sometimes in the evenings between the revolutions. "Sir," Captain Mitchell would pursue with portentous gravity, "the ill-timed end of that mule attracted attention to the unfortunate rider. His features were recognized by several deserters from the Dictatorial army amongst the rascally mob already engaged in smashing the windows of the Intendencia."

Early on the morning of that day the local authorities of Sulaco had fled for refuge to the O.S.N. Company's offices, a strong building near the shore end of the jetty, leaving the town to the mercies of a revolutionary rabble; and as the Dictator was execrated by the populace on account of the severe recruitment law his necessities had compelled him to enforce during the struggle, he stood a good chance of being torn to pieces. Providentially, Nostromo — invaluable fellow — with some Italian workmen, imported to work upon the National Central Railway, was at hand, and managed to snatch him away — for the time at least. Ultimately, Captain Mitchell succeeded in taking everybody off in his own gig to one of the Company's steamers — it was the Minerva — just then, as luck would have it, entering the harbour.

He had to lower these gentlemen at the end of a rope out of a hole in the wall at the back, while the mob which, pouring out of the town, had spread itself all along the shore, howled and foamed at the foot of the building in front. He had to hurry them then the whole length of the jetty; it had been a desperate dash, neck or nothing — and again it was Nostromo, a fellow in a thousand, who, at the head, this time, of the Company's body of lightermen, held the jetty against the rushes of the rabble, thus giving the fugitives time to reach the gig lying ready for them at the other end with the Company's flag at the stern. Sticks, stones, shots flew; knives, too, were thrown. Captain Mitchell exhibited willingly the long cicatrice of a cut over his left ear and temple, made by a razor-blade fastened to a stick — a weapon, he explained, very much in favour with the "worst kind of nigger out here."

Captain Mitchell was a thick, elderly man, wearing high, pointed collars and short side-whiskers, partial to white waistcoats, and really very communicative under his air of pompous reserve.

“These gentlemen,” he would say, staring with great solemnity, “had to run like rabbits, sir. I ran like a rabbit myself. Certain forms of death are — er — distasteful to a — a — er — respectable man. They would have pounded me to death, too. A crazy mob, sir, does not discriminate. Under providence we owed our preservation to my Capataz de Cargadores, as they called him in the town, a man who, when I discovered his value, sir, was just the bos’n of an Italian ship, a big Genoese ship, one of the few European ships that ever came to Sulaco with a general cargo before the building of the National Central. He left her on account of some very respectable friends he made here, his own countrymen, but also, I suppose, to better himself. Sir, I am a pretty good judge of character. I engaged him to be the foreman of our lightermen, and caretaker of our jetty. That’s all that he was. But without him Senor Ribiera would have been a dead man. This Nostromo, sir, a man absolutely above reproach, became the terror of all the thieves in the town. We were infested, infested, overrun, sir, here at that time by ladrones and matreros, thieves and murderers from the whole province. On this occasion they had been flocking into Sulaco for a week past. They had scented the end, sir. Fifty per cent. of that murdering mob were professional bandits from the Campo, sir, but there wasn’t one that hadn’t heard of Nostromo. As to the town leperos, sir, the sight of his black whiskers and white teeth was enough for them. They quailed before him, sir. That’s what the force of character will do for you.”

It could very well be said that it was Nostromo alone who saved the lives of these gentlemen. Captain Mitchell, on his part, never left them till he had seen them collapse, panting, terrified, and exasperated, but safe, on the luxuriant velvet sofas in the first-class saloon of the Minerva. To the very last he had been careful to address the ex-Dictator as “Your Excellency.”

“Sir, I could do no other. The man was down — ghastly, livid, one mass of scratches.”

The Minerva never let go her anchor that call. The superintendent ordered her out of the harbour at once. No cargo could be landed, of course, and the passengers for Sulaco naturally refused to go ashore. They could hear the firing and see plainly the fight going on at the edge of the water. The repulsed mob devoted its energies to an attack upon the Custom House, a dreary, unfinished-looking structure with many windows two hundred yards away from the O.S.N. Offices, and the only other building near the harbour. Captain Mitchell, after directing the commander of the Minerva to land “these gentlemen” in the first port of call outside Costaguana, went back in his gig to see what could be done for the protection of the Company’s property. That and the property of the railway were preserved by the European residents; that is, by Captain Mitchell himself and the staff of engineers building the road, aided by the Italian and Basque workmen who rallied faithfully round their English chiefs. The Company’s lightermen, too, natives of the Republic, behaved very well under their Capataz. An outcast lot of very mixed blood, mainly negroes, everlastingly at feud with the other

customers of low grog shops in the town, they embraced with delight this opportunity to settle their personal scores under such favourable auspices. There was not one of them that had not, at some time or other, looked with terror at Nostromo's revolver poked very close at his face, or been otherwise daunted by Nostromo's resolution. He was "much of a man," their Capataz was, they said, too scornful in his temper ever to utter abuse, a tireless taskmaster, and the more to be feared because of his aloofness. And behold! there he was that day, at their head, condescending to make jocular remarks to this man or the other.

Such leadership was inspiring, and in truth all the harm the mob managed to achieve was to set fire to one — only one — stack of railway-sleepers, which, being creosoted, burned well. The main attack on the railway yards, on the O.S.N. Offices, and especially on the Custom House, whose strong room, it was well known, contained a large treasure in silver ingots, failed completely. Even the little hotel kept by old Giorgio, standing alone halfway between the harbour and the town, escaped looting and destruction, not by a miracle, but because with the safes in view they had neglected it at first, and afterwards found no leisure to stop. Nostromo, with his Cargadores, was pressing them too hard then.

Chapter 3

It might have been said that there he was only protecting his own. From the first he had been admitted to live in the intimacy of the family of the hotel-keeper who was a countryman of his. Old Giorgio Viola, a Genoese with a shaggy white leonine head — often called simply "the Garibaldino" (as Mohammedans are called after their prophet) — was, to use Captain Mitchell's own words, the "respectable married friend" by whose advice Nostromo had left his ship to try for a run of shore luck in Costaguana.

The old man, full of scorn for the populace, as your austere republican so often is, had disregarded the preliminary sounds of trouble. He went on that day as usual pottering about the "casa" in his slippers, muttering angrily to himself his contempt of the non-political nature of the riot, and shrugging his shoulders. In the end he was taken unawares by the out-rush of the rabble. It was too late then to remove his family, and, indeed, where could he have run to with the portly Signora Teresa and two little girls on that great plain? So, barricading every opening, the old man sat down sternly in the middle of the darkened cafe with an old shot-gun on his knees. His wife sat on another chair by his side, muttering pious invocations to all the saints of the calendar.

The old republican did not believe in saints, or in prayers, or in what he called "priest's religion." Liberty and Garibaldi were his divinities; but he tolerated "superstition" in women, preserving in these matters a lofty and silent attitude.

His two girls, the eldest fourteen, and the other two years younger, crouched on the sanded floor, on each side of the Signora Teresa, with their heads on their mother's lap, both scared, but each in her own way, the dark-haired Linda indignant and angry,

the fair Giselle, the younger, bewildered and resigned. The Patrona removed her arms, which embraced her daughters, for a moment to cross herself and wring her hands hurriedly. She moaned a little louder.

“Oh! Gian’ Battista, why art thou not here? Oh! why art thou not here?”

She was not then invoking the saint himself, but calling upon Nostromo, whose patron he was. And Giorgio, motionless on the chair by her side, would be provoked by these reproachful and distracted appeals.

“Peace, woman! Where’s the sense of it? There’s his duty,” he murmured in the dark; and she would retort, panting —

“Eh! I have no patience. Duty! What of the woman who has been like a mother to him? I bent my knee to him this morning; don’t you go out, Gian’ Battista — stop in the house, Battistino — look at those two little innocent children!”

Mrs. Viola was an Italian, too, a native of Spezzia, and though considerably younger than her husband, already middle-aged. She had a handsome face, whose complexion had turned yellow because the climate of Sulaco did not suit her at all. Her voice was a rich contralto. When, with her arms folded tight under her ample bosom, she scolded the squat, thick-legged China girls handling linen, plucking fowls, pounding corn in wooden mortars amongst the mud outbuildings at the back of the house, she could bring out such an impassioned, vibrating, sepulchral note that the chained watch-dog bolted into his kennel with a great rattle. Luis, a cinnamon-coloured mulatto with a sprouting moustache and thick, dark lips, would stop sweeping the cafe with a broom of palm-leaves to let a gentle shudder run down his spine. His languishing almond eyes would remain closed for a long time.

This was the staff of the Casa Viola, but all these people had fled early that morning at the first sounds of the riot, preferring to hide on the plain rather than trust themselves in the house; a preference for which they were in no way to blame, since, whether true or not, it was generally believed in the town that the Garibaldino had some money buried under the clay floor of the kitchen. The dog, an irritable, shaggy brute, barked violently and whined plaintively in turns at the back, running in and out of his kennel as rage or fear prompted him.

Bursts of great shouting rose and died away, like wild gusts of wind on the plain round the barricaded house; the fitful popping of shots grew louder above the yelling. Sometimes there were intervals of unaccountable stillness outside, and nothing could have been more gaily peaceful than the narrow bright lines of sunlight from the cracks in the shutters, ruled straight across the cafe over the disarranged chairs and tables to the wall opposite. Old Giorgio had chosen that bare, whitewashed room for a retreat. It had only one window, and its only door swung out upon the track of thick dust fenced by aloe hedges between the harbour and the town, where clumsy carts used to creak along behind slow yokes of oxen guided by boys on horseback.

In a pause of stillness Giorgio cocked his gun. The ominous sound wrung a low moan from the rigid figure of the woman sitting by his side. A sudden outbreak of defiant yelling quite near the house sank all at once to a confused murmur of growls.

Somebody ran along; the loud catching of his breath was heard for an instant passing the door; there were hoarse mutters and footsteps near the wall; a shoulder rubbed against the shutter, effacing the bright lines of sunshine pencilled across the whole breadth of the room. Signora Teresa's arms thrown about the kneeling forms of her daughters embraced them closer with a convulsive pressure.

The mob, driven away from the Custom House, had broken up into several bands, retreating across the plain in the direction of the town. The subdued crash of irregular volleys fired in the distance was answered by faint yells far away. In the intervals the single shots rang feebly, and the low, long, white building blinded in every window seemed to be the centre of a turmoil widening in a great circle about its closed-up silence. But the cautious movements and whispers of a routed party seeking a momentary shelter behind the wall made the darkness of the room, striped by threads of quiet sunlight, alight with evil, stealthy sounds. The Violas had them in their ears as though invisible ghosts hovering about their chairs had consulted in mutters as to the advisability of setting fire to this foreigner's casa.

It was trying to the nerves. Old Viola had risen slowly, gun in hand, irresolute, for he did not see how he could prevent them. Already voices could be heard talking at the back. Signora Teresa was beside herself with terror.

"Ah! the traitor! the traitor!" she mumbled, almost inaudibly. "Now we are going to be burnt; and I bent my knee to him. No! he must run at the heels of his English."

She seemed to think that Nostromo's mere presence in the house would have made it perfectly safe. So far, she, too, was under the spell of that reputation the Capataz de Cargadores had made for himself by the waterside, along the railway line, with the English and with the populace of Sulaco. To his face, and even against her husband, she invariably affected to laugh it to scorn, sometimes good-naturedly, more often with a curious bitterness. But then women are unreasonable in their opinions, as Giorgio used to remark calmly on fitting occasions. On this occasion, with his gun held at ready before him, he stooped down to his wife's head, and, keeping his eyes steadfastly on the barricaded door, he breathed out into her ear that Nostromo would have been powerless to help. What could two men shut up in a house do against twenty or more bent upon setting fire to the roof? Gian' Battista was thinking of the casa all the time, he was sure.

"He think of the casa! He!" gasped Signora Viola, crazily. She struck her breast with her open hands. "I know him. He thinks of nobody but himself."

A discharge of firearms near by made her throw her head back and close her eyes. Old Giorgio set his teeth hard under his white moustache, and his eyes began to roll fiercely. Several bullets struck the end of the wall together; pieces of plaster could be heard falling outside; a voice screamed "Here they come!" and after a moment of uneasy silence there was a rush of running feet along the front.

Then the tension of old Giorgio's attitude relaxed, and a smile of contemptuous relief came upon his lips of an old fighter with a leonine face. These were not a people striving for justice, but thieves. Even to defend his life against them was a sort of degradation

for a man who had been one of Garibaldi's immortal thousand in the conquest of Sicily. He had an immense scorn for this outbreak of scoundrels and lepers, who did not know the meaning of the word "liberty."

He grounded his old gun, and, turning his head, glanced at the coloured lithograph of Garibaldi in a black frame on the white wall; a thread of strong sunshine cut it perpendicularly. His eyes, accustomed to the luminous twilight, made out the high colouring of the face, the red of the shirt, the outlines of the square shoulders, the black patch of the Bersagliere hat with cock's feathers curling over the crown. An immortal hero! This was your liberty; it gave you not only life, but immortality as well!

For that one man his fanaticism had suffered no diminution. In the moment of relief from the apprehension of the greatest danger, perhaps, his family had been exposed to in all their wanderings, he had turned to the picture of his old chief, first and only, then laid his hand on his wife's shoulder.

The children kneeling on the floor had not moved. Signora Teresa opened her eyes a little, as though he had awakened her from a very deep and dreamless slumber. Before he had time in his deliberate way to say a reassuring word she jumped up, with the children clinging to her, one on each side, gasped for breath, and let out a hoarse shriek.

It was simultaneous with the bang of a violent blow struck on the outside of the shutter. They could hear suddenly the snorting of a horse, the restive tramping of hoofs on the narrow, hard path in front of the house; the toe of a boot struck at the shutter again; a spur jingled at every blow, and an excited voice shouted, "Hola! hola, in there!"

Chapter 4

All the morning Nostromo had kept his eye from afar on the Casa Viola, even in the thick of the hottest scrimmage near the Custom House. "If I see smoke rising over there," he thought to himself, "they are lost." Directly the mob had broken he pressed with a small band of Italian workmen in that direction, which, indeed, was the shortest line towards the town. That part of the rabble he was pursuing seemed to think of making a stand under the house; a volley fired by his followers from behind an aloe hedge made the rascals fly. In a gap chopped out for the rails of the harbour branch line Nostromo appeared, mounted on his silver-grey mare. He shouted, sent after them one shot from his revolver, and galloped up to the cafe window. He had an idea that old Giorgio would choose that part of the house for a refuge.

His voice had penetrated to them, sounding breathlessly hurried: "Hola! Vecchio! O, Vecchio! Is it all well with you in there?"

"You see —" murmured old Viola to his wife. Signora Teresa was silent now. Outside Nostromo laughed.

"I can hear the padrona is not dead."

"You have done your best to kill me with fear," cried Signora Teresa. She wanted to say something more, but her voice failed her.

Linda raised her eyes to her face for a moment, but old Giorgio shouted apologetically —

"She is a little upset."

Outside Nostromo shouted back with another laugh —

"She cannot upset me."

Signora Teresa found her voice.

"It is what I say. You have no heart — and you have no conscience, Gian' Battista —"

They heard him wheel his horse away from the shutters. The party he led were babbling excitedly in Italian and Spanish, inciting each other to the pursuit. He put himself at their head, crying, "Avanti!"

"He has not stopped very long with us. There is no praise from strangers to be got here," Signora Teresa said tragically. "Avanti! Yes! That is all he cares for. To be first somewhere — somehow — to be first with these English. They will be showing him to everybody. 'This is our Nostromo!'" She laughed ominously. "What a name! What is that? Nostromo? He would take a name that is properly no word from them."

Meantime Giorgio, with tranquil movements, had been unfastening the door; the flood of light fell on Signora Teresa, with her two girls gathered to her side, a picturesque woman in a pose of maternal exaltation. Behind her the wall was dazzlingly white, and the crude colours of the Garibaldi lithograph paled in the sunshine.

Old Viola, at the door, moved his arm upwards as if referring all his quick, fleeting thoughts to the picture of his old chief on the wall. Even when he was cooking for the "Signori Inglesi" — the engineers (he was a famous cook, though the kitchen was a dark place) — he was, as it were, under the eye of the great man who had led him in a glorious struggle where, under the walls of Gaeta, tyranny would have expired for ever had it not been for that accursed Piedmontese race of kings and ministers. When sometimes a frying-pan caught fire during a delicate operation with some shredded onions, and the old man was seen backing out of the doorway, swearing and coughing violently in an acrid cloud of smoke, the name of Cavour — the arch intriguer sold to kings and tyrants — could be heard involved in imprecations against the China girls, cooking in general, and the brute of a country where he was reduced to live for the love of liberty that traitor had strangled.

Then Signora Teresa, all in black, issuing from another door, advanced, portly and anxious, inclining her fine, black-browed head, opening her arms, and crying in a profound tone —

"Giorgio! thou passionate man! Misericordia Divina! In the sun like this! He will make himself ill."

At her feet the hens made off in all directions, with immense strides; if there were any engineers from up the line staying in Sulaco, a young English face or two would

appear at the billiard-room occupying one end of the house; but at the other end, in the cafe, Luis, the mulatto, took good care not to show himself. The Indian girls, with hair like flowing black manes, and dressed only in a shift and short petticoat, stared dully from under the square-cut fringes on their foreheads; the noisy frizzling of fat had stopped, the fumes floated upwards in sunshine, a strong smell of burnt onions hung in the drowsy heat, enveloping the house; and the eye lost itself in a vast flat expanse of grass to the west, as if the plain between the Sierra overtopping Sulaco and the coast range away there towards Esmeralda had been as big as half the world.

Signora Teresa, after an impressive pause, remonstrated —

“Eh, Giorgio! Leave Cavour alone and take care of yourself now we are lost in this country all alone with the two children, because you cannot live under a king.”

And while she looked at him she would sometimes put her hand hastily to her side with a short twitch of her fine lips and a knitting of her black, straight eyebrows like a flicker of angry pain or an angry thought on her handsome, regular features.

It was pain; she suppressed the twinge. It had come to her first a few years after they had left Italy to emigrate to America and settle at last in Sulaco after wandering from town to town, trying shopkeeping in a small way here and there; and once an organized enterprise of fishing — in Maldonado — for Giorgio, like the great Garibaldi, had been a sailor in his time.

Sometimes she had no patience with pain. For years its gnawing had been part of the landscape embracing the glitter of the harbour under the wooded spurs of the range; and the sunshine itself was heavy and dull — heavy with pain — not like the sunshine of her girlhood, in which middle-aged Giorgio had wooed her gravely and passionately on the shores of the gulf of Spezzia.

“You go in at once, Giorgio,” she directed. “One would think you do not wish to have any pity on me — with four Signori Inglesi staying in the house.” “Va bene, va bene,” Giorgio would mutter. He obeyed. The Signori Inglesi would require their midday meal presently. He had been one of the immortal and invincible band of liberators who had made the mercenaries of tyranny fly like chaff before a hurricane, “un uragano terribile.” But that was before he was married and had children; and before tyranny had reared its head again amongst the traitors who had imprisoned Garibaldi, his hero.

There were three doors in the front of the house, and each afternoon the Garibaldino could be seen at one or another of them with his big bush of white hair, his arms folded, his legs crossed, leaning back his leonine head against the side, and looking up the wooded slopes of the foothills at the snowy dome of Higuerota. The front of his house threw off a black long rectangle of shade, broadening slowly over the soft ox-cart track. Through the gaps, chopped out in the oleander hedges, the harbour branch railway, laid out temporarily on the level of the plain, curved away its shining parallel ribbons on a belt of scorched and withered grass within sixty yards of the end of the house. In the evening the empty material trains of flat cars circled round the dark green grove of Sulaco, and ran, undulating slightly with white jets of steam, over the plain towards the Casa Viola, on their way to the railway yards by the harbour.

The Italian drivers saluted him from the foot-plate with raised hand, while the negro brakesmen sat carelessly on the brakes, looking straight forward, with the rims of their big hats flapping in the wind. In return Giorgio would give a slight sideways jerk of the head, without unfolding his arms.

On this memorable day of the riot his arms were not folded on his chest. His hand grasped the barrel of the gun grounded on the threshold; he did not look up once at the white dome of Higuerota, whose cool purity seemed to hold itself aloof from a hot earth. His eyes examined the plain curiously. Tall trails of dust subsided here and there. In a speckless sky the sun hung clear and blinding. Knots of men ran headlong; others made a stand; and the irregular rattle of firearms came rippling to his ears in the fiery, still air. Single figures on foot raced desperately. Horsemen galloped towards each other, wheeled round together, separated at speed. Giorgio saw one fall, rider and horse disappearing as if they had galloped into a chasm, and the movements of the animated scene were like the passages of a violent game played upon the plain by dwarfs mounted and on foot, yelling with tiny throats, under the mountain that seemed a colossal embodiment of silence. Never before had Giorgio seen this bit of plain so full of active life; his gaze could not take in all its details at once; he shaded his eyes with his hand, till suddenly the thundering of many hoofs near by startled him.

A troop of horses had broken out of the fenced paddock of the Railway Company. They came on like a whirlwind, and dashed over the line snorting, kicking, squealing in a compact, piebald, tossing mob of bay, brown, grey backs, eyes staring, necks extended, nostrils red, long tails streaming. As soon as they had leaped upon the road the thick dust flew upwards from under their hoofs, and within six yards of Giorgio only a brown cloud with vague forms of necks and cruppers rolled by, making the soil tremble on its passage.

Viola coughed, turning his face away from the dust, and shaking his head slightly.

“There will be some horse-catching to be done before to-night,” he muttered.

In the square of sunlight falling through the door Signora Teresa, kneeling before the chair, had bowed her head, heavy with a twisted mass of ebony hair streaked with silver, into the palm of her hands. The black lace shawl she used to drape about her face had dropped to the ground by her side. The two girls had got up, hand-in-hand, in short skirts, their loose hair falling in disorder. The younger had thrown her arm across her eyes, as if afraid to face the light. Linda, with her hand on the other’s shoulder, stared fearlessly. Viola looked at his children. The sun brought out the deep lines on his face, and, energetic in expression, it had the immobility of a carving. It was impossible to discover what he thought. Bushy grey eyebrows shaded his dark glance.

“Well! And do you not pray like your mother?”

Linda pouted, advancing her red lips, which were almost too red; but she had admirable eyes, brown, with a sparkle of gold in the irises, full of intelligence and meaning, and so clear that they seemed to throw a glow upon her thin, colourless face.

There were bronze glints in the sombre clusters of her hair, and the eyelashes, long and coal black, made her complexion appear still more pale.

“Mother is going to offer up a lot of candles in the church. She always does when Nostromo has been away fighting. I shall have some to carry up to the Chapel of the Madonna in the Cathedral.”

She said all this quickly, with great assurance, in an animated, penetrating voice. Then, giving her sister’s shoulder a slight shake, she added —

“And she will be made to carry one, too!”

“Why made?” inquired Giorgio, gravely. “Does she not want to?”

“She is timid,” said Linda, with a little burst of laughter. “People notice her fair hair as she goes along with us. They call out after her, ‘Look at the Rubia! Look at the Rubiacita!’ They call out in the streets. She is timid.”

“And you? You are not timid — eh?” the father pronounced, slowly.

She tossed back all her dark hair.

“Nobody calls out after me.”

Old Giorgio contemplated his children thoughtfully. There was two years difference between them. They had been born to him late, years after the boy had died. Had he lived he would have been nearly as old as Gian’ Battista — he whom the English called Nostromo; but as to his daughters, the severity of his temper, his advancing age, his absorption in his memories, had prevented his taking much notice of them. He loved his children, but girls belong more to the mother, and much of his affection had been expended in the worship and service of liberty.

When quite a youth he had deserted from a ship trading to La Plata, to enlist in the navy of Montevideo, then under the command of Garibaldi. Afterwards, in the Italian legion of the Republic struggling against the encroaching tyranny of Rosas, he had taken part, on great plains, on the banks of immense rivers, in the fiercest fighting perhaps the world had ever known. He had lived amongst men who had declaimed about liberty, suffered for liberty, died for liberty, with a desperate exaltation, and with their eyes turned towards an oppressed Italy. His own enthusiasm had been fed on scenes of carnage, on the examples of lofty devotion, on the din of armed struggle, on the inflamed language of proclamations. He had never parted from the chief of his choice — the fiery apostle of independence — keeping by his side in America and in Italy till after the fatal day of Aspromonte, when the treachery of kings, emperors, and ministers had been revealed to the world in the wounding and imprisonment of his hero — a catastrophe that had instilled into him a gloomy doubt of ever being able to understand the ways of Divine justice.

He did not deny it, however. It required patience, he would say. Though he disliked priests, and would not put his foot inside a church for anything, he believed in God. Were not the proclamations against tyrants addressed to the peoples in the name of God and liberty? “God for men — religions for women,” he muttered sometimes. In Sicily, an Englishman who had turned up in Palermo after its evacuation by the army of the king, had given him a Bible in Italian — the publication of the British and Foreign

Bible Society, bound in a dark leather cover. In periods of political adversity, in the pauses of silence when the revolutionists issued no proclamations, Giorgio earned his living with the first work that came to hand — as sailor, as dock labourer on the quays of Genoa, once as a hand on a farm in the hills above Spezzia — and in his spare time he studied the thick volume. He carried it with him into battles. Now it was his only reading, and in order not to be deprived of it (the print was small) he had consented to accept the present of a pair of silver-mounted spectacles from Senora Emilia Gould, the wife of the Englishman who managed the silver mine in the mountains three leagues from the town. She was the only Englishwoman in Sulaco.

Giorgio Viola had a great consideration for the English. This feeling, born on the battlefields of Uruguay, was forty years old at the very least. Several of them had poured their blood for the cause of freedom in America, and the first he had ever known he remembered by the name of Samuel; he commanded a negro company under Garibaldi, during the famous siege of Montevideo, and died heroically with his negroes at the fording of the Boyana. He, Giorgio, had reached the rank of ensign-alferez-and cooked for the general. Later, in Italy, he, with the rank of lieutenant, rode with the staff and still cooked for the general. He had cooked for him in Lombardy through the whole campaign; on the march to Rome he had lassoed his beef in the Campagna after the American manner; he had been wounded in the defence of the Roman Republic; he was one of the four fugitives who, with the general, carried out of the woods the inanimate body of the general's wife into the farmhouse where she died, exhausted by the hardships of that terrible retreat. He had survived that disastrous time to attend his general in Palermo when the Neapolitan shells from the castle crashed upon the town. He had cooked for him on the field of Volturmo after fighting all day. And everywhere he had seen Englishmen in the front rank of the army of freedom. He respected their nation because they loved Garibaldi. Their very countesses and princesses had kissed the general's hands in London, it was said. He could well believe it; for the nation was noble, and the man was a saint. It was enough to look once at his face to see the divine force of faith in him and his great pity for all that was poor, suffering, and oppressed in this world.

The spirit of self-forgetfulness, the simple devotion to a vast humanitarian idea which inspired the thought and stress of that revolutionary time, had left its mark upon Giorgio in a sort of austere contempt for all personal advantage. This man, whom the lowest class in Sulaco suspected of having a buried hoard in his kitchen, had all his life despised money. The leaders of his youth had lived poor, had died poor. It had been a habit of his mind to disregard to-morrow. It was engendered partly by an existence of excitement, adventure, and wild warfare. But mostly it was a matter of principle. It did not resemble the carelessness of a condottiere, it was a puritanism of conduct, born of stern enthusiasm like the puritanism of religion.

This stern devotion to a cause had cast a gloom upon Giorgio's old age. It cast a gloom because the cause seemed lost. Too many kings and emperors flourished yet in the world which God had meant for the people. He was sad because of his simplicity.

Though always ready to help his countrymen, and greatly respected by the Italian emigrants wherever he lived (in his exile he called it), he could not conceal from himself that they cared nothing for the wrongs of down-trodden nations. They listened to his tales of war readily, but seemed to ask themselves what he had got out of it after all. There was nothing that they could see. "We wanted nothing, we suffered for the love of all humanity!" he cried out furiously sometimes, and the powerful voice, the blazing eyes, the shaking of the white mane, the brown, sinewy hand pointing upwards as if to call heaven to witness, impressed his hearers. After the old man had broken off abruptly with a jerk of the head and a movement of the arm, meaning clearly, "But what's the good of talking to you?" they nudged each other. There was in old Giorgio an energy of feeling, a personal quality of conviction, something they called "terribilita" — "an old lion," they used to say of him. Some slight incident, a chance word would set him off talking on the beach to the Italian fishermen of Maldonado, in the little shop he kept afterwards (in Valparaiso) to his countrymen customers; of an evening, suddenly, in the cafe at one end of the Casa Viola (the other was reserved for the English engineers) to the select clientele of engine-drivers and foremen of the railway shops.

With their handsome, bronzed, lean faces, shiny black ringlets, glistening eyes, broad-chested, bearded, sometimes a tiny gold ring in the lobe of the ear, the aristocracy of the railway works listened to him, turning away from their cards or dominoes. Here and there a fair-haired Basque studied his hand meantime, waiting without protest. No native of Costaguana intruded there. This was the Italian stronghold. Even the Sulaco policemen on a night patrol let their horses pace softly by, bending low in the saddle to glance through the window at the heads in a fog of smoke; and the drone of old Giorgio's declamatory narrative seemed to sink behind them into the plain. Only now and then the assistant of the chief of police, some broad-faced, brown little gentleman, with a great deal of Indian in him, would put in an appearance. Leaving his man outside with the horses he advanced with a confident, sly smile, and without a word up to the long trestle table. He pointed to one of the bottles on the shelf; Giorgio, thrusting his pipe into his mouth abruptly, served him in person. Nothing would be heard but the slight jingle of the spurs. His glass emptied, he would take a leisurely, scrutinizing look all round the room, go out, and ride away slowly, circling towards the town.

Chapter 5

In this way only was the power of the local authorities vindicated amongst the great body of strong-limbed foreigners who dug the earth, blasted the rocks, drove the engines for the "progressive and patriotic undertaking." In these very words eighteen months before the Excellentissimo Senor don Vincente Ribiera, the Dictator of

Costaguana, had described the National Central Railway in his great speech at the turning of the first sod.

He had come on purpose to Sulaco, and there was a one-o'clock dinner-party, a convite offered by the O.S.N. Company on board the Juno after the function on shore. Captain Mitchell had himself steered the cargo lighter, all draped with flags, which, in tow of the Juno's steam launch, took the Excellentissimo from the jetty to the ship. Everybody of note in Sulaco had been invited — the one or two foreign merchants, all the representatives of the old Spanish families then in town, the great owners of estates on the plain, grave, courteous, simple men, caballeros of pure descent, with small hands and feet, conservative, hospitable, and kind. The Occidental Province was their stronghold; their Blanco party had triumphed now; it was their President-Dictator, a Blanco of the Blancos, who sat smiling urbanely between the representatives of two friendly foreign powers. They had come with him from Sta. Marta to countenance by their presence the enterprise in which the capital of their countries was engaged. The only lady of that company was Mrs. Gould, the wife of Don Carlos, the administrator of the San Tome silver mine. The ladies of Sulaco were not advanced enough to take part in the public life to that extent. They had come out strongly at the great ball at the Intendencia the evening before, but Mrs. Gould alone had appeared, a bright spot in the group of black coats behind the President-Dictator, on the crimson cloth-covered stage erected under a shady tree on the shore of the harbour, where the ceremony of turning the first sod had taken place. She had come off in the cargo lighter, full of notabilities, sitting under the flutter of gay flags, in the place of honour by the side of Captain Mitchell, who steered, and her clear dress gave the only truly festive note to the sombre gathering in the long, gorgeous saloon of the Juno.

The head of the chairman of the railway board (from London), handsome and pale in a silvery mist of white hair and clipped beard, hovered near her shoulder attentive, smiling, and fatigued. The journey from London to Sta. Marta in mail boats and the special carriages of the Sta. Marta coast-line (the only railway so far) had been tolerable — even pleasant — quite tolerable. But the trip over the mountains to Sulaco was another sort of experience, in an old diligencia over impassable roads skirting awful precipices.

“We have been upset twice in one day on the brink of very deep ravines,” he was telling Mrs. Gould in an undertone. “And when we arrived here at last I don't know what we should have done without your hospitality. What an out-of-the-way place Sulaco is! — and for a harbour, too! Astonishing!”

“Ah, but we are very proud of it. It used to be historically important. The highest ecclesiastical court for two viceroyalties, sat here in the olden time,” she instructed him with animation.

“I am impressed. I didn't mean to be disparaging. You seem very patriotic.”

“The place is lovable, if only by its situation. Perhaps you don't know what an old resident I am.”

“How old, I wonder,” he murmured, looking at her with a slight smile. Mrs. Gould’s appearance was made youthful by the mobile intelligence of her face. “We can’t give you your ecclesiastical court back again; but you shall have more steamers, a railway, a telegraph-cable — a future in the great world which is worth infinitely more than any amount of ecclesiastical past. You shall be brought in touch with something greater than two viceroyalties. But I had no notion that a place on a sea-coast could remain so isolated from the world. If it had been a thousand miles inland now — most remarkable! Has anything ever happened here for a hundred years before to-day?”

While he talked in a slow, humorous tone, she kept her little smile. Agreeing ironically, she assured him that certainly not — nothing ever happened in Sulaco. Even the revolutions, of which there had been two in her time, had respected the repose of the place. Their course ran in the more populous southern parts of the Republic, and the great valley of Sta. Marta, which was like one great battlefield of the parties, with the possession of the capital for a prize and an outlet to another ocean. They were more advanced over there. Here in Sulaco they heard only the echoes of these great questions, and, of course, their official world changed each time, coming to them over their rampart of mountains which he himself had traversed in an old diligencia, with such a risk to life and limb.

The chairman of the railway had been enjoying her hospitality for several days, and he was really grateful for it. It was only since he had left Sta. Marta that he had utterly lost touch with the feeling of European life on the background of his exotic surroundings. In the capital he had been the guest of the Legation, and had been kept busy negotiating with the members of Don Vincente’s Government — cultured men, men to whom the conditions of civilized business were not unknown.

What concerned him most at the time was the acquisition of land for the railway. In the Sta. Marta Valley, where there was already one line in existence, the people were tractable, and it was only a matter of price. A commission had been nominated to fix the values, and the difficulty resolved itself into the judicious influencing of the Commissioners. But in Sulaco — the Occidental Province for whose development the railway was intended — there had been trouble. It had been lying for ages ensconced behind its natural barriers, repelling modern enterprise by the precipices of its mountain range, by its shallow harbour opening into the everlasting calms of a gulf full of clouds, by the benighted state of mind of the owners of its fertile territory — all these aristocratic old Spanish families, all those Don Ambrosios this and Don Fernandos that, who seemed actually to dislike and distrust the coming of the railway over their lands. It had happened that some of the surveying parties scattered all over the province had been warned off with threats of violence. In other cases outrageous pretensions as to price had been raised. But the man of railways prided himself on being equal to every emergency. Since he was met by the inimical sentiment of blind conservatism in Sulaco he would meet it by sentiment, too, before taking his stand on his right alone. The Government was bound to carry out its part of the contract with the board of the new railway company, even if it had to use force for the purpose.

But he desired nothing less than an armed disturbance in the smooth working of his plans. They were much too vast and far-reaching, and too promising to leave a stone unturned; and so he imagined to get the President-Dictator over there on a tour of ceremonies and speeches, culminating in a great function at the turning of the first sod by the harbour shore. After all he was their own creature — that Don Vincente. He was the embodied triumph of the best elements in the State. These were facts, and, unless facts meant nothing, Sir John argued to himself, such a man's influence must be real, and his personal action would produce the conciliatory effect he required. He had succeeded in arranging the trip with the help of a very clever advocate, who was known in Sta. Marta as the agent of the Gould silver mine, the biggest thing in Sulaco, and even in the whole Republic. It was indeed a fabulously rich mine. Its so-called agent, evidently a man of culture and ability, seemed, without official position, to possess an extraordinary influence in the highest Government spheres. He was able to assure Sir John that the President-Dictator would make the journey. He regretted, however, in the course of the same conversation, that General Montero insisted upon going, too.

General Montero, whom the beginning of the struggle had found an obscure army captain employed on the wild eastern frontier of the State, had thrown in his lot with the Ribiera party at a moment when special circumstances had given that small adhesion a fortuitous importance. The fortunes of war served him marvellously, and the victory of Rio Seco (after a day of desperate fighting) put a seal to his success. At the end he emerged General, Minister of War, and the military head of the Blanco party, although there was nothing aristocratic in his descent. Indeed, it was said that he and his brother, orphans, had been brought up by the munificence of a famous European traveller, in whose service their father had lost his life. Another story was that their father had been nothing but a charcoal burner in the woods, and their mother a baptised Indian woman from the far interior.

However that might be, the Costaguana Press was in the habit of styling Montero's forest march from his commandancia to join the Blanco forces at the beginning of the troubles, the "most heroic military exploit of modern times." About the same time, too, his brother had turned up from Europe, where he had gone apparently as secretary to a consul. Having, however, collected a small band of outlaws, he showed some talent as guerilla chief and had been rewarded at the pacification by the post of Military Commandant of the capital.

The Minister of War, then, accompanied the Dictator. The board of the O.S.N. Company, working hand-in-hand with the railway people for the good of the Republic, had on this important occasion instructed Captain Mitchell to put the mail-boat Juno at the disposal of the distinguished party. Don Vincente, journeying south from Sta. Marta, had embarked at Cayta, the principal port of Costaguana, and came to Sulaco by sea. But the chairman of the railway company had courageously crossed the mountains in a ramshackle diligencia, mainly for the purpose of meeting his engineer-in-chief engaged in the final survey of the road.

For all the indifference of a man of affairs to nature, whose hostility can always be overcome by the resources of finance, he could not help being impressed by his surroundings during his halt at the surveying camp established at the highest point his railway was to reach. He spent the night there, arriving just too late to see the last dying glow of sunlight upon the snowy flank of Higueroa. Pillared masses of black basalt framed like an open portal a portion of the white field lying aslant against the west. In the transparent air of the high altitudes everything seemed very near, steeped in a clear stillness as in an imponderable liquid; and with his ear ready to catch the first sound of the expected diligencia the engineer-in-chief, at the door of a hut of rough stones, had contemplated the changing hues on the enormous side of the mountain, thinking that in this sight, as in a piece of inspired music, there could be found together the utmost delicacy of shaded expression and a stupendous magnificence of effect.

Sir John arrived too late to hear the magnificent and inaudible strain sung by the sunset amongst the high peaks of the Sierra. It had sung itself out into the breathless pause of deep dusk before, climbing down the fore wheel of the diligencia with stiff limbs, he shook hands with the engineer.

They gave him his dinner in a stone hut like a cubical boulder, with no door or windows in its two openings; a bright fire of sticks (brought on muleback from the first valley below) burning outside, sent in a wavering glare; and two candles in tin candlesticks — lighted, it was explained to him, in his honour — stood on a sort of rough camp table, at which he sat on the right hand of the chief. He knew how to be amiable; and the young men of the engineering staff, for whom the surveying of the railway track had the glamour of the first steps on the path of life, sat there, too, listening modestly, with their smooth faces tanned by the weather, and very pleased to witness so much affability in so great a man.

Afterwards, late at night, pacing to and fro outside, he had a long talk with his chief engineer. He knew him well of old. This was not the first undertaking in which their gifts, as elementally different as fire and water, had worked in conjunction. From the contact of these two personalities, who had not the same vision of the world, there was generated a power for the world's service — a subtle force that could set in motion mighty machines, men's muscles, and awaken also in human breasts an unbounded devotion to the task. Of the young fellows at the table, to whom the survey of the track was like the tracing of the path of life, more than one would be called to meet death before the work was done. But the work would be done: the force would be almost as strong as a faith. Not quite, however. In the silence of the sleeping camp upon the moonlit plateau forming the top of the pass like the floor of a vast arena surrounded by the basalt walls of precipices, two strolling figures in thick ulsters stood still, and the voice of the engineer pronounced distinctly the words —

“We can't move mountains!”

Sir John, raising his head to follow the pointing gesture, felt the full force of the words. The white Higueroa soared out of the shadows of rock and earth like a frozen

bubble under the moon. All was still, till near by, behind the wall of a corral for the camp animals, built roughly of loose stones in the form of a circle, a pack mule stamped his forefoot and blew heavily twice.

The engineer-in-chief had used the phrase in answer to the chairman's tentative suggestion that the tracing of the line could, perhaps, be altered in deference to the prejudices of the Sulaco landowners. The chief engineer believed that the obstinacy of men was the lesser obstacle. Moreover, to combat that they had the great influence of Charles Gould, whereas tunnelling under Higueroa would have been a colossal undertaking.

"Ah, yes! Gould. What sort of a man is he?"

Sir John had heard much of Charles Gould in Sta. Marta, and wanted to know more. The engineer-in-chief assured him that the administrator of the San Tome silver mine had an immense influence over all these Spanish Dons. He had also one of the best houses in Sulaco, and the Gould hospitality was beyond all praise.

"They received me as if they had known me for years," he said. "The little lady is kindness personified. I stayed with them for a month. He helped me to organize the surveying parties. His practical ownership of the San Tome silver mine gives him a special position. He seems to have the ear of every provincial authority apparently, and, as I said, he can wind all the hidalgos of the province round his little finger. If you follow his advice the difficulties will fall away, because he wants the railway. Of course, you must be careful in what you say. He's English, and besides he must be immensely wealthy. The Holroyd house is in with him in that mine, so you may imagine — "

He interrupted himself as, from before one of the little fires burning outside the low wall of the corral, arose the figure of a man wrapped in a poncho up to the neck. The saddle which he had been using for a pillow made a dark patch on the ground against the red glow of embers.

"I shall see Holroyd himself on my way back through the States," said Sir John. "I've ascertained that he, too, wants the railway."

The man who, perhaps disturbed by the proximity of the voices, had arisen from the ground, struck a match to light a cigarette. The flame showed a bronzed, black-whiskered face, a pair of eyes gazing straight; then, rearranging his wrappings, he sank full length and laid his head again on the saddle.

"That's our camp-master, whom I must send back to Sulaco now we are going to carry our survey into the Sta. Marta Valley," said the engineer. "A most useful fellow, lent me by Captain Mitchell of the O.S.N. Company. It was very good of Mitchell. Charles Gould told me I couldn't do better than take advantage of the offer. He seems to know how to rule all these muleteers and peons. We had not the slightest trouble with our people. He shall escort your diligencia right into Sulaco with some of our railway peons. The road is bad. To have him at hand may save you an upset or two. He promised me to take care of your person all the way down as if you were his father."

This camp-master was the Italian sailor whom all the Europeans in Sulaco, following Captain Mitchell's mispronunciation, were in the habit of calling Nostromo. And

indeed, taciturn and ready, he did take excellent care of his charge at the bad parts of the road, as Sir John himself acknowledged to Mrs. Gould afterwards.

Chapter 6

At that time Nostromo had been already long enough in the country to raise to the highest pitch Captain Mitchell's opinion of the extraordinary value of his discovery. Clearly he was one of those invaluable subordinates whom to possess is a legitimate cause of boasting. Captain Mitchell plumed himself upon his eye for men — but he was not selfish — and in the innocence of his pride was already developing that mania for “lending you my Capataz de Cargadores” which was to bring Nostromo into personal contact, sooner or later, with every European in Sulaco, as a sort of universal factotum — a prodigy of efficiency in his own sphere of life.

“The fellow is devoted to me, body and soul!” Captain Mitchell was given to affirm; and though nobody, perhaps, could have explained why it should be so, it was impossible on a survey of their relation to throw doubt on that statement, unless, indeed, one were a bitter, eccentric character like Dr. Monygham — for instance — whose short, hopeless laugh expressed somehow an immense mistrust of mankind. Not that Dr. Monygham was a prodigal either of laughter or of words. He was bitterly taciturn when at his best. At his worst people feared the open scornfulness of his tongue. Only Mrs. Gould could keep his unbelief in men's motives within due bounds; but even to her (on an occasion not connected with Nostromo, and in a tone which for him was gentle), even to her, he had said once, “Really, it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think of other people so much better than he is able to think of himself.”

And Mrs. Gould had hastened to drop the subject. There were strange rumours of the English doctor. Years ago, in the time of Guzman Bento, he had been mixed up, it was whispered, in a conspiracy which was betrayed and, as people expressed it, drowned in blood. His hair had turned grey, his hairless, seamed face was of a brick-dust colour; the large check pattern of his flannel shirt and his old stained Panama hat were an established defiance to the conventionalities of Sulaco. Had it not been for the immaculate cleanliness of his apparel he might have been taken for one of those shiftless Europeans that are a moral eyesore to the respectability of a foreign colony in almost every exotic part of the world. The young ladies of Sulaco, adorning with clusters of pretty faces the balconies along the Street of the Constitution, when they saw him pass, with his limping gait and bowed head, a short linen jacket drawn on carelessly over the flannel check shirt, would remark to each other, “Here is the Senor doctor going to call on Dona Emilia. He has got his little coat on.” The inference was true. Its deeper meaning was hidden from their simple intelligence. Moreover, they expended no store of thought on the doctor. He was old, ugly, learned — and a little “loco” — mad, if not a bit of a sorcerer, as the common people suspected him of being. The little white jacket was in reality a concession to Mrs. Gould's humanizing influence.

The doctor, with his habit of sceptical, bitter speech, had no other means of showing his profound respect for the character of the woman who was known in the country as the English Senora. He presented this tribute very seriously indeed; it was no trifle for a man of his habits. Mrs. Gould felt that, too, perfectly. She would never have thought of imposing upon him this marked show of deference.

She kept her old Spanish house (one of the finest specimens in Sulaco) open for the dispensation of the small graces of existence. She dispensed them with simplicity and charm because she was guided by an alert perception of values. She was highly gifted in the art of human intercourse which consists in delicate shades of self-forgetfulness and in the suggestion of universal comprehension. Charles Gould (the Gould family, established in Costaguana for three generations, always went to England for their education and for their wives) imagined that he had fallen in love with a girl's sound common sense like any other man, but these were not exactly the reasons why, for instance, the whole surveying camp, from the youngest of the young men to their mature chief, should have found occasion to allude to Mrs. Gould's house so frequently amongst the high peaks of the Sierra. She would have protested that she had done nothing for them, with a low laugh and a surprised widening of her grey eyes, had anybody told her how convincingly she was remembered on the edge of the snow-line above Sulaco. But directly, with a little capable air of setting her wits to work, she would have found an explanation. "Of course, it was such a surprise for these boys to find any sort of welcome here. And I suppose they are homesick. I suppose everybody must be always just a little homesick."

She was always sorry for homesick people.

Born in the country, as his father before him, spare and tall, with a flaming moustache, a neat chin, clear blue eyes, auburn hair, and a thin, fresh, red face, Charles Gould looked like a new arrival from over the sea. His grandfather had fought in the cause of independence under Bolivar, in that famous English legion which on the battlefield of Carabobo had been saluted by the great Liberator as Saviours of his country. One of Charles Gould's uncles had been the elected President of that very province of Sulaco (then called a State) in the days of Federation, and afterwards had been put up against the wall of a church and shot by the order of the barbarous Unionist general, Guzman Bento. It was the same Guzman Bento who, becoming later Perpetual President, famed for his ruthless and cruel tyranny, readied his apotheosis in the popular legend of a sanguinary land-haunting spectre whose body had been carried off by the devil in person from the brick mausoleum in the nave of the Church of Assumption in Sta. Marta. Thus, at least, the priests explained its disappearance to the barefooted multitude that streamed in, awestruck, to gaze at the hole in the side of the ugly box of bricks before the great altar.

Guzman Bento of cruel memory had put to death great numbers of people besides Charles Gould's uncle; but with a relative martyred in the cause of aristocracy, the Sulaco Oligarchs (this was the phraseology of Guzman Bento's time; now they were called Blancos, and had given up the federal idea), which meant the families of pure

Spanish descent, considered Charles as one of themselves. With such a family record, no one could be more of a Costaguanero than Don Carlos Gould; but his aspect was so characteristic that in the talk of common people he was just the Ingles — the Englishman of Sulaco. He looked more English than a casual tourist, a sort of heretic pilgrim, however, quite unknown in Sulaco. He looked more English than the last arrived batch of young railway engineers, than anybody out of the hunting-field pictures in the numbers of *Punch* reaching his wife's drawing-room two months or so after date. It astonished you to hear him talk Spanish (Castilian, as the natives say) or the Indian dialect of the country-people so naturally. His accent had never been English; but there was something so indelible in all these ancestral Goulds — liberators, explorers, coffee planters, merchants, revolutionists — of Costaguana, that he, the only representative of the third generation in a continent possessing its own style of horsemanship, went on looking thoroughly English even on horseback. This is not said of him in the mocking spirit of the *Llaneros* — men of the great plains — who think that no one in the world knows how to sit a horse but themselves. Charles Gould, to use the suitably lofty phrase, rode like a centaur. Riding for him was not a special form of exercise; it was a natural faculty, as walking straight is to all men sound of mind and limb; but, all the same, when cantering beside the ruddy ox-cart track to the mine he looked in his English clothes and with his imported saddlery as though he had come this moment to Costaguana at his easy swift *pasotrote*, straight out of some green meadow at the other side of the world.

His way would lie along the old Spanish road — the *Camino Real* of popular speech — the only remaining vestige of a fact and name left by that royalty old Giorgio Viola hated, and whose very shadow had departed from the land; for the big equestrian statue of Charles IV. at the entrance of the Alameda, towering white against the trees, was only known to the folk from the country and to the beggars of the town that slept on the steps around the pedestal, as the Horse of Stone. The other Carlos, turning off to the left with a rapid clatter of hoofs on the disjointed pavement — Don Carlos Gould, in his English clothes, looked as incongruous, but much more at home than the kingly cavalier reining in his steed on the pedestal above the sleeping leperos, with his marble arm raised towards the marble rim of a plumed hat.

The weather-stained effigy of the mounted king, with its vague suggestion of a saluting gesture, seemed to present an inscrutable breast to the political changes which had robbed it of its very name; but neither did the other horseman, well known to the people, keen and alive on his well-shaped, slate-coloured beast with a white eye, wear his heart on the sleeve of his English coat. His mind preserved its steady poise as if sheltered in the passionless stability of private and public decencies at home in Europe. He accepted with a like calm the shocking manner in which the Sulaco ladies smothered their faces with pearl powder till they looked like white plaster casts with beautiful living eyes, the peculiar gossip of the town, and the continuous political changes, the constant "saving of the country," which to his wife seemed a puerile and bloodthirsty game of murder and rapine played with terrible earnestness by depraved

children. In the early days of her Costaguana life, the little lady used to clench her hands with exasperation at not being able to take the public affairs of the country as seriously as the incidental atrocity of methods deserved. She saw in them a comedy of naive pretences, but hardly anything genuine except her own appalled indignation. Charles, very quiet and twisting his long moustaches, would decline to discuss them at all. Once, however, he observed to her gently —

“My dear, you seem to forget that I was born here.” These few words made her pause as if they had been a sudden revelation. Perhaps the mere fact of being born in the country did make a difference. She had a great confidence in her husband; it had always been very great. He had struck her imagination from the first by his unsentimentalism, by that very quietude of mind which she had erected in her thought for a sign of perfect competency in the business of living. Don Jose Avellanos, their neighbour across the street, a statesman, a poet, a man of culture, who had represented his country at several European Courts (and had suffered untold indignities as a state prisoner in the time of the tyrant Guzman Bento), used to declare in Dona Emilia’s drawing-room that Carlos had all the English qualities of character with a truly patriotic heart.

Mrs. Gould, raising her eyes to her husband’s thin, red and tan face, could not detect the slightest quiver of a feature at what he must have heard said of his patriotism. Perhaps he had just dismounted on his return from the mine; he was English enough to disregard the hottest hours of the day. Basilio, in a livery of white linen and a red sash, had squatted for a moment behind his heels to unstrap the heavy, blunt spurs in the patio; and then the Senor Administrator would go up the staircase into the gallery. Rows of plants in pots, ranged on the balustrade between the pilasters of the arches, screened the corredor with their leaves and flowers from the quadrangle below, whose paved space is the true hearthstone of a South American house, where the quiet hours of domestic life are marked by the shifting of light and shadow on the flagstones.

Senor Avellanos was in the habit of crossing the patio at five o’clock almost every day. Don Jose chose to come over at tea-time because the English rite at Dona Emilia’s house reminded him of the time he lived in London as Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James. He did not like tea; and, usually, rocking his American chair, his neat little shiny boots crossed on the foot-rest, he would talk on and on with a sort of complacent virtuosity wonderful in a man of his age, while he held the cup in his hands for a long time. His close-cropped head was perfectly white; his eyes coalblack.

On seeing Charles Gould step into the sala he would nod provisionally and go on to the end of the oratorical period. Only then he would say —

“Carlos, my friend, you have ridden from San Tome in the heat of the day. Always the true English activity. No? What?”

He drank up all the tea at once in one draught. This performance was invariably followed by a slight shudder and a low, involuntary “br-r-r-r,” which was not covered by the hasty exclamation, “Excellent!”

Then giving up the empty cup into his young friend’s hand, extended with a smile, he continued to expatiate upon the patriotic nature of the San Tome mine for the simple

pleasure of talking fluently, it seemed, while his reclining body jerked backwards and forwards in a rocking-chair of the sort exported from the United States. The ceiling of the largest drawing-room of the Casa Gould extended its white level far above his head. The loftiness dwarfed the mixture of heavy, straight-backed Spanish chairs of brown wood with leathern seats, and European furniture, low, and cushioned all over, like squat little monsters gorged to bursting with steel springs and horsehair. There were knick-knacks on little tables, mirrors let into the wall above marble consoles, square spaces of carpet under the two groups of armchairs, each presided over by a deep sofa; smaller rugs scattered all over the floor of red tiles; three windows from the ceiling down to the ground, opening on a balcony, and flanked by the perpendicular folds of the dark hangings. The stateliness of ancient days lingered between the four high, smooth walls, tinted a delicate primrose-colour; and Mrs. Gould, with her little head and shining coils of hair, sitting in a cloud of muslin and lace before a slender mahogany table, resembled a fairy posed lightly before dainty philtres dispensed out of vessels of silver and porcelain.

Mrs. Gould knew the history of the San Tome mine. Worked in the early days mostly by means of lashes on the backs of slaves, its yield had been paid for in its own weight of human bones. Whole tribes of Indians had perished in the exploitation; and then the mine was abandoned, since with this primitive method it had ceased to make a profitable return, no matter how many corpses were thrown into its maw. Then it became forgotten. It was rediscovered after the War of Independence. An English company obtained the right to work it, and found so rich a vein that neither the exactions of successive governments, nor the periodical raids of recruiting officers upon the population of paid miners they had created, could discourage their perseverance. But in the end, during the long turmoil of pronunciamientos that followed the death of the famous Guzman Bento, the native miners, incited to revolt by the emissaries sent out from the capital, had risen upon their English chiefs and murdered them to a man. The decree of confiscation which appeared immediately afterwards in the *Diario Oficial*, published in Sta. Marta, began with the words: "Justly incensed at the grinding oppression of foreigners, actuated by sordid motives of gain rather than by love for a country where they come impoverished to seek their fortunes, the mining population of San Tome, etc. . . ." and ended with the declaration: "The chief of the State has resolved to exercise to the full his power of clemency. The mine, which by every law, international, human, and divine, reverts now to the Government as national property, shall remain closed till the sword drawn for the sacred defence of liberal principles has accomplished its mission of securing the happiness of our beloved country."

And for many years this was the last of the San Tome mine. What advantage that Government had expected from the spoliation, it is impossible to tell now. Costaguana was made with difficulty to pay a beggarly money compensation to the families of the victims, and then the matter dropped out of diplomatic despatches. But afterwards another Government bethought itself of that valuable asset. It was an ordinary Costaguana Government — the fourth in six years — but it judged of its opportunities

sanelly. It remembered the San Tome mine with a secret conviction of its worthlessness in their own hands, but with an ingenious insight into the various uses a silver mine can be put to, apart from the sordid process of extracting the metal from under the ground. The father of Charles Gould, for a long time one of the most wealthy merchants of Costaguana, had already lost a considerable part of his fortune in forced loans to the successive Governments. He was a man of calm judgment, who never dreamed of pressing his claims; and when, suddenly, the perpetual concession of the San Tome mine was offered to him in full settlement, his alarm became extreme. He was versed in the ways of Governments. Indeed, the intention of this affair, though no doubt deeply meditated in the closet, lay open on the surface of the document presented urgently for his signature. The third and most important clause stipulated that the concession-holder should pay at once to the Government five years' royalties on the estimated output of the mine.

Mr. Gould, senior, defended himself from this fatal favour with many arguments and entreaties, but without success. He knew nothing of mining; he had no means to put his concession on the European market; the mine as a working concern did not exist. The buildings had been burnt down, the mining plant had been destroyed, the mining population had disappeared from the neighbourhood years and years ago; the very road had vanished under a flood of tropical vegetation as effectually as if swallowed by the sea; and the main gallery had fallen in within a hundred yards from the entrance. It was no longer an abandoned mine; it was a wild, inaccessible, and rocky gorge of the Sierra, where vestiges of charred timber, some heaps of smashed bricks, and a few shapeless pieces of rusty iron could have been found under the matted mass of thorny creepers covering the ground. Mr. Gould, senior, did not desire the perpetual possession of that desolate locality; in fact, the mere vision of it arising before his mind in the still watches of the night had the power to exasperate him into hours of hot and agitated insomnia.

It so happened, however, that the Finance Minister of the time was a man to whom, in years gone by, Mr. Gould had, unfortunately, declined to grant some small pecuniary assistance, basing his refusal on the ground that the applicant was a notorious gambler and cheat, besides being more than half suspected of a robbery with violence on a wealthy ranchero in a remote country district, where he was actually exercising the function of a judge. Now, after reaching his exalted position, that politician had proclaimed his intention to repay evil with good to Senor Gould — the poor man. He affirmed and reaffirmed this resolution in the drawing-rooms of Sta. Marta, in a soft and implacable voice, and with such malicious glances that Mr. Gould's best friends advised him earnestly to attempt no bribery to get the matter dropped. It would have been useless. Indeed, it would not have been a very safe proceeding. Such was also the opinion of a stout, loud-voiced lady of French extraction, the daughter, she said, of an officer of high rank (*officier superieur de l'armee*), who was accommodated with lodgings within the walls of a secularized convent next door to the Ministry of Finance. That florid person, when approached on behalf of Mr. Gould in a proper manner, and

with a suitable present, shook her head despondently. She was good-natured, and her despondency was genuine. She imagined she could not take money in consideration of something she could not accomplish. The friend of Mr. Gould, charged with the delicate mission, used to say afterwards that she was the only honest person closely or remotely connected with the Government he had ever met. "No go," she had said with a cavalier, husky intonation which was natural to her, and using turns of expression more suitable to a child of parents unknown than to the orphaned daughter of a general officer. "No; it's no go. Pas moyen, mon garçon. C'est dommage, tout de meme. Ah! zut! Je ne vole pas mon monde. Je ne suis pas ministre — moi! Vous pouvez emporter votre petit sac."

For a moment, biting her carmine lip, she deplored inwardly the tyranny of the rigid principles governing the sale of her influence in high places. Then, significantly, and with a touch of impatience, "Allez," she added, "et dites bien a votre bonhomme — entendez-vous? — qu'il faut avaler la pilule."

After such a warning there was nothing for it but to sign and pay. Mr. Gould had swallowed the pill, and it was as though it had been compounded of some subtle poison that acted directly on his brain. He became at once mine-ridden, and as he was well read in light literature it took to his mind the form of the Old Man of the Sea fastened upon his shoulders. He also began to dream of vampires. Mr. Gould exaggerated to himself the disadvantages of his new position, because he viewed it emotionally. His position in Costaguana was no worse than before. But man is a desperately conservative creature, and the extravagant novelty of this outrage upon his purse distressed his sensibilities. Everybody around him was being robbed by the grotesque and murderous bands that played their game of governments and revolutions after the death of Guzman Bento. His experience had taught him that, however short the plunder might fall of their legitimate expectations, no gang in possession of the Presidential Palace would be so incompetent as to suffer itself to be baffled by the want of a pretext. The first casual colonel of the barefooted army of scarecrows that came along was able to expose with force and precision to any mere civilian his titles to a sum of 10,000 dollars; the while his hope would be immutably fixed upon a gratuity, at any rate, of no less than a thousand. Mr. Gould knew that very well, and, armed with resignation, had waited for better times. But to be robbed under the forms of legality and business was intolerable to his imagination. Mr. Gould, the father, had one fault in his sagacious and honourable character: he attached too much importance to form. It is a failing common to mankind, whose views are tinged by prejudices. There was for him in that affair a malignancy of perverted justice which, by means of a moral shock, attacked his vigorous physique. "It will end by killing me," he used to affirm many times a day. And, in fact, since that time he began to suffer from fever, from liver pains, and mostly from a worrying inability to think of anything else. The Finance Minister could have formed no conception of the profound subtlety of his revenge. Even Mr. Gould's letters to his fourteen-year-old boy Charles, then away in England for his education, came at last to talk of practically nothing but the mine. He groaned over the injustice, the

persecution, the outrage of that mine; he occupied whole pages in the exposition of the fatal consequences attaching to the possession of that mine from every point of view, with every dismal inference, with words of horror at the apparently eternal character of that curse. For the Concession had been granted to him and his descendants for ever. He implored his son never to return to Costaguana, never to claim any part of his inheritance there, because it was tainted by the infamous Concession; never to touch it, never to approach it, to forget that America existed, and pursue a mercantile career in Europe. And each letter ended with bitter self-reproaches for having stayed too long in that cavern of thieves, intriguers, and brigands.

To be told repeatedly that one's future is blighted because of the possession of a silver mine is not, at the age of fourteen, a matter of prime importance as to its main statement; but in its form it is calculated to excite a certain amount of wonder and attention. In course of time the boy, at first only puzzled by the angry jeremiads, but rather sorry for his dad, began to turn the matter over in his mind in such moments as he could spare from play and study. In about a year he had evolved from the lecture of the letters a definite conviction that there was a silver mine in the Sulaco province of the Republic of Costaguana, where poor Uncle Harry had been shot by soldiers a great many years before. There was also connected closely with that mine a thing called the "iniquitous Gould Concession," apparently written on a paper which his father desired ardently to "tear and fling into the faces" of presidents, members of judicature, and ministers of State. And this desire persisted, though the names of these people, he noticed, seldom remained the same for a whole year together. This desire (since the thing was iniquitous) seemed quite natural to the boy, though why the affair was iniquitous he did not know. Afterwards, with advancing wisdom, he managed to clear the plain truth of the business from the fantastic intrusions of the Old Man of the Sea, vampires, and ghouls, which had lent to his father's correspondence the flavour of a gruesome Arabian Nights tale. In the end, the growing youth attained to as close an intimacy with the San Tome mine as the old man who wrote these plaintive and enraged letters on the other side of the sea. He had been made several times already to pay heavy fines for neglecting to work the mine, he reported, besides other sums extracted from him on account of future royalties, on the ground that a man with such a valuable concession in his pocket could not refuse his financial assistance to the Government of the Republic. The last of his fortune was passing away from him against worthless receipts, he wrote, in a rage, whilst he was being pointed out as an individual who had known how to secure enormous advantages from the necessities of his country. And the young man in Europe grew more and more interested in that thing which could provoke such a tumult of words and passion.

He thought of it every day; but he thought of it without bitterness. It might have been an unfortunate affair for his poor dad, and the whole story threw a queer light upon the social and political life of Costaguana. The view he took of it was sympathetic to his father, yet calm and reflective. His personal feelings had not been outraged, and it is difficult to resent with proper and durable indignation the physical or mental

anguish of another organism, even if that other organism is one's own father. By the time he was twenty Charles Gould had, in his turn, fallen under the spell of the San Tome mine. But it was another form of enchantment, more suitable to his youth, into whose magic formula there entered hope, vigour, and self-confidence, instead of weary indignation and despair. Left after he was twenty to his own guidance (except for the severe injunction not to return to Costaguana), he had pursued his studies in Belgium and France with the idea of qualifying for a mining engineer. But this scientific aspect of his labours remained vague and imperfect in his mind. Mines had acquired for him a dramatic interest. He studied their peculiarities from a personal point of view, too, as one would study the varied characters of men. He visited them as one goes with curiosity to call upon remarkable persons. He visited mines in Germany, in Spain, in Cornwall. Abandoned workings had for him strong fascination. Their desolation appealed to him like the sight of human misery, whose causes are varied and profound. They might have been worthless, but also they might have been misunderstood. His future wife was the first, and perhaps the only person to detect this secret mood which governed the profoundly sensible, almost voiceless attitude of this man towards the world of material things. And at once her delight in him, lingering with half-open wings like those birds that cannot rise easily from a flat level, found a pinnacle from which to soar up into the skies.

They had become acquainted in Italy, where the future Mrs. Gould was staying with an old and pale aunt who, years before, had married a middle-aged, impoverished Italian marquis. She now mourned that man, who had known how to give up his life to the independence and unity of his country, who had known how to be as enthusiastic in his generosity as the youngest of those who fell for that very cause of which old Giorgio Viola was a drifting relic, as a broken spar is suffered to float away disregarded after a naval victory. The Marchesa led a still, whispering existence, nun-like in her black robes and a white band over the forehead, in a corner of the first floor of an ancient and ruinous palace, whose big, empty halls downstairs sheltered under their painted ceilings the harvests, the fowls, and even the cattle, together with the whole family of the tenant farmer.

The two young people had met in Lucca. After that meeting Charles Gould visited no mines, though they went together in a carriage, once, to see some marble quarries, where the work resembled mining in so far that it also was the tearing of the raw material of treasure from the earth. Charles Gould did not open his heart to her in any set speeches. He simply went on acting and thinking in her sight. This is the true method of sincerity. One of his frequent remarks was, "I think sometimes that poor father takes a wrong view of that San Tome business." And they discussed that opinion long and earnestly, as if they could influence a mind across half the globe; but in reality they discussed it because the sentiment of love can enter into any subject and live ardently in remote phrases. For this natural reason these discussions were precious to Mrs. Gould in her engaged state. Charles feared that Mr. Gould, senior, was wasting his strength and making himself ill by his efforts to get rid of the Concession. "I fancy

that this is not the kind of handling it requires," he mused aloud, as if to himself. And when she wondered frankly that a man of character should devote his energies to plotting and intrigues, Charles would remark, with a gentle concern that understood her wonder, "You must not forget that he was born there."

She would set her quick mind to work upon that, and then make the inconsequent retort, which he accepted as perfectly sagacious, because, in fact, it was so —

"Well, and you? You were born there, too."

He knew his answer.

"That's different. I've been away ten years. Dad never had such a long spell; and it was more than thirty years ago."

She was the first person to whom he opened his lips after receiving the news of his father's death.

"It has killed him!" he said.

He had walked straight out of town with the news, straight out before him in the noonday sun on the white road, and his feet had brought him face to face with her in the hall of the ruined palazzo, a room magnificent and naked, with here and there a long strip of damask, black with damp and age, hanging down on a bare panel of the wall. It was furnished with exactly one gilt armchair, with a broken back, and an octagon columnar stand bearing a heavy marble vase ornamented with sculptured masks and garlands of flowers, and cracked from top to bottom. Charles Gould was dusty with the white dust of the road lying on his boots, on his shoulders, on his cap with two peaks. Water dripped from under it all over his face, and he grasped a thick oaken cudgel in his bare right hand.

She went very pale under the roses of her big straw hat, gloved, swinging a clear sunshade, caught just as she was going out to meet him at the bottom of the hill, where three poplars stand near the wall of a vineyard.

"It has killed him!" he repeated. "He ought to have had many years yet. We are a long-lived family."

She was too startled to say anything; he was contemplating with a penetrating and motionless stare the cracked marble urn as though he had resolved to fix its shape for ever in his memory. It was only when, turning suddenly to her, he blurted out twice, "I've come to you — I've come straight to you — ," without being able to finish his phrase, that the great pitifulness of that lonely and tormented death in Costaguana came to her with the full force of its misery. He caught hold of her hand, raised it to his lips, and at that she dropped her parasol to pat him on the cheek, murmured "Poor boy," and began to dry her eyes under the downward curve of her hat-brim, very small in her simple, white frock, almost like a lost child crying in the degraded grandeur of the noble hall, while he stood by her, again perfectly motionless in the contemplation of the marble urn.

Afterwards they went out for a long walk, which was silent till he exclaimed suddenly

"Yes. But if he had only grappled with it in a proper way!"

And then they stopped. Everywhere there were long shadows lying on the hills, on the roads, on the enclosed fields of olive trees; the shadows of poplars, of wide chestnuts, of farm buildings, of stone walls; and in mid-air the sound of a bell, thin and alert, was like the throbbing pulse of the sunset glow. Her lips were slightly parted as though in surprise that he should not be looking at her with his usual expression. His usual expression was unconditionally approving and attentive. He was in his talks with her the most anxious and deferential of dictators, an attitude that pleased her immensely. It affirmed her power without detracting from his dignity. That slight girl, with her little feet, little hands, little face attractively overweighted by great coils of hair; with a rather large mouth, whose mere parting seemed to breathe upon you the fragrance of frankness and generosity, had the fastidious soul of an experienced woman. She was, before all things and all flatteries, careful of her pride in the object of her choice. But now he was actually not looking at her at all; and his expression was tense and irrational, as is natural in a man who elects to stare at nothing past a young girl's head.

"Well, yes. It was iniquitous. They corrupted him thoroughly, the poor old boy. Oh! why wouldn't he let me go back to him? But now I shall know how to grapple with this."

After pronouncing these words with immense assurance, he glanced down at her, and at once fell a prey to distress, incertitude, and fear.

The only thing he wanted to know now, he said, was whether she did love him enough — whether she would have the courage to go with him so far away? He put these questions to her in a voice that trembled with anxiety — for he was a determined man.

She did. She would. And immediately the future hostess of all the Europeans in Sulaco had the physical experience of the earth falling away from under her. It vanished completely, even to the very sound of the bell. When her feet touched the ground again, the bell was still ringing in the valley; she put her hands up to her hair, breathing quickly, and glanced up and down the stony lane. It was reassuringly empty. Meantime, Charles, stepping with one foot into a dry and dusty ditch, picked up the open parasol, which had bounded away from them with a martial sound of drum taps. He handed it to her soberly, a little crestfallen.

They turned back, and after she had slipped her hand on his arm, the first words he pronounced were —

"It's lucky that we shall be able to settle in a coast town. You've heard its name. It is Sulaco. I am so glad poor father did get that house. He bought a big house there years ago, in order that there should always be a Casa Gould in the principal town of what used to be called the Occidental Province. I lived there once, as a small boy, with my dear mother, for a whole year, while poor father was away in the United States on business. You shall be the new mistress of the Casa Gould."

And later, in the inhabited corner of the Palazzo above the vineyards, the marble hills, the pines and olives of Lucca, he also said —

“The name of Gould has been always highly respected in Sulaco. My uncle Harry was chief of the State for some time, and has left a great name amongst the first families. By this I mean the pure Creole families, who take no part in the miserable farce of governments. Uncle Harry was no adventurer. In Costaguana we Goulds are no adventurers. He was of the country, and he loved it, but he remained essentially an Englishman in his ideas. He made use of the political cry of his time. It was Federation. But he was no politician. He simply stood up for social order out of pure love for rational liberty and from his hate of oppression. There was no nonsense about him. He went to work in his own way because it seemed right, just as I feel I must lay hold of that mine.”

In such words he talked to her because his memory was very full of the country of his childhood, his heart of his life with that girl, and his mind of the San Tome Concession. He added that he would have to leave her for a few days to find an American, a man from San Francisco, who was still somewhere in Europe. A few months before he had made his acquaintance in an old historic German town, situated in a mining district. The American had his womankind with him, but seemed lonely while they were sketching all day long the old doorways and the turreted corners of the mediaeval houses. Charles Gould had with him the inseparable companionship of the mine. The other man was interested in mining enterprises, knew something of Costaguana, and was no stranger to the name of Gould. They had talked together with some intimacy which was made possible by the difference of their ages. Charles wanted now to find that capitalist of shrewd mind and accessible character. His father's fortune in Costaguana, which he had supposed to be still considerable, seemed to have melted in the rascally crucible of revolutions. Apart from some ten thousand pounds deposited in England, there appeared to be nothing left except the house in Sulaco, a vague right of forest exploitation in a remote and savage district, and the San Tome Concession, which had attended his poor father to the very brink of the grave.

He explained those things. It was late when they parted. She had never before given him such a fascinating vision of herself. All the eagerness of youth for a strange life, for great distances, for a future in which there was an air of adventure, of combat — a subtle thought of redress and conquest, had filled her with an intense excitement, which she returned to the giver with a more open and exquisite display of tenderness.

He left her to walk down the hill, and directly he found himself alone he became sober. That irreparable change a death makes in the course of our daily thoughts can be felt in a vague and poignant discomfort of mind. It hurt Charles Gould to feel that never more, by no effort of will, would he be able to think of his father in the same way he used to think of him when the poor man was alive. His breathing image was no longer in his power. This consideration, closely affecting his own identity, filled his breast with a mournful and angry desire for action. In this his instinct was unerring. Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates. For his action, the mine was obviously the only field. It was imperative sometimes

to know how to disobey the solemn wishes of the dead. He resolved firmly to make his disobedience as thorough (by way of atonement) as it well could be. The mine had been the cause of an absurd moral disaster; its working must be made a serious and moral success. He owed it to the dead man's memory. Such were the — properly speaking — emotions of Charles Gould. His thoughts ran upon the means of raising a large amount of capital in San Francisco or elsewhere; and incidentally there occurred to him also the general reflection that the counsel of the departed must be an unsound guide. Not one of them could be aware beforehand what enormous changes the death of any given individual may produce in the very aspect of the world.

The latest phase in the history of the mine Mrs. Gould knew from personal experience. It was in essence the history of her married life. The mantle of the Goulds' hereditary position in Sulaco had descended amply upon her little person; but she would not allow the peculiarities of the strange garment to weigh down the vivacity of her character, which was the sign of no mere mechanical sprightliness, but of an eager intelligence. It must not be supposed that Mrs. Gould's mind was masculine. A woman with a masculine mind is not a being of superior efficiency; she is simply a phenomenon of imperfect differentiation — interestingly barren and without importance. Dona Emilia's intelligence being feminine led her to achieve the conquest of Sulaco, simply by lighting the way for her unselfishness and sympathy. She could converse charmingly, but she was not talkative. The wisdom of the heart having no concern with the erection or demolition of theories any more than with the defence of prejudices, has no random words at its command. The words it pronounces have the value of acts of integrity, tolerance, and compassion. A woman's true tenderness, like the true virility of man, is expressed in action of a conquering kind. The ladies of Sulaco adored Mrs. Gould. "They still look upon me as something of a monster," Mrs. Gould had said pleasantly to one of the three gentlemen from San Francisco she had to entertain in her new Sulaco house just about a year after her marriage.

They were her first visitors from abroad, and they had come to look at the San Tome mine. She jested most agreeably, they thought; and Charles Gould, besides knowing thoroughly what he was about, had shown himself a real hustler. These facts caused them to be well disposed towards his wife. An unmistakable enthusiasm, pointed by a slight flavour of irony, made her talk of the mine absolutely fascinating to her visitors, and provoked them to grave and indulgent smiles in which there was a good deal of deference. Perhaps had they known how much she was inspired by an idealistic view of success they would have been amazed at the state of her mind as the Spanish-American ladies had been amazed at the tireless activity of her body. She would — in her own words — have been for them "something of a monster." However, the Goulds were in essentials a reticent couple, and their guests departed without the suspicion of any other purpose but simple profit in the working of a silver mine. Mrs. Gould had out her own carriage, with two white mules, to drive them down to the harbour, whence the *Ceres* was to carry them off into the Olympus of plutocrats. Captain Mitchell had

snatched at the occasion of leave-taking to remark to Mrs. Gould, in a low, confidential mutter, "This marks an epoch."

Mrs. Gould loved the patio of her Spanish house. A broad flight of stone steps was overlooked silently from a niche in the wall by a Madonna in blue robes with the crowned child sitting on her arm. Subdued voices ascended in the early mornings from the paved well of the quadrangle, with the stamping of horses and mules led out in pairs to drink at the cistern. A tangle of slender bamboo stems drooped its narrow, blade-like leaves over the square pool of water, and the fat coachman sat muffled up on the edge, holding lazily the ends of halters in his hand. Barefooted servants passed to and fro, issuing from dark, low doorways below; two laundry girls with baskets of washed linen; the baker with the tray of bread made for the day; Leonarda — her own camerista — bearing high up, swung from her hand raised above her raven black head, a bunch of starched under-skirts dazzlingly white in the slant of sunshine. Then the old porter would hobble in, sweeping the flagstones, and the house was ready for the day. All the lofty rooms on three sides of the quadrangle opened into each other and into the corredor, with its wrought-iron railings and a border of flowers, whence, like the lady of the mediaeval castle, she could witness from above all the departures and arrivals of the Casa, to which the sonorous arched gateway lent an air of stately importance.

She had watched her carriage roll away with the three guests from the north. She smiled. Their three arms went up simultaneously to their three hats. Captain Mitchell, the fourth, in attendance, had already begun a pompous discourse. Then she lingered. She lingered, approaching her face to the clusters of flowers here and there as if to give time to her thoughts to catch up with her slow footsteps along the straight vista of the corredor.

A fringed Indian hammock from Aroa, gay with coloured featherwork, had been swung judiciously in a corner that caught the early sun; for the mornings are cool in Sulaco. The cluster of flor de noche buena blazed in great masses before the open glass doors of the reception rooms. A big green parrot, brilliant like an emerald in a cage that flashed like gold, screamed out ferociously, "Viva Costaguana!" then called twice mellifluously, "Leonarda! Leonarda!" in imitation of Mrs. Gould's voice, and suddenly took refuge in immobility and silence. Mrs. Gould reached the end of the gallery and put her head through the door of her husband's room.

Charles Gould, with one foot on a low wooden stool, was already strapping his spurs. He wanted to hurry back to the mine. Mrs. Gould, without coming in, glanced about the room. One tall, broad bookcase, with glass doors, was full of books; but in the other, without shelves, and lined with red baize, were arranged firearms: Winchester carbines, revolvers, a couple of shot-guns, and even two pairs of double-barrelled holster pistols. Between them, by itself, upon a strip of scarlet velvet, hung an old cavalry sabre, once the property of Don Enrique Gould, the hero of the Occidental Province, presented by Don Jose Avellanos, the hereditary friend of the family.

Otherwise, the plastered white walls were completely bare, except for a water-colour sketch of the San Tome mountain — the work of Dona Emilia herself. In the middle of the red-tiled floor stood two long tables littered with plans and papers, a few chairs, and a glass show-case containing specimens of ore from the mine. Mrs. Gould, looking at all these things in turn, wondered aloud why the talk of these wealthy and enterprising men discussing the prospects, the working, and the safety of the mine rendered her so impatient and uneasy, whereas she could talk of the mine by the hour with her husband with unwearied interest and satisfaction. And dropping her eyelids expressively, she added —

“What do you feel about it, Charley?”

Then, surprised at her husband’s silence, she raised her eyes, opened wide, as pretty as pale flowers. He had done with the spurs, and, twisting his moustache with both hands, horizontally, he contemplated her from the height of his long legs with a visible appreciation of her appearance. The consciousness of being thus contemplated pleased Mrs. Gould.

“They are considerable men,” he said.

“I know. But have you listened to their conversation? They don’t seem to have understood anything they have seen here.”

“They have seen the mine. They have understood that to some purpose,” Charles Gould interjected, in defence of the visitors; and then his wife mentioned the name of the most considerable of the three. He was considerable in finance and in industry. His name was familiar to many millions of people. He was so considerable that he would never have travelled so far away from the centre of his activity if the doctors had not insisted, with veiled menaces, on his taking a long holiday.

“Mr. Holroyd’s sense of religion,” Mrs. Gould pursued, “was shocked and disgusted at the tawdriness of the dressed-up saints in the cathedral — the worship, he called it, of wood and tinsel. But it seemed to me that he looked upon his own God as a sort of influential partner, who gets his share of profits in the endowment of churches. That’s a sort of idolatry. He told me he endowed churches every year, Charley.”

“No end of them,” said Mr. Gould, marvelling inwardly at the mobility of her physiognomy. “All over the country. He’s famous for that sort of munificence.” “Oh, he didn’t boast,” Mrs. Gould declared, scrupulously. “I believe he’s really a good man, but so stupid! A poor Chulo who offers a little silver arm or leg to thank his god for a cure is as rational and more touching.”

“He’s at the head of immense silver and iron interests,” Charles Gould observed.

“Ah, yes! The religion of silver and iron. He’s a very civil man, though he looked awfully solemn when he first saw the Madonna on the staircase, who’s only wood and paint; but he said nothing to me. My dear Charley, I heard those men talk among themselves. Can it be that they really wish to become, for an immense consideration, drawers of water and hewers of wood to all the countries and nations of the earth?”

“A man must work to some end,” Charles Gould said, vaguely.

Mrs. Gould, frowning, surveyed him from head to foot. With his riding breeches, leather leggings (an article of apparel never before seen in Costaguana), a Norfolk coat of grey flannel, and those great flaming moustaches, he suggested an officer of cavalry turned gentleman farmer. This combination was gratifying to Mrs. Gould's tastes. "How thin the poor boy is!" she thought. "He overworks himself." But there was no denying that his fine-drawn, keen red face, and his whole, long-limbed, lank person had an air of breeding and distinction. And Mrs. Gould relented.

"I only wondered what you felt," she murmured, gently.

During the last few days, as it happened, Charles Gould had been kept too busy thinking twice before he spoke to have paid much attention to the state of his feelings. But theirs was a successful match, and he had no difficulty in finding his answer.

"The best of my feelings are in your keeping, my dear," he said, lightly; and there was so much truth in that obscure phrase that he experienced towards her at the moment a great increase of gratitude and tenderness.

Mrs. Gould, however, did not seem to find this answer in the least obscure. She brightened up delicately; already he had changed his tone.

"But there are facts. The worth of the mine — as a mine — is beyond doubt. It shall make us very wealthy. The mere working of it is a matter of technical knowledge, which I have — which ten thousand other men in the world have. But its safety, its continued existence as an enterprise, giving a return to men — to strangers, comparative strangers — who invest money in it, is left altogether in my hands. I have inspired confidence in a man of wealth and position. You seem to think this perfectly natural — do you? Well, I don't know. I don't know why I have; but it is a fact. This fact makes everything possible, because without it I would never have thought of disregarding my father's wishes. I would never have disposed of the Concession as a speculator disposes of a valuable right to a company — for cash and shares, to grow rich eventually if possible, but at any rate to put some money at once in his pocket. No. Even if it had been feasible — which I doubt — I would not have done so. Poor father did not understand. He was afraid I would hang on to the ruinous thing, waiting for just some such chance, and waste my life miserably. That was the true sense of his prohibition, which we have deliberately set aside."

They were walking up and down the corridor. Her head just reached to his shoulder. His arm, extended downwards, was about her waist. His spurs jingled slightly.

"He had not seen me for ten years. He did not know me. He parted from me for my sake, and he would never let me come back. He was always talking in his letters of leaving Costaguana, of abandoning everything and making his escape. But he was too valuable a prey. They would have thrown him into one of their prisons at the first suspicion."

His spurred feet clinked slowly. He was bending over his wife as they walked. The big parrot, turning its head askew, followed their pacing figures with a round, unblinking eye.

“He was a lonely man. Ever since I was ten years old he used to talk to me as if I had been grown up. When I was in Europe he wrote to me every month. Ten, twelve pages every month of my life for ten years. And, after all, he did not know me! Just think of it — ten whole years away; the years I was growing up into a man. He could not know me. Do you think he could?”

Mrs. Gould shook her head negatively; which was just what her husband had expected from the strength of the argument. But she shook her head negatively only because she thought that no one could know her Charles — really know him for what he was but herself. The thing was obvious. It could be felt. It required no argument. And poor Mr. Gould, senior, who had died too soon to ever hear of their engagement, remained too shadowy a figure for her to be credited with knowledge of any sort whatever.

“No, he did not understand. In my view this mine could never have been a thing to sell. Never! After all his misery I simply could not have touched it for money alone,” Charles Gould pursued: and she pressed her head to his shoulder approvingly.

These two young people remembered the life which had ended wretchedly just when their own lives had come together in that splendour of hopeful love, which to the most sensible minds appears like a triumph of good over all the evils of the earth. A vague idea of rehabilitation had entered the plan of their life. That it was so vague as to elude the support of argument made it only the stronger. It had presented itself to them at the instant when the woman’s instinct of devotion and the man’s instinct of activity receive from the strongest of illusions their most powerful impulse. The very prohibition imposed the necessity of success. It was as if they had been morally bound to make good their vigorous view of life against the unnatural error of weariness and despair. If the idea of wealth was present to them it was only in so far as it was bound with that other success. Mrs. Gould, an orphan from early childhood and without fortune, brought up in an atmosphere of intellectual interests, had never considered the aspects of great wealth. They were too remote, and she had not learned that they were desirable. On the other hand, she had not known anything of absolute want. Even the very poverty of her aunt, the Marchesa, had nothing intolerable to a refined mind; it seemed in accord with a great grief: it had the austerity of a sacrifice offered to a noble ideal. Thus even the most legitimate touch of materialism was wanting in Mrs. Gould’s character. The dead man of whom she thought with tenderness (because he was Charley’s father) and with some impatience (because he had been weak), must be put completely in the wrong. Nothing else would do to keep their prosperity without a stain on its only real, on its immaterial side!

Charles Gould, on his part, had been obliged to keep the idea of wealth well to the fore; but he brought it forward as a means, not as an end. Unless the mine was good business it could not be touched. He had to insist on that aspect of the enterprise. It was his lever to move men who had capital. And Charles Gould believed in the mine. He knew everything that could be known of it. His faith in the mine was contagious, though it was not served by a great eloquence; but business men are frequently as san-

guine and imaginative as lovers. They are affected by a personality much oftener than people would suppose; and Charles Gould, in his unshaken assurance, was absolutely convincing. Besides, it was a matter of common knowledge to the men to whom he addressed himself that mining in Costaguana was a game that could be made considerably more than worth the candle. The men of affairs knew that very well. The real difficulty in touching it was elsewhere. Against that there was an implication of calm and implacable resolution in Charles Gould's very voice. Men of affairs venture sometimes on acts that the common judgment of the world would pronounce absurd; they make their decisions on apparently impulsive and human grounds. "Very well," had said the considerable personage to whom Charles Gould on his way out through San Francisco had lucidly exposed his point of view. "Let us suppose that the mining affairs of Sulaco are taken in hand. There would then be in it: first, the house of Holroyd, which is all right; then, Mr. Charles Gould, a citizen of Costaguana, who is also all right; and, lastly, the Government of the Republic. So far this resembles the first start of the Atacama nitrate fields, where there was a financing house, a gentleman of the name of Edwards, and — a Government; or, rather, two Governments — two South American Governments. And you know what came of it. War came of it; devastating and prolonged war came of it, Mr. Gould. However, here we possess the advantage of having only one South American Government hanging around for plunder out of the deal. It is an advantage; but then there are degrees of badness, and that Government is the Costaguana Government."

Thus spoke the considerable personage, the millionaire endower of churches on a scale befitting the greatness of his native land — the same to whom the doctors used the language of horrid and veiled menaces. He was a big-limbed, deliberate man, whose quiet burliness lent to an ample silk-faced frock-coat a superfine dignity. His hair was iron grey, his eyebrows were still black, and his massive profile was the profile of a Caesar's head on an old Roman coin. But his parentage was German and Scotch and English, with remote strains of Danish and French blood, giving him the temperament of a Puritan and an insatiable imagination of conquest. He was completely unbending to his visitor, because of the warm introduction the visitor had brought from Europe, and because of an irrational liking for earnestness and determination wherever met, to whatever end directed.

"The Costaguana Government shall play its hand for all it's worth — and don't you forget it, Mr. Gould. Now, what is Costaguana? It is the bottomless pit of 10 per cent. loans and other fool investments. European capital has been flung into it with both hands for years. Not ours, though. We in this country know just about enough to keep indoors when it rains. We can sit and watch. Of course, some day we shall step in. We are bound to. But there's no hurry. Time itself has got to wait on the greatest country in the whole of God's Universe. We shall be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith's Sound, and beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands

and continents of the earth. We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it — and neither can we, I guess.”

By this he meant to express his faith in destiny in words suitable to his intelligence, which was unskilled in the presentation of general ideas. His intelligence was nourished on facts; and Charles Gould, whose imagination had been permanently affected by the one great fact of a silver mine, had no objection to this theory of the world's future. If it had seemed distasteful for a moment it was because the sudden statement of such vast eventualities dwarfed almost to nothingness the actual matter in hand. He and his plans and all the mineral wealth of the Occidental Province appeared suddenly robbed of every vestige of magnitude. The sensation was disagreeable; but Charles Gould was not dull. Already he felt that he was producing a favourable impression; the consciousness of that flattering fact helped him to a vague smile, which his big interlocutor took for a smile of discreet and admiring assent. He smiled quietly, too; and immediately Charles Gould, with that mental agility mankind will display in defence of a cherished hope, reflected that the very apparent insignificance of his aim would help him to success. His personality and his mine would be taken up because it was a matter of no great consequence, one way or another, to a man who referred his action to such a prodigious destiny. And Charles Gould was not humiliated by this consideration, because the thing remained as big as ever for him. Nobody else's vast conceptions of destiny could diminish the aspect of his desire for the redemption of the San Tome mine. In comparison to the correctness of his aim, definite in space and absolutely attainable within a limited time, the other man appeared for an instant as a dreamy idealist of no importance.

The great man, massive and benignant, had been looking at him thoughtfully; when he broke the short silence it was to remark that concessions flew about thick in the air of Costaguana. Any simple soul that just yearned to be taken in could bring down a concession at the first shot.

“Our consuls get their mouths stopped with them,” he continued, with a twinkle of genial scorn in his eyes. But in a moment he became grave. “A conscientious, upright man, that cares nothing for boodle, and keeps clear of their intrigues, conspiracies, and factions, soon gets his passports. See that, Mr. Gould? *Persona non grata*. That's the reason our Government is never properly informed. On the other hand, Europe must be kept out of this continent, and for proper interference on our part the time is not yet ripe, I dare say. But we here — we are not this country's Government, neither are we simple souls. Your affair is all right. The main question for us is whether the second partner, and that's you, is the right sort to hold his own against the third and unwelcome partner, which is one or another of the high and mighty robber gangs that run the Costaguana Government. What do you think, Mr. Gould, eh?”

He bent forward to look steadily into the unflinching eyes of Charles Gould, who, remembering the large box full of his father's letters, put the accumulated scorn and bitterness of many years into the tone of his answer —

“As far as the knowledge of these men and their methods and their politics is concerned, I can answer for myself. I have been fed on that sort of knowledge since I was a boy. I am not likely to fall into mistakes from excess of optimism.”

“Not likely, eh? That’s all right. Tact and a stiff upper lip is what you’ll want; and you could bluff a little on the strength of your backing. Not too much, though. We will go with you as long as the thing runs straight. But we won’t be drawn into any large trouble. This is the experiment which I am willing to make. There is some risk, and we will take it; but if you can’t keep up your end, we will stand our loss, of course, and then — we’ll let the thing go. This mine can wait; it has been shut up before, as you know. You must understand that under no circumstances will we consent to throw good money after bad.”

Thus the great personage had spoken then, in his own private office, in a great city where other men (very considerable in the eyes of a vain populace) waited with alacrity upon a wave of his hand. And rather more than a year later, during his unexpected appearance in Sulaco, he had emphasized his uncompromising attitude with a freedom of sincerity permitted to his wealth and influence. He did this with the less reserve, perhaps, because the inspection of what had been done, and more still the way in which successive steps had been taken, had impressed him with the conviction that Charles Gould was perfectly capable of keeping up his end.

“This young fellow,” he thought to himself, “may yet become a power in the land.”

This thought flattered him, for hitherto the only account of this young man he could give to his intimates was —

“My brother-in-law met him in one of these one-horse old German towns, near some mines, and sent him on to me with a letter. He’s one of the Costaguana Goulds, pure-bred Englishmen, but all born in the country. His uncle went into politics, was the last Provincial President of Sulaco, and got shot after a battle. His father was a prominent business man in Sta. Marta, tried to keep clear of their politics, and died ruined after a lot of revolutions. And that’s your Costaguana in a nutshell.”

Of course, he was too great a man to be questioned as to his motives, even by his intimates. The outside world was at liberty to wonder respectfully at the hidden meaning of his actions. He was so great a man that his lavish patronage of the “purer forms of Christianity” (which in its naive form of church-building amused Mrs. Gould) was looked upon by his fellow-citizens as the manifestation of a pious and humble spirit. But in his own circles of the financial world the taking up of such a thing as the San Tome mine was regarded with respect, indeed, but rather as a subject for discreet jocularity. It was a great man’s caprice. In the great Holroyd building (an enormous pile of iron, glass, and blocks of stone at the corner of two streets, cobwebbed aloft by the radiation of telegraph wires) the heads of principal departments exchanged humorous glances, which meant that they were not let into the secrets of the San Tome business. The Costaguana mail (it was never large — one fairly heavy envelope) was taken unopened straight into the great man’s room, and no instructions dealing with it had ever been issued thence. The office whispered that he answered personally

— and not by dictation either, but actually writing in his own hand, with pen and ink, and, it was to be supposed, taking a copy in his own private press copy-book, inaccessible to profane eyes. Some scornful young men, insignificant pieces of minor machinery in that eleven-storey-high workshop of great affairs, expressed frankly their private opinion that the great chief had done at last something silly, and was ashamed of his folly; others, elderly and insignificant, but full of romantic reverence for the business that had devoured their best years, used to mutter darkly and knowingly that this was a portentous sign; that the Holroyd connection meant by-and-by to get hold of the whole Republic of Costaguana, lock, stock, and barrel. But, in fact, the hobby theory was the right one. It interested the great man to attend personally to the San Tome mine; it interested him so much that he allowed this hobby to give a direction to the first complete holiday he had taken for quite a startling number of years. He was not running a great enterprise there; no mere railway board or industrial corporation. He was running a man! A success would have pleased him very much on refreshingly novel grounds; but, on the other side of the same feeling, it was incumbent upon him to cast it off utterly at the first sign of failure. A man may be thrown off. The papers had unfortunately trumpeted all over the land his journey to Costaguana. If he was pleased at the way Charles Gould was going on, he infused an added grimness into his assurances of support. Even at the very last interview, half an hour or so before he rolled out of the patio, hat in hand, behind Mrs. Gould's white mules, he had said in Charles's room —

“You go ahead in your own way, and I shall know how to help you as long as you hold your own. But you may rest assured that in a given case we shall know how to drop you in time.”

To this Charles Gould's only answer had been: “You may begin sending out the machinery as soon as you like.”

And the great man had liked this imperturbable assurance. The secret of it was that to Charles Gould's mind these uncompromising terms were agreeable. Like this the mine preserved its identity, with which he had endowed it as a boy; and it remained dependent on himself alone. It was a serious affair, and he, too, took it grimly.

“Of course,” he said to his wife, alluding to this last conversation with the departed guest, while they walked slowly up and down the corredor, followed by the irritated eye of the parrot — “of course, a man of that sort can take up a thing or drop it when he likes. He will suffer from no sense of defeat. He may have to give in, or he may have to die to-morrow, but the great silver and iron interests will survive, and some day will get hold of Costaguana along with the rest of the world.”

They had stopped near the cage. The parrot, catching the sound of a word belonging to his vocabulary, was moved to interfere. Parrots are very human.

“Viva Costaguana!” he shrieked, with intense self-assertion, and, instantly ruffling up his feathers, assumed an air of puffed-up somnolence behind the glittering wires.

“And do you believe that, Charley?” Mrs. Gould asked. “This seems to me most awful materialism, and — ”

“My dear, it’s nothing to me,” interrupted her husband, in a reasonable tone. “I make use of what I see. What’s it to me whether his talk is the voice of destiny or simply a bit of clap-trap eloquence? There’s a good deal of eloquence of one sort or another produced in both Americas. The air of the New World seems favourable to the art of declamation. Have you forgotten how dear Avellanos can hold forth for hours here — ?”

“Oh, but that’s different,” protested Mrs. Gould, almost shocked. The allusion was not to the point. Don Jose was a dear good man, who talked very well, and was enthusiastic about the greatness of the San Tome mine. “How can you compare them, Charles?” she exclaimed, reproachfully. “He has suffered — and yet he hopes.”

The working competence of men — which she never questioned — was very surprising to Mrs. Gould, because upon so many obvious issues they showed themselves strangely muddle-headed.

Charles Gould, with a careworn calmness which secured for him at once his wife’s anxious sympathy, assured her that he was not comparing. He was an American himself, after all, and perhaps he could understand both kinds of eloquence — “if it were worth while to try,” he added, grimly. But he had breathed the air of England longer than any of his people had done for three generations, and really he begged to be excused. His poor father could be eloquent, too. And he asked his wife whether she remembered a passage in one of his father’s last letters where Mr. Gould had expressed the conviction that “God looked wrathfully at these countries, or else He would let some ray of hope fall through a rift in the appalling darkness of intrigue, bloodshed, and crime that hung over the Queen of Continents.”

Mrs. Gould had not forgotten. “You read it to me, Charley,” she murmured. “It was a striking pronouncement. How deeply your father must have felt its terrible sadness!”

“He did not like to be robbed. It exasperated him,” said Charles Gould. “But the image will serve well enough. What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Any one can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That’s how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That’s your ray of hope.” His arm pressed her slight form closer to his side for a moment. “And who knows whether in that sense even the San Tome mine may not become that little rift in the darkness which poor father despaired of ever seeing?”

She glanced up at him with admiration. He was competent; he had given a vast shape to the vagueness of her unselfish ambitions.

“Charley,” she said, “you are splendidly disobedient.”

He left her suddenly in the corridor to go and get his hat, a soft, grey sombrero, an article of national costume which combined unexpectedly well with his English get-up. He came back, a riding-whip under his arm, buttoning up a dogskin glove; his face

reflected the resolute nature of his thoughts. His wife had waited for him at the head of the stairs, and before he gave her the parting kiss he finished the conversation —

“What should be perfectly clear to us,” he said, “is the fact that there is no going back. Where could we begin life afresh? We are in now for all that there is in us.”

He bent over her upturned face very tenderly and a little remorsefully. Charles Gould was competent because he had no illusions. The Gould Concession had to fight for life with such weapons as could be found at once in the mire of a corruption that was so universal as almost to lose its significance. He was prepared to stoop for his weapons. For a moment he felt as if the silver mine, which had killed his father, had decoyed him further than he meant to go; and with the roundabout logic of emotions, he felt that the worthiness of his life was bound up with success. There was no going back.

Chapter 7

Mrs. Gould was too intelligently sympathetic not to share that feeling. It made life exciting, and she was too much of a woman not to like excitement. But it frightened her, too, a little; and when Don Jose Avellanos, rocking in the American chair, would go so far as to say, “Even, my dear Carlos, if you had failed; even if some untoward event were yet to destroy your work — which God forbid! — you would have deserved well of your country,” Mrs. Gould would look up from the tea-table profoundly at her unmoved husband stirring the spoon in the cup as though he had not heard a word.

Not that Don Jose anticipated anything of the sort. He could not praise enough dear Carlos’s tact and courage. His English, rock-like quality of character was his best safeguard, Don Jose affirmed; and, turning to Mrs. Gould, “As to you, Emilia, my soul” — he would address her with the familiarity of his age and old friendship — “you are as true a patriot as though you had been born in our midst.”

This might have been less or more than the truth. Mrs. Gould, accompanying her husband all over the province in the search for labour, had seen the land with a deeper glance than a trueborn Costaguanera could have done. In her travel-worn riding habit, her face powdered white like a plaster cast, with a further protection of a small silk mask during the heat of the day, she rode on a well-shaped, light-footed pony in the centre of a little cavalcade. Two *mozos de campo*, picturesque in great hats, with spurred bare heels, in white embroidered *calzoneras*, leather jackets and striped ponchos, rode ahead with carbines across their shoulders, swaying in unison to the pace of the horses. A *tropilla* of pack mules brought up the rear in charge of a thin brown muleteer, sitting his long-eared beast very near the tail, legs thrust far forward, the wide brim of his hat set far back, making a sort of halo for his head. An old Costaguana officer, a retired senior major of humble origin, but patronized by the first families on account of his Blanco opinions, had been recommended by Don Jose for commissary and organizer of that expedition. The points of his grey moustache hung far below his chin, and,

riding on Mrs. Gould's left hand, he looked about with kindly eyes, pointing out the features of the country, telling the names of the little pueblos and of the estates, of the smooth-walled haciendas like long fortresses crowning the knolls above the level of the Sulaco Valley. It unrolled itself, with green young crops, plains, woodland, and gleams of water, park-like, from the blue vapour of the distant sierra to an immense quivering horizon of grass and sky, where big white clouds seemed to fall slowly into the darkness of their own shadows.

Men ploughed with wooden ploughs and yoked oxen, small on a boundless expanse, as if attacking immensity itself. The mounted figures of vaqueros galloped in the distance, and the great herds fed with all their horned heads one way, in one single wavering line as far as eye could reach across the broad potreros. A spreading cotton-wool tree shaded a thatched ranche by the road; the trudging files of burdened Indians taking off their hats, would lift sad, mute eyes to the cavalcade raising the dust of the crumbling camino real made by the hands of their enslaved forefathers. And Mrs. Gould, with each day's journey, seemed to come nearer to the soul of the land in the tremendous disclosure of this interior unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast towns, a great land of plain and mountain and people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future in a pathetic immobility of patience.

She knew its sights and its hospitality, dispensed with a sort of slumbrous dignity in those great houses presenting long, blind walls and heavy portals to the wind-swept pastures. She was given the head of the tables, where masters and dependants sat in a simple and patriarchal state. The ladies of the house would talk softly in the moonlight under the orange trees of the courtyards, impressing upon her the sweetness of their voices and the something mysterious in the quietude of their lives. In the morning the gentlemen, well mounted in braided sombreros and embroidered riding suits, with much silver on the trappings of their horses, would ride forth to escort the departing guests before committing them, with grave good-byes, to the care of God at the boundary pillars of their estates. In all these households she could hear stories of political outrage; friends, relatives, ruined, imprisoned, killed in the battles of senseless civil wars, barbarously executed in ferocious proscriptions, as though the government of the country had been a struggle of lust between bands of absurd devils let loose upon the land with sabres and uniforms and grandiloquent phrases. And on all the lips she found a weary desire for peace, the dread of officialdom with its nightmarish parody of administration without law, without security, and without justice.

She bore a whole two months of wandering very well; she had that power of resistance to fatigue which one discovers here and there in some quite frail-looking women with surprise — like a state of possession by a remarkably stubborn spirit. Don Pepe — the old Costaguana major — after much display of solicitude for the delicate lady, had ended by conferring upon her the name of the "Never-tired Senora." Mrs. Gould was indeed becoming a Costaguanera. Having acquired in Southern Europe a knowledge of true peasantry, she was able to appreciate the great worth of the people. She saw the man under the silent, sad-eyed beast of burden. She saw them on the road carrying

loads, lonely figures upon the plain, toiling under great straw hats, with their white clothing flapping about their limbs in the wind; she remembered the villages by some group of Indian women at the fountain impressed upon her memory, by the face of some young Indian girl with a melancholy and sensual profile, raising an earthenware vessel of cool water at the door of a dark hut with a wooden porch cumbered with great brown jars. The solid wooden wheels of an ox-cart, halted with its shafts in the dust, showed the strokes of the axe; and a party of charcoal carriers, with each man's load resting above his head on the top of the low mud wall, slept stretched in a row within the strip of shade.

The heavy stonework of bridges and churches left by the conquerors proclaimed the disregard of human labour, the tribute-labour of vanished nations. The power of king and church was gone, but at the sight of some heavy ruinous pile overtopping from a knoll the low mud walls of a village, Don Pepe would interrupt the tale of his campaigns to exclaim —

“Poor Costaguana! Before, it was everything for the Padres, nothing for the people; and now it is everything for those great politicians in Sta. Marta, for negroes and thieves.”

Charles talked with the alcaldes, with the fiscales, with the principal people in towns, and with the caballeros on the estates. The commandantes of the districts offered him escorts — for he could show an authorization from the Sulaco political chief of the day. How much the document had cost him in gold twenty-dollar pieces was a secret between himself, a great man in the United States (who condescended to answer the Sulaco mail with his own hand), and a great man of another sort, with a dark olive complexion and shifty eyes, inhabiting then the Palace of the Intendencia in Sulaco, and who piqued himself on his culture and Europeanism generally in a rather French style because he had lived in Europe for some years — in exile, he said. However, it was pretty well known that just before this exile he had incautiously gambled away all the cash in the Custom House of a small port where a friend in power had procured for him the post of subcollector. That youthful indiscretion had, amongst other inconveniences, obliged him to earn his living for a time as a cafe waiter in Madrid; but his talents must have been great, after all, since they had enabled him to retrieve his political fortunes so splendidly. Charles Gould, exposing his business with an imperturbable steadiness, called him Excellency.

The provincial Excellency assumed a weary superiority, tilting his chair far back near an open window in the true Costaguana manner. The military band happened to be braying operatic selections on the plaza just then, and twice he raised his hand imperatively for silence in order to listen to a favourite passage.

“Exquisite, delicious!” he murmured; while Charles Gould waited, standing by with inscrutable patience. “Lucia, Lucia di Lammermoor! I am passionate for music. It transports me. Ha! the divine — ha! — Mozart. Si! divine . . . What is it you were saying?”

Of course, rumours had reached him already of the newcomer's intentions. Besides, he had received an official warning from Sta. Marta. His manner was intended simply

to conceal his curiosity and impress his visitor. But after he had locked up something valuable in the drawer of a large writing-desk in a distant part of the room, he became very affable, and walked back to his chair smartly.

“If you intend to build villages and assemble a population near the mine, you shall require a decree of the Minister of the Interior for that,” he suggested in a business-like manner.

“I have already sent a memorial,” said Charles Gould, steadily, “and I reckon now confidently upon your Excellency’s favourable conclusions.”

The Excellency was a man of many moods. With the receipt of the money a great mellowness had descended upon his simple soul. Unexpectedly he fetched a deep sigh.

“Ah, Don Carlos! What we want is advanced men like you in the province. The lethargy — the lethargy of these aristocrats! The want of public spirit! The absence of all enterprise! I, with my profound studies in Europe, you understand — ”

With one hand thrust into his swelling bosom, he rose and fell on his toes, and for ten minutes, almost without drawing breath, went on hurling himself intellectually to the assault of Charles Gould’s polite silence; and when, stopping abruptly, he fell back into his chair, it was as though he had been beaten off from a fortress. To save his dignity he hastened to dismiss this silent man with a solemn inclination of the head and the words, pronounced with moody, fatigued condescension —

“You may depend upon my enlightened goodwill as long as your conduct as a good citizen deserves it.”

He took up a paper fan and began to cool himself with a consequential air, while Charles Gould bowed and withdrew. Then he dropped the fan at once, and stared with an appearance of wonder and perplexity at the closed door for quite a long time. At last he shrugged his shoulders as if to assure himself of his disdain. Cold, dull. No intellectuality. Red hair. A true Englishman. He despised him.

His face darkened. What meant this unimpressed and frigid behaviour? He was the first of the successive politicians sent out from the capital to rule the Occidental Province whom the manner of Charles Gould in official intercourse was to strike as offensively independent.

Charles Gould assumed that if the appearance of listening to deplorable balderdash must form part of the price he had to pay for being left unmolested, the obligation of uttering balderdash personally was by no means included in the bargain. He drew the line there. To these provincial autocrats, before whom the peaceable population of all classes had been accustomed to tremble, the reserve of that English-looking engineer caused an uneasiness which swung to and fro between cringing and truculence. Gradually all of them discovered that, no matter what party was in power, that man remained in most effective touch with the higher authorities in Sta. Marta.

This was a fact, and it accounted perfectly for the Goulds being by no means so wealthy as the engineer-in-chief on the new railway could legitimately suppose. Following the advice of Don Jose Avellanos, who was a man of good counsel (though rendered timid by his horrible experiences of Guzman Bento’s time), Charles Gould

had kept clear of the capital; but in the current gossip of the foreign residents there he was known (with a good deal of seriousness underlying the irony) by the nickname of "King of Sulaco." An advocate of the Costaguana Bar, a man of reputed ability and good character, member of the distinguished Moraga family possessing extensive estates in the Sulaco Valley, was pointed out to strangers, with a shade of mystery and respect, as the agent of the San Tome mine — "political, you know." He was tall, black-whiskered, and discreet. It was known that he had easy access to ministers, and that the numerous Costaguana generals were always anxious to dine at his house. Presidents granted him audience with facility. He corresponded actively with his maternal uncle, Don Jose Avellanos; but his letters — unless those expressing formally his dutiful affection — were seldom entrusted to the Costaguana Post Office. There the envelopes are opened, indiscriminately, with the frankness of a brazen and childish impudence characteristic of some Spanish-American Governments. But it must be noted that at about the time of the re-opening of the San Tome mine the muleteer who had been employed by Charles Gould in his preliminary travels on the Campo added his small train of animals to the thin stream of traffic carried over the mountain passes between the Sta. Marta upland and the Valley of Sulaco. There are no travellers by that arduous and unsafe route unless under very exceptional circumstances, and the state of inland trade did not visibly require additional transport facilities; but the man seemed to find his account in it. A few packages were always found for him whenever he took the road. Very brown and wooden, in goatskin breeches with the hair outside, he sat near the tail of his own smart mule, his great hat turned against the sun, an expression of blissful vacancy on his long face, humming day after day a love-song in a plaintive key, or, without a change of expression, letting out a yell at his small tropilla in front. A round little guitar hung high up on his back; and there was a place scooped out artistically in the wood of one of his pack-saddles where a tightly rolled piece of paper could be slipped in, the wooden plug replaced, and the coarse canvas nailed on again. When in Sulaco it was his practice to smoke and doze all day long (as though he had no care in the world) on a stone bench outside the doorway of the Casa Gould and facing the windows of the Avellanos house. Years and years ago his mother had been chief laundry-woman in that family — very accomplished in the matter of clear-starching. He himself had been born on one of their haciendas. His name was Bonifacio, and Don Jose, crossing the street about five o'clock to call on Dona Emilia, always acknowledged his humble salute by some movement of hand or head. The porters of both houses conversed lazily with him in tones of grave intimacy. His evenings he devoted to gambling and to calls in a spirit of generous festivity upon the peyne d'oro girls in the more remote side-streets of the town. But he, too, was a discreet man.

Chapter 8

Those of us whom business or curiosity took to Sulaco in these years before the first advent of the railway can remember the steadying effect of the San Tome mine upon the life of that remote province. The outward appearances had not changed then as they have changed since, as I am told, with cable cars running along the streets of the Constitution, and carriage roads far into the country, to Rincon and other villages, where the foreign merchants and the Ricos generally have their modern villas, and a vast railway goods yard by the harbour, which has a quay-side, a long range of warehouses, and quite serious, organized labour troubles of its own.

Nobody had ever heard of labour troubles then. The Cargadores of the port formed, indeed, an unruly brotherhood of all sorts of scum, with a patron saint of their own. They went on strike regularly (every bull-fight day), a form of trouble that even Nostromo at the height of his prestige could never cope with efficiently; but the morning after each fiesta, before the Indian market-women had opened their mat parasols on the plaza, when the snows of Higueroa gleamed pale over the town on a yet black sky, the appearance of a phantom-like horseman mounted on a silver-grey mare solved the problem of labour without fail. His steed paced the lanes of the slums and the weed-grown enclosures within the old ramparts, between the black, lightless cluster of huts, like cow-byres, like dog-kennels. The horseman hammered with the butt of a heavy revolver at the doors of low pulperias, of obscene lean-to sheds sloping against the tumble-down piece of a noble wall, at the wooden sides of dwellings so flimsy that the sound of snores and sleepy mutters within could be heard in the pauses of the thundering clatter of his blows. He called out men's names menacingly from the saddle, once, twice. The drowsy answers — grumpy, conciliating, savage, jocular, or deprecating — came out into the silent darkness in which the horseman sat still, and presently a dark figure would flit out coughing in the still air. Sometimes a low-toned woman cried through the window-hole softly, "He's coming directly, *senor*," and the horseman waited silent on a motionless horse. But if perchance he had to dismount, then, after a while, from the door of that hovel or of that pulperia, with a ferocious scuffle and stifled imprecations, a *cargador* would fly out head first and hands abroad, to sprawl under the forelegs of the silver-grey mare, who only pricked forward her sharp little ears. She was used to that work; and the man, picking himself up, would walk away hastily from Nostromo's revolver, reeling a little along the street and snarling low curses. At sunrise Captain Mitchell, coming out anxiously in his night attire on to the wooden balcony running the whole length of the O.S.N. Company's lonely building by the shore, would see the lighters already under way, figures moving busily about the cargo cranes, perhaps hear the invaluable Nostromo, now dismounted and in the checked shirt and red sash of a Mediterranean sailor, bawling orders from the end of the jetty in a stentorian voice. A fellow in a thousand!

The material apparatus of perfected civilization which obliterates the individuality of old towns under the stereotyped conveniences of modern life had not intruded as yet;

but over the worn-out antiquity of Sulaco, so characteristic with its stuccoed houses and barred windows, with the great yellowy-white walls of abandoned convents behind the rows of sombre green cypresses, that fact — very modern in its spirit — the San Tome mine had already thrown its subtle influence. It had altered, too, the outward character of the crowds on feast days on the plaza before the open portal of the cathedral, by the number of white ponchos with a green stripe affected as holiday wear by the San Tome miners. They had also adopted white hats with green cord and braid — articles of good quality, which could be obtained in the storehouse of the administration for very little money. A peaceable Cholo wearing these colours (unusual in Costaguana) was somehow very seldom beaten to within an inch of his life on a charge of disrespect to the town police; neither ran he much risk of being suddenly lassoed on the road by a recruiting party of lanceros — a method of voluntary enlistment looked upon as almost legal in the Republic. Whole villages were known to have volunteered for the army in that way; but, as Don Pepe would say with a hopeless shrug to Mrs. Gould, “What would you! Poor people! Pobrecitos! Pobrecitos! But the State must have its soldiers.”

Thus professionally spoke Don Pepe, the fighter, with pendent moustaches, a nut-brown, lean face, and a clean run of a cast-iron jaw, suggesting the type of a cattle-herd horseman from the great Llanos of the South. “If you will listen to an old officer of Paez, senores,” was the exordium of all his speeches in the Aristocratic Club of Sulaco, where he was admitted on account of his past services to the extinct cause of Federation. The club, dating from the days of the proclamation of Costaguana’s independence, boasted many names of liberators amongst its first founders. Suppressed arbitrarily innumerable times by various Governments, with memories of proscriptions and of at least one wholesale massacre of its members, sadly assembled for a banquet by the order of a zealous military commandante (their bodies were afterwards stripped naked and flung into the plaza out of the windows by the lowest scum of the populace), it was again flourishing, at that period, peacefully. It extended to strangers the large hospitality of the cool, big rooms of its historic quarters in the front part of a house, once the residence of a high official of the Holy Office. The two wings, shut up, crumbled behind the nailed doors, and what may be described as a grove of young orange trees grown in the unpaved patio concealed the utter ruin of the back part facing the gate. You turned in from the street, as if entering a secluded orchard, where you came upon the foot of a disjointed staircase, guarded by a moss-stained effigy of some saintly bishop, mitred and staffed, and bearing the indignity of a broken nose meekly, with his fine stone hands crossed on his breast. The chocolate-coloured faces of servants with mops of black hair peeped at you from above; the click of billiard balls came to your ears, and ascending the steps, you would perhaps see in the first sala, very stiff upon a straight-backed chair, in a good light, Don Pepe moving his long moustaches as he spelt his way, at arm’s length, through an old Sta. Marta newspaper. His horse — a stony-hearted but persevering black brute with a hammer head — you would have

seen in the street dozing motionless under an immense saddle, with its nose almost touching the curbstone of the sidewalk.

Don Pepe, when "down from the mountain," as the phrase, often heard in Sulaco, went, could also be seen in the drawing-room of the Casa Gould. He sat with modest assurance at some distance from the tea-table. With his knees close together, and a kindly twinkle of drollery in his deep-set eyes, he would throw his small and ironic pleasantries into the current of conversation. There was in that man a sort of sane, humorous shrewdness, and a vein of genuine humanity so often found in simple old soldiers of proved courage who have seen much desperate service. Of course he knew nothing whatever of mining, but his employment was of a special kind. He was in charge of the whole population in the territory of the mine, which extended from the head of the gorge to where the cart track from the foot of the mountain enters the plain, crossing a stream over a little wooden bridge painted green — green, the colour of hope, being also the colour of the mine.

It was reported in Sulaco that up there "at the mountain" Don Pepe walked about precipitous paths, girt with a great sword and in a shabby uniform with tarnished bullion epaulettes of a senior major. Most miners being Indians, with big wild eyes, addressed him as Taita (father), as these barefooted people of Costaguana will address anybody who wears shoes; but it was Basilio, Mr. Gould's own mozo and the head servant of the Casa, who, in all good faith and from a sense of propriety, announced him once in the solemn words, "El Senor Gobernador has arrived."

Don Jose Avellanos, then in the drawing-room, was delighted beyond measure at the aptness of the title, with which he greeted the old major banteringly as soon as the latter's soldierly figure appeared in the doorway. Don Pepe only smiled in his long moustaches, as much as to say, "You might have found a worse name for an old soldier."

And El Senor Gobernador he had remained, with his small jokes upon his function and upon his domain, where he affirmed with humorous exaggeration to Mrs. Gould

"No two stones could come together anywhere without the Gobernador hearing the click, senora."

And he would tap his ear with the tip of his forefinger knowingly. Even when the number of the miners alone rose to over six hundred he seemed to know each of them individually, all the innumerable Joses, Manuels, Ignacios, from the villages primero — segundo — or tercero (there were three mining villages) under his government. He could distinguish them not only by their flat, joyless faces, which to Mrs. Gould looked all alike, as if run into the same ancestral mould of suffering and patience, but apparently also by the infinitely graduated shades of reddish-brown, of blackish-brown, of coppery-brown backs, as the two shifts, stripped to linen drawers and leather skull-caps, mingled together with a confusion of naked limbs, of shouldered picks, swinging lamps, in a great shuffle of sandalled feet on the open plateau before the entrance of the main tunnel. It was a time of pause. The Indian boys leaned idly against the long line of little cradle wagons standing empty; the screeners and ore-breakers squatted on their

heels smoking long cigars; the great wooden shoots slanting over the edge of the tunnel plateau were silent; and only the ceaseless, violent rush of water in the open flumes could be heard, murmuring fiercely, with the splash and rumble of revolving turbine-wheels, and the thudding march of the stamps pounding to powder the treasure rock on the plateau below. The heads of gangs, distinguished by brass medals hanging on their bare breasts, marshalled their squads; and at last the mountain would swallow one-half of the silent crowd, while the other half would move off in long files down the zigzag paths leading to the bottom of the gorge. It was deep; and, far below, a thread of vegetation winding between the blazing rock faces resembled a slender green cord, in which three lumpy knots of banana patches, palm-leaf roots, and shady trees marked the Village One, Village Two, Village Three, housing the miners of the Gould Concession.

Whole families had been moving from the first towards the spot in the Higuerota range, whence the rumour of work and safety had spread over the pastoral Campo, forcing its way also, even as the waters of a high flood, into the nooks and crannies of the distant blue walls of the Sierras. Father first, in a pointed straw hat, then the mother with the bigger children, generally also a diminutive donkey, all under burdens, except the leader himself, or perhaps some grown girl, the pride of the family, stepping barefooted and straight as an arrow, with braids of raven hair, a thick, haughty profile, and no load to carry but the small guitar of the country and a pair of soft leather sandals tied together on her back. At the sight of such parties strung out on the cross trails between the pastures, or camped by the side of the royal road, travellers on horseback would remark to each other —

“More people going to the San Tome mine. We shall see others to-morrow.”

And spurring on in the dusk they would discuss the great news of the province, the news of the San Tome mine. A rich Englishman was going to work it — and perhaps not an Englishman, *Quien sabe!* A foreigner with much money. Oh, yes, it had begun. A party of men who had been to Sulaco with a herd of black bulls for the next *corrida* had reported that from the porch of the *posada* in Rincon, only a short league from the town, the lights on the mountain were visible, twinkling above the trees. And there was a woman seen riding a horse sideways, not in the chair seat, but upon a sort of saddle, and a man’s hat on her head. She walked about, too, on foot up the mountain paths. A woman engineer, it seemed she was.

“What an absurdity! Impossible, *senor!*”

“*Si! Si! Una Americana del Norte.*”

“Ah, well! if your worship is informed. *Una Americana*; it need be something of that sort.”

And they would laugh a little with astonishment and scorn, keeping a wary eye on the shadows of the road, for one is liable to meet bad men when travelling late on the Campo.

And it was not only the men that Don Pepe knew so well, but he seemed able, with one attentive, thoughtful glance, to classify each woman, girl, or growing youth of his

domain. It was only the small fry that puzzled him sometimes. He and the padre could be seen frequently side by side, meditative and gazing across the street of a village at a lot of sedate brown children, trying to sort them out, as it were, in low, consulting tones, or else they would together put searching questions as to the parentage of some small, staid urchin met wandering, naked and grave, along the road with a cigar in his baby mouth, and perhaps his mother's rosary, purloined for purposes of ornamentation, hanging in a loop of beads low down on his rotund little stomach. The spiritual and temporal pastors of the mine flock were very good friends. With Dr. Monygham, the medical pastor, who had accepted the charge from Mrs. Gould, and lived in the hospital building, they were on not so intimate terms. But no one could be on intimate terms with El Senor Doctor, who, with his twisted shoulders, drooping head, sardonic mouth, and side-long bitter glance, was mysterious and uncanny. The other two authorities worked in harmony. Father Roman, dried-up, small, alert, wrinkled, with big round eyes, a sharp chin, and a great snuff-taker, was an old campaigner, too; he had shriven many simple souls on the battlefields of the Republic, kneeling by the dying on hillsides, in the long grass, in the gloom of the forests, to hear the last confession with the smell of gunpowder smoke in his nostrils, the rattle of muskets, the hum and spatter of bullets in his ears. And where was the harm if, at the presbytery, they had a game with a pack of greasy cards in the early evening, before Don Pepe went his last rounds to see that all the watchmen of the mine — a body organized by himself — were at their posts? For that last duty before he slept Don Pepe did actually gird his old sword on the verandah of an unmistakable American white frame house, which Father Roman called the presbytery. Near by, a long, low, dark building, steeple-roofed, like a vast barn with a wooden cross over the gable, was the miners' chapel. There Father Roman said Mass every day before a sombre altar-piece representing the Resurrection, the grey slab of the tombstone balanced on one corner, a figure soaring upwards, long-limbed and livid, in an oval of pallid light, and a helmeted brown legionary smitten down, right across the bituminous foreground. "This picture, my children, muy linda e maravillosa," Father Roman would say to some of his flock, "which you behold here through the munificence of the wife of our Senor Administrador, has been painted in Europe, a country of saints and miracles, and much greater than our Costaguana." And he would take a pinch of snuff with unction. But when once an inquisitive spirit desired to know in what direction this Europe was situated, whether up or down the coast, Father Roman, to conceal his perplexity, became very reserved and severe. "No doubt it is extremely far away. But ignorant sinners like you of the San Tome mine should think earnestly of everlasting punishment instead of inquiring into the magnitude of the earth, with its countries and populations altogether beyond your understanding."

With a "Good-night, Padre," "Good-night, Don Pepe," the Gobernador would go off, holding up his sabre against his side, his body bent forward, with a long, plodding stride in the dark. The jocularly proper to an innocent card game for a few cigars or a bundle of yerba was replaced at once by the stern duty mood of an officer setting out to visit the outposts of an encamped army. One loud blast of the whistle that hung

from his neck provoked instantly a great shrilling of responding whistles, mingled with the barking of dogs, that would calm down slowly at last, away up at the head of the gorge; and in the stillness two serenos, on guard by the bridge, would appear walking noiselessly towards him. On one side of the road a long frame building — the store — would be closed and barricaded from end to end; facing it another white frame house, still longer, and with a verandah — the hospital — would have lights in the two windows of Dr. Monygham's quarters. Even the delicate foliage of a clump of pepper trees did not stir, so breathless would be the darkness warmed by the radiation of the over-heated rocks. Don Pepe would stand still for a moment with the two motionless serenos before him, and, abruptly, high up on the sheer face of the mountain, dotted with single torches, like drops of fire fallen from the two great blazing clusters of lights above, the ore shoots would begin to rattle. The great clattering, shuffling noise, gathering speed and weight, would be caught up by the walls of the gorge, and sent upon the plain in a growl of thunder. The pasadero in Rincon swore that on calm nights, by listening intently, he could catch the sound in his doorway as of a storm in the mountains.

To Charles Gould's fancy it seemed that the sound must reach the uttermost limits of the province. Riding at night towards the mine, it would meet him at the edge of a little wood just beyond Rincon. There was no mistaking the growling mutter of the mountain pouring its stream of treasure under the stamps; and it came to his heart with the peculiar force of a proclamation thundered forth over the land and the marvellousness of an accomplished fact fulfilling an audacious desire. He had heard this very sound in his imagination on that far-off evening when his wife and himself, after a tortuous ride through a strip of forest, had reined in their horses near the stream, and had gazed for the first time upon the jungle-grown solitude of the gorge. The head of a palm rose here and there. In a high ravine round the corner of the San Tome mountain (which is square like a blockhouse) the thread of a slender waterfall flashed bright and glassy through the dark green of the heavy fronds of tree-ferns. Don Pepe, in attendance, rode up, and, stretching his arm up the gorge, had declared with mock solemnity, "Behold the very paradise of snakes, senora."

And then they had wheeled their horses and ridden back to sleep that night at Rincon. The alcalde — an old, skinny Moreno, a sergeant of Guzman Bento's time — had cleared respectfully out of his house with his three pretty daughters, to make room for the foreign senora and their worships the Caballeros. All he asked Charles Gould (whom he took for a mysterious and official person) to do for him was to remind the supreme Government — El Gobierno supreme — of a pension (amounting to about a dollar a month) to which he believed himself entitled. It had been promised to him, he affirmed, straightening his bent back martially, "many years ago, for my valour in the wars with the wild Indios when a young man, senior."

The waterfall existed no longer. The tree-ferns that had luxuriated in its spray had died around the dried-up pool, and the high ravine was only a big trench half filled up with the refuse of excavations and tailings. The torrent, dammed up above, sent

its water rushing along the open flumes of scooped tree trunks striding on trestle-legs to the turbines working the stamps on the lower plateau — the mesa grande of the San Tome mountain. Only the memory of the waterfall, with its amazing fernery, like a hanging garden above the rocks of the gorge, was preserved in Mrs. Gould's water-colour sketch; she had made it hastily one day from a cleared patch in the bushes, sitting in the shade of a roof of straw erected for her on three rough poles under Don Pepe's direction.

Mrs. Gould had seen it all from the beginning: the clearing of the wilderness, the making of the road, the cutting of new paths up the cliff face of San Tome. For weeks together she had lived on the spot with her husband; and she was so little in Sulaco during that year that the appearance of the Gould carriage on the Alameda would cause a social excitement. From the heavy family coaches full of stately senoras and black-eyed senioritas rolling solemnly in the shaded alley white hands were waved towards her with animation in a flutter of greetings. Dona Emilia was "down from the mountain."

But not for long. Dona Emilia would be gone "up to the mountain" in a day or two, and her sleek carriage mules would have an easy time of it for another long spell. She had watched the erection of the first frame-house put up on the lower mesa for an office and Don Pepe's quarters; she heard with a thrill of thankful emotion the first wagon load of ore rattle down the then only shoot; she had stood by her husband's side perfectly silent, and gone cold all over with excitement at the instant when the first battery of only fifteen stamps was put in motion for the first time. On the occasion when the fires under the first set of retorts in their shed had glowed far into the night she did not retire to rest on the rough cadre set up for her in the as yet bare frame-house till she had seen the first spongy lump of silver yielded to the hazards of the world by the dark depths of the Gould Concession; she had laid her unmercenary hands, with an eagerness that made them tremble, upon the first silver ingot turned out still warm from the mould; and by her imaginative estimate of its power she endowed that lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle.

Don Pepe, extremely interested, too, looked over her shoulder with a smile that, making longitudinal folds on his face, caused it to resemble a leathern mask with a benignantly diabolic expression.

"Would not the muchachos of Hernandez like to get hold of this insignificant object, that looks, por Dios, very much like a piece of tin?" he remarked, jocularly.

Hernandez, the robber, had been an inoffensive, small rancho, kidnapped with circumstances of peculiar atrocity from his home during one of the civil wars, and forced to serve in the army. There his conduct as soldier was exemplary, till, watching his chance, he killed his colonel, and managed to get clear away. With a band of deserters, who chose him for their chief, he had taken refuge beyond the wild and waterless Bolson de Tonoro. The haciendas paid him blackmail in cattle and horses; extraordinary stories were told of his powers and of his wonderful escapes from capture.

He used to ride, single-handed, into the villages and the little towns on the Campo, driving a pack mule before him, with two revolvers in his belt, go straight to the shop or store, select what he wanted, and ride away unopposed because of the terror his exploits and his audacity inspired. Poor country people he usually left alone; the upper class were often stopped on the roads and robbed; but any unlucky official that fell into his hands was sure to get a severe flogging. The army officers did not like his name to be mentioned in their presence. His followers, mounted on stolen horses, laughed at the pursuit of the regular cavalry sent to hunt them down, and whom they took pleasure to ambush most scientifically in the broken ground of their own fastness. Expeditions had been fitted out; a price had been put upon his head; even attempts had been made, treacherously of course, to open negotiations with him, without in the slightest way affecting the even tenor of his career. At last, in true Costaguana fashion, the Fiscal of Tonoro, who was ambitious of the glory of having reduced the famous Hernandez, offered him a sum of money and a safe conduct out of the country for the betrayal of his band. But Hernandez evidently was not of the stuff of which the distinguished military politicians and conspirators of Costaguana are made. This clever but common device (which frequently works like a charm in putting down revolutions) failed with the chief of vulgar Salteadores. It promised well for the Fiscal at first, but ended very badly for the squadron of lanceros posted (by the Fiscal's directions) in a fold of the ground into which Hernandez had promised to lead his unsuspecting followers. They came, indeed, at the appointed time, but creeping on their hands and knees through the bush, and only let their presence be known by a general discharge of firearms, which emptied many saddles. The troopers who escaped came riding very hard into Tonoro. It is said that their commanding officer (who, being better mounted, rode far ahead of the rest) afterwards got into a state of despairing intoxication and beat the ambitious Fiscal severely with the flat of his sabre in the presence of his wife and daughters, for bringing this disgrace upon the National Army. The highest civil official of Tonoro, falling to the ground in a swoon, was further kicked all over the body and rowelled with sharp spurs about the neck and face because of the great sensitiveness of his military colleague. This gossip of the inland Campo, so characteristic of the rulers of the country with its story of oppression, inefficiency, fatuous methods, treachery, and savage brutality, was perfectly known to Mrs. Gould. That it should be accepted with no indignant comment by people of intelligence, refinement, and character as something inherent in the nature of things was one of the symptoms of degradation that had the power to exasperate her almost to the verge of despair. Still looking at the ingot of silver, she shook her head at Don Pepe's remark —

“If it had not been for the lawless tyranny of your Government, Don Pepe, many an outlaw now with Hernandez would be living peaceably and happy by the honest work of his hands.”

“Senora,” cried Don Pepe, with enthusiasm, “it is true! It is as if God had given you the power to look into the very breasts of people. You have seen them working round you, Dona Emilia — meek as lambs, patient like their own burros, brave like lions. I

have led them to the very muzzles of guns — I, who stand here before you, senora — in the time of Paez, who was full of generosity, and in courage only approached by the uncle of Don Carlos here, as far as I know. No wonder there are bandits in the Campo when there are none but thieves, swindlers, and sanguinary macaques to rule us in Sta. Marta. However, all the same, a bandit is a bandit, and we shall have a dozen good straight Winchesters to ride with the silver down to Sulaco.”

Mrs. Gould’s ride with the first silver escort to Sulaco was the closing episode of what she called “my camp life” before she had settled in her town-house permanently, as was proper and even necessary for the wife of the administrator of such an important institution as the San Tome mine. For the San Tome mine was to become an institution, a rallying point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live. Security seemed to flow upon this land from the mountain-gorge. The authorities of Sulaco had learned that the San Tome mine could make it worth their while to leave things and people alone. This was the nearest approach to the rule of common-sense and justice Charles Gould felt it possible to secure at first. In fact, the mine, with its organization, its population growing fiercely attached to their position of privileged safety, with its armoury, with its Don Pepe, with its armed body of serenos (where, it was said, many an outlaw and deserter — and even some members of Hernandez’s band — had found a place), the mine was a power in the land. As a certain prominent man in Sta. Marta had exclaimed with a hollow laugh, once, when discussing the line of action taken by the Sulaco authorities at a time of political crisis —

“You call these men Government officials? They? Never! They are officials of the mine — officials of the Concession — I tell you.”

The prominent man (who was then a person in power, with a lemon-coloured face and a very short and curly, not to say woolly, head of hair) went so far in his temporary discontent as to shake his yellow fist under the nose of his interlocutor, and shriek —

“Yes! All! Silence! All! I tell you! The political Gefe, the chief of the police, the chief of the customs, the general, all, all, are the officials of that Gould.”

Thereupon an intrepid but low and argumentative murmur would flow on for a space in the ministerial cabinet, and the prominent man’s passion would end in a cynical shrug of the shoulders. After all, he seemed to say, what did it matter as long as the minister himself was not forgotten during his brief day of authority? But all the same, the unofficial agent of the San Tome mine, working for a good cause, had his moments of anxiety, which were reflected in his letters to Don Jose Avellanos, his maternal uncle.

“No sanguinary macaque from Sta. Marta shall set foot on that part of Costaguana which lies beyond the San Tome bridge,” Don Pepe used to assure Mrs. Gould. “Except, of course, as an honoured guest — for our Senor Administrador is a deep politico.” But to Charles Gould, in his own room, the old Major would remark with a grim and soldierly cheeriness, “We are all playing our heads at this game.”

Don Jose Avellanos would mutter “Imperium in imperio, Emilia, my soul,” with an air of profound self-satisfaction which, somehow, in a curious way, seemed to contain a queer admixture of bodily discomfort. But that, perhaps, could only be visible to

the initiated. And for the initiated it was a wonderful place, this drawing-room of the Casa Gould, with its momentary glimpses of the master — El Senor Administrador — older, harder, mysteriously silent, with the lines deepened on his English, ruddy, out-of-doors complexion; flitting on his thin cavalryman's legs across the doorways, either just "back from the mountain" or with jingling spurs and riding-whip under his arm, on the point of starting "for the mountain." Then Don Pepe, modestly martial in his chair, the llanero who seemed somehow to have found his martial jocularly, his knowledge of the world, and his manner perfect for his station, in the midst of savage armed contests with his kind; Avellanos, polished and familiar, the diplomatist with his loquacity covering much caution and wisdom in delicate advice, with his manuscript of a historical work on Costaguana, entitled "Fifty Years of Misrule," which, at present, he thought it was not prudent (even if it were possible) "to give to the world"; these three, and also Dona Emilia amongst them, gracious, small, and fairy-like, before the glittering tea-set, with one common master-thought in their heads, with one common feeling of a tense situation, with one ever-present aim to preserve the inviolable character of the mine at every cost. And there was also to be seen Captain Mitchell, a little apart, near one of the long windows, with an air of old-fashioned neat old bachelorhood about him, slightly pompous, in a white waistcoat, a little disregarded and unconscious of it; utterly in the dark, and imagining himself to be in the thick of things. The good man, having spent a clear thirty years of his life on the high seas before getting what he called a "shore billet," was astonished at the importance of transactions (other than relating to shipping) which take place on dry land. Almost every event out of the usual daily course "marked an epoch" for him or else was "history"; unless with his pomposity struggling with a discomfited droop of his rubicund, rather handsome face, set off by snow-white close hair and short whiskers, he would mutter —

"Ah, that! That, sir, was a mistake."

The reception of the first consignment of San Tome silver for shipment to San Francisco in one of the O.S.N. Co.'s mail-boats had, of course, "marked an epoch" for Captain Mitchell. The ingots packed in boxes of stiff ox-hide with plaited handles, small enough to be carried easily by two men, were brought down by the serenos of the mine walking in careful couples along the half-mile or so of steep, zigzag paths to the foot of the mountain. There they would be loaded into a string of two-wheeled carts, resembling roomy coffers with a door at the back, and harnessed tandem with two mules each, waiting under the guard of armed and mounted serenos. Don Pepe padlocked each door in succession, and at the signal of his whistle the string of carts would move off, closely surrounded by the clank of spur and carbine, with jolts and cracking of whips, with a sudden deep rumble over the boundary bridge ("into the land of thieves and sanguinary macaques," Don Pepe defined that crossing); hats bobbing in the first light of the dawn, on the heads of cloaked figures; Winchesters on hip; bridle hands protruding lean and brown from under the falling folds of the ponchos. The convoy skirting a little wood, along the mine trail, between the mud huts and low walls of Rincon, increased its pace on the camino real, mules urged to speed, escort

galloping, Don Carlos riding alone ahead of a dust storm affording a vague vision of long ears of mules, of fluttering little green and white flags stuck upon each cart; of raised arms in a mob of sombreros with the white gleam of ranging eyes; and Don Pepe, hardly visible in the rear of that rattling dust trail, with a stiff seat and impassive face, rising and falling rhythmically on an ewe-necked silver-bitted black brute with a hammer head.

The sleepy people in the little clusters of huts, in the small ranches near the road, recognized by the headlong sound the charge of the San Tome silver escort towards the crumbling wall of the city on the Campo side. They came to the doors to see it dash by over ruts and stones, with a clatter and clank and cracking of whips, with the reckless rush and precise driving of a field battery hurrying into action, and the solitary English figure of the Senor Administrador riding far ahead in the lead.

In the fenced roadside paddocks loose horses galloped wildly for a while; the heavy cattle stood up breast deep in the grass, lowing mutteringly at the flying noise; a meek Indian villager would glance back once and hasten to shove his loaded little donkey bodily against a wall, out of the way of the San Tome silver escort going to the sea; a small knot of chilly leperos under the Stone Horse of the Alameda would mutter: "Caramba!" on seeing it take a wide curve at a gallop and dart into the empty Street of the Constitution; for it was considered the correct thing, the only proper style by the mule-drivers of the San Tome mine to go through the waking town from end to end without a check in the speed as if chased by a devil.

The early sunshine glowed on the delicate primrose, pale pink, pale blue fronts of the big houses with all their gates shut yet, and no face behind the iron bars of the windows. In the whole sunlit range of empty balconies along the street only one white figure would be visible high up above the clear pavement — the wife of the Senor Administrador — leaning over to see the escort go by to the harbour, a mass of heavy, fair hair twisted up negligently on her little head, and a lot of lace about the neck of her muslin wrapper. With a smile to her husband's single, quick, upward glance, she would watch the whole thing stream past below her feet with an orderly uproar, till she answered by a friendly sign the salute of the galloping Don Pepe, the stiff, deferential inclination with a sweep of the hat below the knee.

The string of padlocked carts lengthened, the size of the escort grew bigger as the years went on. Every three months an increasing stream of treasure swept through the streets of Sulaco on its way to the strong room in the O.S.N. Co.'s building by the harbour, there to await shipment for the North. Increasing in volume, and of immense value also; for, as Charles Gould told his wife once with some exultation, there had never been seen anything in the world to approach the vein of the Gould Concession. For them both, each passing of the escort under the balconies of the Casa Gould was like another victory gained in the conquest of peace for Sulaco.

No doubt the initial action of Charles Gould had been helped at the beginning by a period of comparative peace which occurred just about that time; and also by the general softening of manners as compared with the epoch of civil wars whence

had emerged the iron tyranny of Guzman Bento of fearful memory. In the contests that broke out at the end of his rule (which had kept peace in the country for a whole fifteen years) there was more fatuous imbecility, plenty of cruelty and suffering still, but much less of the old-time fierce and blindly ferocious political fanaticism. It was all more vile, more base, more contemptible, and infinitely more manageable in the very outspoken cynicism of motives. It was more clearly a brazen-faced scramble for a constantly diminishing quantity of booty; since all enterprise had been stupidly killed in the land. Thus it came to pass that the province of Sulaco, once the field of cruel party vengeance, had become in a way one of the considerable prizes of political career. The great of the earth (in Sta. Marta) reserved the posts in the old Occidental State to those nearest and dearest to them: nephews, brothers, husbands of favourite sisters, bosom friends, trusty supporters — or prominent supporters of whom perhaps they were afraid. It was the blessed province of great opportunities and of largest salaries; for the San Tome mine had its own unofficial pay list, whose items and amounts, fixed in consultation by Charles Gould and Senor Avellanos, were known to a prominent business man in the United States, who for twenty minutes or so in every month gave his undivided attention to Sulaco affairs. At the same time the material interests of all sorts, backed up by the influence of the San Tome mine, were quietly gathering substance in that part of the Republic. If, for instance, the Sulaco Collectorship was generally understood, in the political world of the capital, to open the way to the Ministry of Finance, and so on for every official post, then, on the other hand, the despondent business circles of the Republic had come to consider the Occidental Province as the promised land of safety, especially if a man managed to get on good terms with the administration of the mine. “Charles Gould; excellent fellow! Absolutely necessary to make sure of him before taking a single step. Get an introduction to him from Moraga if you can — the agent of the King of Sulaco, don’t you know.”

No wonder, then, that Sir John, coming from Europe to smooth the path for his railway, had been meeting the name (and even the nickname) of Charles Gould at every turn in Costaguana. The agent of the San Tome Administration in Sta. Marta (a polished, well-informed gentleman, Sir John thought him) had certainly helped so greatly in bringing about the presidential tour that he began to think that there was something in the faint whispers hinting at the immense occult influence of the Gould Concession. What was currently whispered was this — that the San Tome Administration had, in part, at least, financed the last revolution, which had brought into a five-year dictatorship Don Vincente Ribiera, a man of culture and of unblemished character, invested with a mandate of reform by the best elements of the State. Serious, well-informed men seemed to believe the fact, to hope for better things, for the establishment of legality, of good faith and order in public life. So much the better, then, thought Sir John. He worked always on a great scale; there was a loan to the State, and a project for systematic colonization of the Occidental Province, involved in one vast scheme with the construction of the National Central Railway. Good faith, order,

honesty, peace, were badly wanted for this great development of material interests. Anybody on the side of these things, and especially if able to help, had an importance in Sir John's eyes. He had not been disappointed in the "King of Sulaco." The local difficulties had fallen away, as the engineer-in-chief had foretold they would, before Charles Gould's mediation. Sir John had been extremely feted in Sulaco, next to the President-Dictator, a fact which might have accounted for the evident ill-humour General Montero displayed at lunch given on board the Juno just before she was to sail, taking away from Sulaco the President-Dictator and the distinguished foreign guests in his train.

The Excellentissimo ("the hope of honest men," as Don Jose had addressed him in a public speech delivered in the name of the Provincial Assembly of Sulaco) sat at the head of the long table; Captain Mitchell, positively stony-eyed and purple in the face with the solemnity of this "historical event," occupied the foot as the representative of the O.S.N. Company in Sulaco, the hosts of that informal function, with the captain of the ship and some minor officials from the shore around him. Those cheery, swarthy little gentlemen cast jovial side-glances at the bottles of champagne beginning to pop behind the guests' backs in the hands of the ship's stewards. The amber wine creamed up to the rims of the glasses.

Charles Gould had his place next to a foreign envoy, who, in a listless undertone, had been talking to him fitfully of hunting and shooting. The well-nourished, pale face, with an eyeglass and drooping yellow moustache, made the Senor Administrador appear by contrast twice as sunbaked, more flaming red, a hundred times more intensely and silently alive. Don Jose Avellanos touched elbows with the other foreign diplomat, a dark man with a quiet, watchful, self-confident demeanour, and a touch of reserve. All etiquette being laid aside on the occasion, General Montero was the only one there in full uniform, so stiff with embroideries in front that his broad chest seemed protected by a cuirass of gold. Sir John at the beginning had got away from high places for the sake of sitting near Mrs. Gould.

The great financier was trying to express to her his grateful sense of her hospitality and of his obligation to her husband's "enormous influence in this part of the country," when she interrupted him by a low "Hush!" The President was going to make an informal pronouncement.

The Excellentissimo was on his legs. He said only a few words, evidently deeply felt, and meant perhaps mostly for Avellanos — his old friend — as to the necessity of unremitting effort to secure the lasting welfare of the country emerging after this last struggle, he hoped, into a period of peace and material prosperity.

Mrs. Gould, listening to the mellow, slightly mournful voice, looking at this rotund, dark, spectacled face, at the short body, obese to the point of infirmity, thought that this man of delicate and melancholy mind, physically almost a cripple, coming out of his retirement into a dangerous strife at the call of his fellows, had the right to speak with the authority of his self-sacrifice. And yet she was made uneasy. He was more pathetic than promising, this first civilian Chief of the State Costaguana had ever

known, pronouncing, glass in hand, his simple watchwords of honesty, peace, respect for law, political good faith abroad and at home — the safeguards of national honour.

He sat down. During the respectful, appreciative buzz of voices that followed the speech, General Montero raised a pair of heavy, drooping eyelids and rolled his eyes with a sort of uneasy dullness from face to face. The military backwoods hero of the party, though secretly impressed by the sudden novelties and splendours of his position (he had never been on board a ship before, and had hardly ever seen the sea except from a distance), understood by a sort of instinct the advantage his surly, unpolished attitude of a savage fighter gave him amongst all these refined Blanco aristocrats. But why was it that nobody was looking at him? he wondered to himself angrily. He was able to spell out the print of newspapers, and knew that he had performed the “greatest military exploit of modern times.”

“My husband wanted the railway,” Mrs. Gould said to Sir John in the general murmur of resumed conversations. “All this brings nearer the sort of future we desire for the country, which has waited for it in sorrow long enough, God knows. But I will confess that the other day, during my afternoon drive when I suddenly saw an Indian boy ride out of a wood with the red flag of a surveying party in his hand, I felt something of a shock. The future means change — an utter change. And yet even here there are simple and picturesque things that one would like to preserve.”

Sir John listened, smiling. But it was his turn now to hush Mrs. Gould.

“General Montero is going to speak,” he whispered, and almost immediately added, in comic alarm, “Heavens! he’s going to propose my own health, I believe.”

General Montero had risen with a jingle of steel scabbard and a ripple of glitter on his gold-embroidered breast; a heavy sword-hilt appeared at his side above the edge of the table. In this gorgeous uniform, with his bull neck, his hooked nose flattened on the tip upon a blue-black, dyed moustache, he looked like a disguised and sinister vaquero. The drone of his voice had a strangely rasping, soulless ring. He floundered, lowering, through a few vague sentences; then suddenly raising his big head and his voice together, burst out harshly —

“The honour of the country is in the hands of the army. I assure you I shall be faithful to it.” He hesitated till his roaming eyes met Sir John’s face upon which he fixed a lurid, sleepy glance; and the figure of the lately negotiated loan came into his mind. He lifted his glass. “I drink to the health of the man who brings us a million and a half of pounds.”

He tossed off his champagne, and sat down heavily with a half-surprised, half-bullying look all round the faces in the profound, as if appalled, silence which succeeded the felicitous toast. Sir John did not move.

“I don’t think I am called upon to rise,” he murmured to Mrs. Gould. “That sort of thing speaks for itself.” But Don Jose Avellanos came to the rescue with a short oration, in which he alluded pointedly to England’s goodwill towards Costaguana — “a goodwill,” he continued, significantly, “of which I, having been in my time accredited to the Court of St. James, am able to speak with some knowledge.”

Only then Sir John thought fit to respond, which he did gracefully in bad French, punctuated by bursts of applause and the "Hear! Hears!" of Captain Mitchell, who was able to understand a word now and then. Directly he had done, the financier of railways turned to Mrs. Gould —

"You were good enough to say that you intended to ask me for something," he reminded her, gallantly. "What is it? Be assured that any request from you would be considered in the light of a favour to myself."

She thanked him by a gracious smile. Everybody was rising from the table.

"Let us go on deck," she proposed, "where I'll be able to point out to you the very object of my request."

An enormous national flag of Costaguana, diagonal red and yellow, with two green palm trees in the middle, floated lazily at the mainmast head of the Juno. A multitude of fireworks being let off in their thousands at the water's edge in honour of the President kept up a mysterious crepitating noise half round the harbour. Now and then a lot of rockets, swishing upwards invisibly, detonated overhead with only a puff of smoke in the bright sky. Crowds of people could be seen between the town gate and the harbour, under the bunches of multicoloured flags fluttering on tall poles. Faint bursts of military music would be heard suddenly, and the remote sound of shouting. A knot of ragged negroes at the end of the wharf kept on loading and firing a small iron cannon time after time. A greyish haze of dust hung thin and motionless against the sun.

Don Vincente Ribiera made a few steps under the deck-awning, leaning on the arm of Senor Avellanos; a wide circle was formed round him, where the mirthless smile of his dark lips and the sightless glitter of his spectacles could be seen turning amiably from side to side. The informal function arranged on purpose on board the Juno to give the President-Dictator an opportunity to meet intimately some of his most notable adherents in Sulaco was drawing to an end. On one side, General Montero, his bald head covered now by a plumed cocked hat, remained motionless on a skylight seat, a pair of big gauntleted hands folded on the hilt of the sabre standing upright between his legs. The white plume, the coppery tint of his broad face, the blue-black of the moustaches under the curved beak, the mass of gold on sleeves and breast, the high shining boots with enormous spurs, the working nostrils, the imbecile and domineering stare of the glorious victor of Rio Seco had in them something ominous and incredible; the exaggeration of a cruel caricature, the fatuity of solemn masquerading, the atrocious grotesqueness of some military idol of Aztec conception and European bedecking, awaiting the homage of worshippers. Don Jose approached diplomatically this weird and inscrutable portent, and Mrs. Gould turned her fascinated eyes away at last.

Charles, coming up to take leave of Sir John, heard him say, as he bent over his wife's hand, "Certainly. Of course, my dear Mrs. Gould, for a protege of yours! Not the slightest difficulty. Consider it done."

Going ashore in the same boat with the Goulds, Don Jose Avellanos was very silent. Even in the Gould carriage he did not open his lips for a long time. The mules trotted slowly away from the wharf between the extended hands of the beggars, who for that day seemed to have abandoned in a body the portals of churches. Charles Gould sat on the back seat and looked away upon the plain. A multitude of booths made of green boughs, of rushes, of odd pieces of plank eked out with bits of canvas had been erected all over it for the sale of cana, of dulces, of fruit, of cigars. Over little heaps of glowing charcoal Indian women, squatting on mats, cooked food in black earthen pots, and boiled the water for the mate gourds, which they offered in soft, caressing voices to the country people. A racecourse had been staked out for the vaqueros; and away to the left, from where the crowd was massed thickly about a huge temporary erection, like a circus tent of wood with a conical grass roof, came the resonant twanging of harp strings, the sharp ping of guitars, with the grave drumming throb of an Indian gombo pulsating steadily through the shrill choruses of the dancers.

Charles Gould said presently —

“All this piece of land belongs now to the Railway Company. There will be no more popular feasts held here.”

Mrs. Gould was rather sorry to think so. She took this opportunity to mention how she had just obtained from Sir John the promise that the house occupied by Giorgio Viola should not be interfered with. She declared she could never understand why the survey engineers ever talked of demolishing that old building. It was not in the way of the projected harbour branch of the line in the least.

She stopped the carriage before the door to reassure at once the old Genoese, who came out bare-headed and stood by the carriage step. She talked to him in Italian, of course, and he thanked her with calm dignity. An old Garibaldino was grateful to her from the bottom of his heart for keeping the roof over the heads of his wife and children. He was too old to wander any more.

“And is it for ever, signora?” he asked.

“For as long as you like.”

“Bene. Then the place must be named, It was not worth while before.”

He smiled ruggedly, with a running together of wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. “I shall set about the painting of the name to-morrow.”

“And what is it going to be, Giorgio?”

“Albergo d’Italia Una,” said the old Garibaldino, looking away for a moment. “More in memory of those who have died,” he added, “than for the country stolen from us soldiers of liberty by the craft of that accursed Piedmontese race of kings and ministers.”

Mrs. Gould smiled slightly, and, bending over a little, began to inquire about his wife and children. He had sent them into town on that day. The padrona was better in health; many thanks to the signora for inquiring.

People were passing in twos and threes, in whole parties of men and women attended by trotting children. A horseman mounted on a silver-grey mare drew rein quietly in the shade of the house after taking off his hat to the party in the carriage, who returned

smiles and familiar nods. Old Viola, evidently very pleased with the news he had just heard, interrupted himself for a moment to tell him rapidly that the house was secured, by the kindness of the English signora, for as long as he liked to keep it. The other listened attentively, but made no response.

When the carriage moved on he took off his hat again, a grey sombrero with a silver cord and tassels. The bright colours of a Mexican serape twisted on the cantle, the enormous silver buttons on the embroidered leather jacket, the row of tiny silver buttons down the seam of the trousers, the snowy linen, a silk sash with embroidered ends, the silver plates on headstall and saddle, proclaimed the unapproachable style of the famous Capataz de Cargadores — a Mediterranean sailor — got up with more finished splendour than any well-to-do young ranchero of the Campo had ever displayed on a high holiday.

“It is a great thing for me,” murmured old Giorgio, still thinking of the house, for now he had grown weary of change. “The signora just said a word to the Englishman.”

“The old Englishman who has enough money to pay for a railway? He is going off in an hour,” remarked Nostromo, carelessly. “Buon viaggio, then. I’ve guarded his bones all the way from the Entrada pass down to the plain and into Sulaco, as though he had been my own father.”

Old Giorgio only moved his head sideways absently. Nostromo pointed after the Goulds’ carriage, nearing the grass-grown gate in the old town wall that was like a wall of matted jungle.

“And I have sat alone at night with my revolver in the Company’s warehouse time and again by the side of that other Englishman’s heap of silver, guarding it as though it had been my own.”

Viola seemed lost in thought. “It is a great thing for me,” he repeated again, as if to himself.

“It is,” agreed the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, calmly. “Listen, Vecchio — go in and bring me, out a cigar, but don’t look for it in my room. There’s nothing there.”

Viola stepped into the cafe and came out directly, still absorbed in his idea, and tendered him a cigar, mumbling thoughtfully in his moustache, “Children growing up — and girls, too! Girls!” He sighed and fell silent.

“What, only one?” remarked Nostromo, looking down with a sort of comic inquisitiveness at the unconscious old man. “No matter,” he added, with lofty negligence; “one is enough till another is wanted.”

He lit it and let the match drop from his passive fingers. Giorgio Viola looked up, and said abruptly —

“My son would have been just such a fine young man as you, Gian’ Battista, if he had lived.”

“What? Your son? But you are right, padrone. If he had been like me he would have been a man.”

He turned his horse slowly, and paced on between the booths, checking the mare almost to a standstill now and then for children, for the groups of people from the distant Campo, who stared after him with admiration. The Company's lightermen saluted him from afar; and the greatly envied Capataz de Cargadores advanced, amongst murmurs of recognition and obsequious greetings, towards the huge circus-like erection. The throng thickened; the guitars tinkled louder; other horsemen sat motionless, smoking calmly above the heads of the crowd; it eddied and pushed before the doors of the high-roofed building, whence issued a shuffle and thumping of feet in time to the dance music vibrating and shrieking with a racking rhythm, overhung by the tremendous, sustained, hollow roar of the gombo. The barbarous and imposing noise of the big drum, that can madden a crowd, and that even Europeans cannot hear without a strange emotion, seemed to draw Nostromo on to its source, while a man, wrapped up in a faded, torn poncho, walked by his stirrup, and, buffeted right and left, begged "his worship" insistently for employment on the wharf. He whined, offering the Senor Capataz half his daily pay for the privilege of being admitted to the swaggering fraternity of Cargadores; the other half would be enough for him, he protested. But Captain Mitchell's right-hand man — "invaluable for our work — a perfectly incorruptible fellow" — after looking down critically at the ragged mozo, shook his head without a word in the uproar going on around.

The man fell back; and a little further on Nostromo had to pull up. From the doors of the dance hall men and women emerged tottering, streaming with sweat, trembling in every limb, to lean, panting, with staring eyes and parted lips, against the wall of the structure, where the harps and guitars played on with mad speed in an incessant roll of thunder. Hundreds of hands clapped in there; voices shrieked, and then all at once would sink low, chanting in unison the refrain of a love song, with a dying fall. A red flower, flung with a good aim from somewhere in the crowd, struck the resplendent Capataz on the cheek.

He caught it as it fell, neatly, but for some time did not turn his head. When at last he condescended to look round, the throng near him had parted to make way for a pretty Morenita, her hair held up by a small golden comb, who was walking towards him in the open space.

Her arms and neck emerged plump and bare from a snowy chemisette; the blue woollen skirt, with all the fullness gathered in front, scanty on the hips and tight across the back, disclosed the provoking action of her walk. She came straight on and laid her hand on the mare's neck with a timid, coquettish look upwards out of the corner of her eyes.

"Querido," she murmured, caressingly, "why do you pretend not to see me when I pass?"

"Because I don't love thee any more," said Nostromo, deliberately, after a moment of reflective silence.

The hand on the mare's neck trembled suddenly. She dropped her head before all the eyes in the wide circle formed round the generous, the terrible, the inconstant Capataz de Cargadores, and his Morenita.

Nostromo, looking down, saw tears beginning to fall down her face.

"Has it come, then, ever beloved of my heart?" she whispered. "Is it true?"

"No," said Nostromo, looking away carelessly. "It was a lie. I love thee as much as ever."

"Is that true?" she cooed, joyously, her cheeks still wet with tears.

"It is true."

"True on the life?"

"As true as that; but thou must not ask me to swear it on the Madonna that stands in thy room." And the Capataz laughed a little in response to the grins of the crowd.

She pouted — very pretty — a little uneasy.

"No, I will not ask for that. I can see love in your eyes." She laid her hand on his knee. "Why are you trembling like this? From love?" she continued, while the cavernous thundering of the gombo went on without a pause. "But if you love her as much as that, you must give your Paquita a gold-mounted rosary of beads for the neck of her Madonna."

"No," said Nostromo, looking into her uplifted, begging eyes, which suddenly turned stony with surprise.

"No? Then what else will your worship give me on the day of the fiesta?" she asked, angrily; "so as not to shame me before all these people."

"There is no shame for thee in getting nothing from thy lover for once."

"True! The shame is your worship's — my poor lover's," she flared up, sarcastically.

Laughs were heard at her anger, at her retort. What an audacious spitfire she was! The people aware of this scene were calling out urgently to others in the crowd. The circle round the silver-grey mare narrowed slowly.

The girl went off a pace or two, confronting the mocking curiosity of the eyes, then flung back to the stirrup, tiptoeing, her enraged face turned up to Nostromo with a pair of blazing eyes. He bent low to her in the saddle.

"Juan," she hissed, "I could stab thee to the heart!"

The dreaded Capataz de Cargadores, magnificent and carelessly public in his amours, flung his arm round her neck and kissed her spluttering lips. A murmur went round.

"A knife!" he demanded at large, holding her firmly by the shoulder.

Twenty blades flashed out together in the circle. A young man in holiday attire, bounding in, thrust one in Nostromo's hand and bounded back into the ranks, very proud of himself. Nostromo had not even looked at him.

"Stand on my foot," he commanded the girl, who, suddenly subdued, rose lightly, and when he had her up, encircling her waist, her face near to his, he pressed the knife into her little hand.

“No, Morenita! You shall not put me to shame,” he said. “You shall have your present; and so that everyone should know who is your lover to-day, you may cut all the silver buttons off my coat.”

There were shouts of laughter and applause at this witty freak, while the girl passed the keen blade, and the impassive rider jingled in his palm the increasing hoard of silver buttons. He eased her to the ground with both her hands full. After whispering for a while with a very strenuous face, she walked away, staring haughtily, and vanished into the crowd.

The circle had broken up, and the lordly Capataz de Cargadores, the indispensable man, the tried and trusty Nostromo, the Mediterranean sailor come ashore casually to try his luck in Costaguana, rode slowly towards the harbour. The Juno was just then swinging round; and even as Nostromo reined up again to look on, a flag ran up on the improvised flagstaff erected in an ancient and dismantled little fort at the harbour entrance. Half a battery of field guns had been hurried over there from the Sulaco barracks for the purpose of firing the regulation salutes for the President-Dictator and the War Minister. As the mail-boat headed through the pass, the badly timed reports announced the end of Don Vicente Ribiera’s first official visit to Sulaco, and for Captain Mitchell the end of another “historic occasion.” Next time when the “Hope of honest men” was to come that way, a year and a half later, it was unofficially, over the mountain tracks, fleeing after a defeat on a lame mule, to be only just saved by Nostromo from an ignominious death at the hands of a mob. It was a very different event, of which Captain Mitchell used to say —

“It was history — history, sir! And that fellow of mine, Nostromo, you know, was right in it. Absolutely making history, sir.”

But this event, creditable to Nostromo, was to lead immediately to another, which could not be classed either as “history” or as “a mistake” in Captain Mitchell’s phraseology. He had another word for it.

“Sir” he used to say afterwards, “that was no mistake. It was a fatality. A misfortune, pure and simple, sir. And that poor fellow of mine was right in it — right in the middle of it! A fatality, if ever there was one — and to my mind he has never been the same man since.”

Part 2 — The Isabels

Chapter 1

Through good and evil report in the varying fortune of that struggle which Don Jose had characterized in the phrase, “the fate of national honesty trembles in the balance,” the Gould Concession, “Imperium in Imperio,” had gone on working; the square mountain had gone on pouring its treasure down the wooden shoots to the unresting batteries of stamps; the lights of San Tome had twinkled night after night upon the great, limitless shadow of the Campo; every three months the silver escort had gone down to the sea as if neither the war nor its consequences could ever affect the ancient Occidental State secluded beyond its high barrier of the Cordillera. All the fighting took place on the other side of that mighty wall of serrated peaks lorded over by the white dome of Higuerota and as yet unbreached by the railway, of which only the first part, the easy Campo part from Sulaco to the Ivie Valley at the foot of the pass, had been laid. Neither did the telegraph line cross the mountains yet; its poles, like slender beacons on the plain, penetrated into the forest fringe of the foot-hills cut by the deep avenue of the track; and its wire ended abruptly in the construction camp at a white deal table supporting a Morse apparatus, in a long hut of planks with a corrugated iron roof overshadowed by gigantic cedar trees — the quarters of the engineer in charge of the advance section.

The harbour was busy, too, with the traffic in railway material, and with the movements of troops along the coast. The O.S.N. Company found much occupation for its fleet. Costaguana had no navy, and, apart from a few coastguard cutters, there were no national ships except a couple of old merchant steamers used as transports.

Captain Mitchell, feeling more and more in the thick of history, found time for an hour or so during an afternoon in the drawing-room of the Casa Gould, where, with a strange ignorance of the real forces at work around him, he professed himself delighted to get away from the strain of affairs. He did not know what he would have done without his invaluable Nostromo, he declared. Those confounded Costaguana politics gave him more work — he confided to Mrs. Gould — than he had bargained for.

Don Jose Avellanos had displayed in the service of the endangered Ribiera Government an organizing activity and an eloquence of which the echoes reached even Europe. For, after the new loan to the Ribiera Government, Europe had become interested in Costaguana. The Sala of the Provincial Assembly (in the Municipal Buildings of Sulaco), with its portraits of the Liberators on the walls and an old flag of Cortez

preserved in a glass case above the President's chair, had heard all these speeches — the early one containing the impassioned declaration "Militarism is the enemy," the famous one of the "trembling balance" delivered on the occasion of the vote for the raising of a second Sulaco regiment in the defence of the reforming Government; and when the provinces again displayed their old flags (proscribed in Guzman Bento's time) there was another of those great orations, when Don Jose greeted these old emblems of the war of Independence, brought out again in the name of new Ideals. The old idea of Federalism had disappeared. For his part he did not wish to revive old political doctrines. They were perishable. They died. But the doctrine of political rectitude was immortal. The second Sulaco regiment, to whom he was presenting this flag, was going to show its valour in a contest for order, peace, progress; for the establishment of national self-respect without which — he declared with energy — "we are a reproach and a byword amongst the powers of the world."

Don Jose Avellanos loved his country. He had served it lavishly with his fortune during his diplomatic career, and the later story of his captivity and barbarous ill-usage under Guzman Bento was well known to his listeners. It was a wonder that he had not been a victim of the ferocious and summary executions which marked the course of that tyranny; for Guzman had ruled the country with the sombre imbecility of political fanaticism. The power of Supreme Government had become in his dull mind an object of strange worship, as if it were some sort of cruel deity. It was incarnated in himself, and his adversaries, the Federalists, were the supreme sinners, objects of hate, abhorrence, and fear, as heretics would be to a convinced Inquisitor. For years he had carried about at the tail of the Army of Pacification, all over the country, a captive band of such atrocious criminals, who considered themselves most unfortunate at not having been summarily executed. It was a diminishing company of nearly naked skeletons, loaded with irons, covered with dirt, with vermin, with raw wounds, all men of position, of education, of wealth, who had learned to fight amongst themselves for scraps of rotten beef thrown to them by soldiers, or to beg a negro cook for a drink of muddy water in pitiful accents. Don Jose Avellanos, clanking his chains amongst the others, seemed only to exist in order to prove how much hunger, pain, degradation, and cruel torture a human body can stand without parting with the last spark of life. Sometimes interrogatories, backed by some primitive method of torture, were administered to them by a commission of officers hastily assembled in a hut of sticks and branches, and made pitiless by the fear for their own lives. A lucky one or two of that spectral company of prisoners would perhaps be led tottering behind a bush to be shot by a file of soldiers. Always an army chaplain — some unshaven, dirty man, girt with a sword and with a tiny cross embroidered in white cotton on the left breast of a lieutenant's uniform — would follow, cigarette in the corner of the mouth, wooden stool in hand, to hear the confession and give absolution; for the Citizen Saviour of the Country (Guzman Bento was called thus officially in petitions) was not averse from the exercise of rational clemency. The irregular report of the firing squad would be heard, followed sometimes by a single finishing shot; a little bluish cloud of smoke would

float up above the green bushes, and the Army of Pacification would move on over the savannas, through the forests, crossing rivers, invading rural pueblos, devastating the haciendas of the horrid aristocrats, occupying the inland towns in the fulfilment of its patriotic mission, and leaving behind a united land wherein the evil taint of Federalism could no longer be detected in the smoke of burning houses and the smell of spilt blood. Don Jose Avellanos had survived that time. Perhaps, when contemptuously signifying to him his release, the Citizen Saviour of the Country might have thought this benighted aristocrat too broken in health and spirit and fortune to be any longer dangerous. Or, perhaps, it may have been a simple caprice. Guzman Bento, usually full of fanciful fears and brooding suspicions, had sudden accesses of unreasonable self-confidence when he perceived himself elevated on a pinnacle of power and safety beyond the reach of mere mortal plotters. At such times he would impulsively command the celebration of a solemn Mass of thanksgiving, which would be sung in great pomp in the cathedral of Sta. Marta by the trembling, subservient Archbishop of his creation. He heard it sitting in a gilt armchair placed before the high altar, surrounded by the civil and military heads of his Government. The unofficial world of Sta. Marta would crowd into the cathedral, for it was not quite safe for anybody of mark to stay away from these manifestations of presidential piety. Having thus acknowledged the only power he was at all disposed to recognize as above himself, he would scatter acts of political grace in a sardonic wantonness of clemency. There was no other way left now to enjoy his power but by seeing his crushed adversaries crawl impotently into the light of day out of the dark, noisome cells of the Collegio. Their harmlessness fed his insatiable vanity, and they could always be got hold of again. It was the rule for all the women of their families to present thanks afterwards in a special audience. The incarnation of that strange god, El Gobierno Supremo, received them standing, cocked hat on head, and exhorted them in a menacing mutter to show their gratitude by bringing up their children in fidelity to the democratic form of government, "which I have established for the happiness of our country." His front teeth having been knocked out in some accident of his former herdsman's life, his utterance was spluttering and indistinct. He had been working for Costaguana alone in the midst of treachery and opposition. Let it cease now lest he should become weary of forgiving!

Don Jose Avellanos had known this forgiveness.

He was broken in health and fortune deplorably enough to present a truly gratifying spectacle to the supreme chief of democratic institutions. He retired to Sulaco. His wife had an estate in that province, and she nursed him back to life out of the house of death and captivity. When she died, their daughter, an only child, was old enough to devote herself to "poor papa."

Miss Avellanos, born in Europe and educated partly in England, was a tall, grave girl, with a self-possessed manner, a wide, white forehead, a wealth of rich brown hair, and blue eyes.

The other young ladies of Sulaco stood in awe of her character and accomplishments. She was reputed to be terribly learned and serious. As to pride, it was well known that

all the Corbelans were proud, and her mother was a Corbelan. Don Jose Avellanos depended very much upon the devotion of his beloved Antonia. He accepted it in the benighted way of men, who, though made in God's image, are like stone idols without sense before the smoke of certain burnt offerings. He was ruined in every way, but a man possessed of passion is not a bankrupt in life. Don Jose Avellanos desired passionately for his country: peace, prosperity, and (as the end of the preface to "Fifty Years of Misrule" has it) "an honourable place in the comity of civilized nations." In this last phrase the Minister Plenipotentiary, cruelly humiliated by the bad faith of his Government towards the foreign bondholders, stands disclosed in the patriot.

The fatuous turmoil of greedy factions succeeding the tyranny of Guzman Bento seemed to bring his desire to the very door of opportunity. He was too old to descend personally into the centre of the arena at Sta. Marta. But the men who acted there sought his advice at every step. He himself thought that he could be most useful at a distance, in Sulaco. His name, his connections, his former position, his experience commanded the respect of his class. The discovery that this man, living in dignified poverty in the Corbelan town residence (opposite the Casa Gould), could dispose of material means towards the support of the cause increased his influence. It was his open letter of appeal that decided the candidature of Don Vincente Ribiera for the Presidency. Another of these informal State papers drawn up by Don Jose (this time in the shape of an address from the Province) induced that scrupulous constitutionalist to accept the extraordinary powers conferred upon him for five years by an overwhelming vote of congress in Sta. Marta. It was a specific mandate to establish the prosperity of the people on the basis of firm peace at home, and to redeem the national credit by the satisfaction of all just claims abroad.

On the afternoon the news of that vote had reached Sulaco by the usual roundabout postal way through Cayta, and up the coast by steamer. Don Jose, who had been waiting for the mail in the Goulds' drawing-room, got out of the rocking-chair, letting his hat fall off his knees. He rubbed his silvery, short hair with both hands, speechless with the excess of joy.

"Emilia, my soul," he had burst out, "let me embrace you! Let me —"

Captain Mitchell, had he been there, would no doubt have made an apt remark about the dawn of a new era; but if Don Jose thought something of the kind, his eloquence failed him on this occasion. The inspirer of that revival of the Blanco party tottered where he stood. Mrs. Gould moved forward quickly and, as she offered her cheek with a smile to her old friend, managed very cleverly to give him the support of her arm he really needed.

Don Jose had recovered himself at once, but for a time he could do no more than murmur, "Oh, you two patriots! Oh, you two patriots!" — looking from one to the other. Vague plans of another historical work, wherein all the devotions to the regeneration of the country he loved would be enshrined for the reverent worship of posterity, flitted through his mind. The historian who had enough elevation of soul to write of Guzman Bento: "Yet this monster, imbrued in the blood of his countrymen, must not be held

unreservedly to the execration of future years. It appears to be true that he, too, loved his country. He had given it twelve years of peace; and, absolute master of lives and fortunes as he was, he died poor. His worst fault, perhaps, was not his ferocity, but his ignorance;" the man who could write thus of a cruel persecutor (the passage occurs in his "History of Misrule") felt at the foreshadowing of success an almost boundless affection for his two helpers, for these two young people from over the sea.

Just as years ago, calmly, from the conviction of practical necessity, stronger than any abstract political doctrine, Henry Gould had drawn the sword, so now, the times being changed, Charles Gould had flung the silver of the San Tome into the fray. The Inglez of Sulaco, the "Costaguana Englishman" of the third generation, was as far from being a political intriguer as his uncle from a revolutionary swashbuckler. Springing from the instinctive uprightness of their natures their action was reasoned. They saw an opportunity and used the weapon to hand.

Charles Gould's position — a commanding position in the background of that attempt to retrieve the peace and the credit of the Republic — was very clear. At the beginning he had had to accommodate himself to existing circumstances of corruption so naively brazen as to disarm the hate of a man courageous enough not to be afraid of its irresponsible potency to ruin everything it touched. It seemed to him too contemptible for hot anger even. He made use of it with a cold, fearless scorn, manifested rather than concealed by the forms of stony courtesy which did away with much of the ignominy of the situation. At bottom, perhaps, he suffered from it, for he was not a man of cowardly illusions, but he refused to discuss the ethical view with his wife. He trusted that, though a little disenchanted, she would be intelligent enough to understand that his character safeguarded the enterprise of their lives as much or more than his policy. The extraordinary development of the mine had put a great power into his hands. To feel that prosperity always at the mercy of unintelligent greed had grown irksome to him. To Mrs. Gould it was humiliating. At any rate, it was dangerous. In the confidential communications passing between Charles Gould, the King of Sulaco, and the head of the silver and steel interests far away in California, the conviction was growing that any attempt made by men of education and integrity ought to be discreetly supported. "You may tell your friend Avellanos that I think so," Mr. Holroyd had written at the proper moment from his inviolable sanctuary within the eleven-storey high factory of great affairs. And shortly afterwards, with a credit opened by the Third Southern Bank (located next door but one to the Holroyd Building), the Ribierist party in Costaguana took a practical shape under the eye of the administrator of the San Tome mine. And Don Jose, the hereditary friend of the Gould family, could say: "Perhaps, my dear Carlos, I shall not have believed in vain."

Chapter 2

After another armed struggle, decided by Montero's victory of Rio Seco, had been added to the tale of civil wars, the "honest men," as Don Jose called them, could breathe freely for the first time in half a century. The Five-Year-Mandate law became the basis of that regeneration, the passionate desire and hope for which had been like the elixir of everlasting youth for Don Jose Avellanos.

And when it was suddenly — and not quite unexpectedly — endangered by that "brute Montero," it was a passionate indignation that gave him a new lease of life, as it were. Already, at the time of the President-Dictator's visit to Sulaco, Moraga had sounded a note of warning from Sta. Marta about the War Minister. Montero and his brother made the subject of an earnest talk between the Dictator-President and the Nestor-inspirer of the party. But Don Vincente, a doctor of philosophy from the Cordova University, seemed to have an exaggerated respect for military ability, whose mysteriousness — since it appeared to be altogether independent of intellect — imposed upon his imagination. The victor of Rio Seco was a popular hero. His services were so recent that the President-Dictator quailed before the obvious charge of political ingratitude. Great regenerating transactions were being initiated — the fresh loan, a new railway line, a vast colonization scheme. Anything that could unsettle the public opinion in the capital was to be avoided. Don Jose bowed to these arguments and tried to dismiss from his mind the gold-laced portent in boots, and with a sabre, made meaningless now at last, he hoped, in the new order of things.

Less than six months after the President-Dictator's visit, Sulaco learned with stupefaction of the military revolt in the name of national honour. The Minister of War, in a barrack-square allocution to the officers of the artillery regiment he had been inspecting, had declared the national honour sold to foreigners. The Dictator, by his weak compliance with the demands of the European powers — for the settlement of long outstanding money claims — had showed himself unfit to rule. A letter from Moraga explained afterwards that the initiative, and even the very text, of the incendiary allocution came, in reality, from the other Montero, the ex-guerillero, the Commandante de Plaza. The energetic treatment of Dr. Monygham, sent for in haste "to the mountain," who came galloping three leagues in the dark, saved Don Jose from a dangerous attack of jaundice.

After getting over the shock, Don Jose refused to let himself be prostrated. Indeed, better news succeeded at first. The revolt in the capital had been suppressed after a night of fighting in the streets. Unfortunately, both the Monteros had been able to make their escape south, to their native province of Entre-Montes. The hero of the forest march, the victor of Rio Seco, had been received with frenzied acclamations in Nicoya, the provincial capital. The troops in garrison there had gone to him in a body. The brothers were organizing an army, gathering malcontents, sending emissaries primed with patriotic lies to the people, and with promises of plunder to the wild llaneros. Even a Monterist press had come into existence, speaking oracularly of the secret promises

of support given by “our great sister Republic of the North” against the sinister land-grabbing designs of European powers, cursing in every issue the “miserable Ribiera,” who had plotted to deliver his country, bound hand and foot, for a prey to foreign speculators.

Sulaco, pastoral and sleepy, with its opulent Campo and the rich silver mine, heard the din of arms fitfully in its fortunate isolation. It was nevertheless in the very forefront of the defence with men and money; but the very rumours reached it circuitously — from abroad even, so much was it cut off from the rest of the Republic, not only by natural obstacles, but also by the vicissitudes of the war. The Monteristos were besieging Cayta, an important postal link. The overland couriers ceased to come across the mountains, and no muleteer would consent to risk the journey at last; even Bonifacio on one occasion failed to return from Sta. Marta, either not daring to start, or perhaps captured by the parties of the enemy raiding the country between the Cordillera and the capital. Monterist publications, however, found their way into the province, mysteriously enough; and also Monterist emissaries preaching death to aristocrats in the villages and towns of the Campo. Very early, at the beginning of the trouble, Hernandez, the bandit, had proposed (through the agency of an old priest of a village in the wilds) to deliver two of them to the Ribierist authorities in Tonoro. They had come to offer him a free pardon and the rank of colonel from General Montero in consideration of joining the rebel army with his mounted band. No notice was taken at the time of the proposal. It was joined, as an evidence of good faith, to a petition praying the Sulaco Assembly for permission to enlist, with all his followers, in the forces being then raised in Sulaco for the defence of the Five-Year Mandate of regeneration. The petition, like everything else, had found its way into Don Jose’s hands. He had showed to Mrs. Gould these pages of dirty-greyish rough paper (perhaps looted in some village store), covered with the crabbed, illiterate handwriting of the old padre, carried off from his hut by the side of a mud-walled church to be the secretary of the dreaded Salteador. They had both bent in the lamplight of the Gould drawing-room over the document containing the fierce and yet humble appeal of the man against the blind and stupid barbarity turning an honest ranchero into a bandit. A postscript of the priest stated that, but for being deprived of his liberty for ten days, he had been treated with humanity and the respect due to his sacred calling. He had been, it appears, confessing and absolving the chief and most of the band, and he guaranteed the sincerity of their good disposition. He had distributed heavy penances, no doubt in the way of litanies and fasts; but he argued shrewdly that it would be difficult for them to make their peace with God durably till they had made peace with men.

Never before, perhaps, had Hernandez’s head been in less jeopardy than when he petitioned humbly for permission to buy a pardon for himself and his gang of deserters by armed service. He could range afar from the waste lands protecting his fastness, unchecked, because there were no troops left in the whole province. The usual garrison of Sulaco had gone south to the war, with its brass band playing the Bolivar march on the bridge of one of the O.S.N. Company’s steamers. The great family coaches drawn

up along the shore of the harbour were made to rock on the high leathern springs by the enthusiasm of the senoras and the senioritas standing up to wave their lace handkerchiefs, as lighter after lighter packed full of troops left the end of the jetty.

Nostromo directed the embarkation, under the superintendence of Captain Mitchell, red-faced in the sun, conspicuous in a white waistcoat, representing the allied and anxious goodwill of all the material interests of civilization. General Barrios, who commanded the troops, assured Don Jose on parting that in three weeks he would have Montero in a wooden cage drawn by three pair of oxen ready for a tour through all the towns of the Republic.

“And then, senora,” he continued, baring his curly iron-grey head to Mrs. Gould in her landau — ”and then, senora, we shall convert our swords into plough-shares and grow rich. Even I, myself, as soon as this little business is settled, shall open a fundacion on some land I have on the llanos and try to make a little money in peace and quietness. Senora, you know, all Costaguana knows — what do I say? — this whole South American continent knows, that Pablo Barrios has had his fill of military glory.”

Charles Gould was not present at the anxious and patriotic send-off. It was not his part to see the soldiers embark. It was neither his part, nor his inclination, nor his policy. His part, his inclination, and his policy were united in one endeavour to keep unchecked the flow of treasure he had started single-handed from the re-opened scar in the flank of the mountain. As the mine developed he had trained for himself some native help. There were foremen, artificers and clerks, with Don Pepe for the gobernador of the mining population. For the rest his shoulders alone sustained the whole weight of the “Imperium in Imperio,” the great Gould Concession whose mere shadow had been enough to crush the life out of his father.

Mrs. Gould had no silver mine to look after. In the general life of the Gould Concession she was represented by her two lieutenants, the doctor and the priest, but she fed her woman’s love of excitement on events whose significance was purified to her by the fire of her imaginative purpose. On that day she had brought the Avellanos, father and daughter, down to the harbour with her.

Amongst his other activities of that stirring time, Don Jose had become the chairman of a Patriotic Committee which had armed a great proportion of troops in the Sulaco command with an improved model of a military rifle. It had been just discarded for something still more deadly by one of the great European powers. How much of the market-price for second-hand weapons was covered by the voluntary contributions of the principal families, and how much came from those funds Don Jose was understood to command abroad, remained a secret which he alone could have disclosed; but the Ricos, as the populace called them, had contributed under the pressure of their Nestor’s eloquence. Some of the more enthusiastic ladies had been moved to bring offerings of jewels into the hands of the man who was the life and soul of the party.

There were moments when both his life and his soul seemed overtaxed by so many years of undiscouraged belief in regeneration. He appeared almost inanimate, sitting

rigidly by the side of Mrs. Gould in the landau, with his fine, old, clean-shaven face of a uniform tint as if modelled in yellow wax, shaded by a soft felt hat, the dark eyes looking out fixedly. Antonia, the beautiful Antonia, as Miss Avellanos was called in Sulaco, leaned back, facing them; and her full figure, the grave oval of her face with full red lips, made her look more mature than Mrs. Gould, with her mobile expression and small, erect person under a slightly swaying sunshade.

Whenever possible Antonia attended her father; her recognized devotion weakened the shocking effect of her scorn for the rigid conventions regulating the life of Spanish-American girlhood. And, in truth, she was no longer girlish. It was said that she often wrote State papers from her father's dictation, and was allowed to read all the books in his library. At the receptions — where the situation was saved by the presence of a very decrepit old lady (a relation of the Corbelans), quite deaf and motionless in an armchair — Antonia could hold her own in a discussion with two or three men at a time. Obviously she was not the girl to be content with peeping through a barred window at a cloaked figure of a lover ensconced in a doorway opposite — which is the correct form of Costaguana courtship. It was generally believed that with her foreign upbringing and foreign ideas the learned and proud Antonia would never marry — unless, indeed, she married a foreigner from Europe or North America, now that Sulaco seemed on the point of being invaded by all the world.

Chapter 3

When General Barrios stopped to address Mrs. Gould, Antonia raised negligently her hand holding an open fan, as if to shade from the sun her head, wrapped in a light lace shawl. The clear gleam of her blue eyes gliding behind the black fringe of eyelashes paused for a moment upon her father, then travelled further to the figure of a young man of thirty at most, of medium height, rather thick-set, wearing a light overcoat. Bearing down with the open palm of his hand upon the knob of a flexible cane, he had been looking on from a distance; but directly he saw himself noticed, he approached quietly and put his elbow over the door of the landau.

The shirt collar, cut low in the neck, the big bow of his cravat, the style of his clothing, from the round hat to the varnished shoes, suggested an idea of French elegance; but otherwise he was the very type of a fair Spanish creole. The fluffy moustache and the short, curly, golden beard did not conceal his lips, rosy, fresh, almost pouting in expression. His full, round face was of that warm, healthy creole white which is never tanned by its native sunshine. Martin Decoud was seldom exposed to the Costaguana sun under which he was born. His people had been long settled in Paris, where he had studied law, had dabbled in literature, had hoped now and then in moments of exaltation to become a poet like that other foreigner of Spanish blood, Jose Maria Heredia. In other moments he had, to pass the time, condescended to write articles on European affairs for the *Semenario*, the principal newspaper in Sta. Marta, which

printed them under the heading "From our special correspondent," though the authorship was an open secret. Everybody in Costaguana, where the tale of compatriots in Europe is jealously kept, knew that it was "the son Decoud," a talented young man, supposed to be moving in the higher spheres of Society. As a matter of fact, he was an idle boulevardier, in touch with some smart journalists, made free of a few newspaper offices, and welcomed in the pleasure haunts of pressmen. This life, whose dreary superficiality is covered by the glitter of universal blague, like the stupid clowning of a harlequin by the spangles of a motley costume, induced in him a Frenchified — but most un-French — cosmopolitanism, in reality a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority. Of his own country he used to say to his French associates: "Imagine an atmosphere of opera-bouffe in which all the comic business of stage statesmen, brigands, etc., etc., all their farcical stealing, intriguing, and stabbing is done in dead earnest. It is screamingly funny, the blood flows all the time, and the actors believe themselves to be influencing the fate of the universe. Of course, government in general, any government anywhere, is a thing of exquisite comicality to a discerning mind; but really we Spanish-Americans do overstep the bounds. No man of ordinary intelligence can take part in the intrigues of une farce macabre. However, these Ribierists, of whom we hear so much just now, are really trying in their own comical way to make the country habitable, and even to pay some of its debts. My friends, you had better write up Senor Ribiera all you can in kindness to your own bondholders. Really, if what I am told in my letters is true, there is some chance for them at last."

And he would explain with railing verve what Don Vincente Ribiera stood for — a mournful little man oppressed by his own good intentions, the significance of battles won, who Montero was (un grotesque vaniteux et feroce), and the manner of the new loan connected with railway development, and the colonization of vast tracts of land in one great financial scheme.

And his French friends would remark that evidently this little fellow Decoud *connaissait la question a fond*. An important Parisian review asked him for an article on the situation. It was composed in a serious tone and in a spirit of levity. Afterwards he asked one of his intimates —

"Have you read my thing about the regeneration of Costaguana — *une bonne blague, hein?*"

He imagined himself Parisian to the tips of his fingers. But far from being that he was in danger of remaining a sort of nondescript dilettante all his life. He had pushed the habit of universal raillery to a point where it blinded him to the genuine impulses of his own nature. To be suddenly selected for the executive member of the patriotic small-arms committee of Sulaco seemed to him the height of the unexpected, one of those fantastic moves of which only his "dear countrymen" were capable.

"It's like a tile falling on my head. I — I — executive member! It's the first I hear of it! What do I know of military rifles? *C'est funambulesque!*" he had exclaimed to his favourite sister; for the Decoud family — except the old father and mother — used

the French language amongst themselves. "And you should see the explanatory and confidential letter! Eight pages of it — no less!"

This letter, in Antonia's handwriting, was signed by Don Jose, who appealed to the "young and gifted Costaguanero" on public grounds, and privately opened his heart to his talented god-son, a man of wealth and leisure, with wide relations, and by his parentage and bringing-up worthy of all confidence.

"Which means," Martin commented, cynically, to his sister, "that I am not likely to misappropriate the funds, or go blabbing to our Charge d'Affaires here."

The whole thing was being carried out behind the back of the War Minister, Montero, a mistrusted member of the Ribiera Government, but difficult to get rid of at once. He was not to know anything of it till the troops under Barrios's command had the new rifle in their hands. The President-Dictator, whose position was very difficult, was alone in the secret.

"How funny!" commented Martin's sister and confidante; to which the brother, with an air of best Parisian blague, had retorted:

"It's immense! The idea of that Chief of the State engaged, with the help of private citizens, in digging a mine under his own indispensable War Minister. No! We are unapproachable!" And he laughed immoderately.

Afterwards his sister was surprised at the earnestness and ability he displayed in carrying out his mission, which circumstances made delicate, and his want of special knowledge rendered difficult. She had never seen Martin take so much trouble about anything in his whole life.

"It amuses me," he had explained, briefly. "I am beset by a lot of swindlers trying to sell all sorts of gaspipe weapons. They are charming; they invite me to expensive luncheons; I keep up their hopes; it's extremely entertaining. Meanwhile, the real affair is being carried through in quite another quarter."

When the business was concluded he declared suddenly his intention of seeing the precious consignment delivered safely in Sulaco. The whole burlesque business, he thought, was worth following up to the end. He mumbled his excuses, tugging at his golden beard, before the acute young lady who (after the first wide stare of astonishment) looked at him with narrowed eyes, and pronounced slowly —

"I believe you want to see Antonia."

"What Antonia?" asked the Costaguana boulevardier, in a vexed and disdainful tone. He shrugged his shoulders, and spun round on his heel. His sister called out after him joyously —

"The Antonia you used to know when she wore her hair in two plaits down her back."

He had known her some eight years since, shortly before the Avellanos had left Europe for good, as a tall girl of sixteen, youthfully austere, and of a character already so formed that she ventured to treat slightly his pose of disabused wisdom. On one occasion, as though she had lost all patience, she flew out at him about the aimlessness of his life and the levity of his opinions. He was twenty then, an only son, spoiled by

his adoring family. This attack disconcerted him so greatly that he had faltered in his affectation of amused superiority before that insignificant chit of a school-girl. But the impression left was so strong that ever since all the girl friends of his sisters recalled to him Antonia Avellanos by some faint resemblance, or by the great force of contrast. It was, he told himself, like a ridiculous fatality. And, of course, in the news the Decouds received regularly from Costaguana, the name of their friends, the Avellanos, cropped up frequently — the arrest and the abominable treatment of the ex-Minister, the dangers and hardships endured by the family, its withdrawal in poverty to Sulaco, the death of the mother.

The Monterist pronunciamento had taken place before Martin Decoud reached Costaguana. He came out in a roundabout way, through Magellan's Straits by the main line and the West Coast Service of the O.S.N. Company. His precious consignment arrived just in time to convert the first feelings of consternation into a mood of hope and resolution. Publicly he was made much of by the familias principales. Privately Don Jose, still shaken and weak, embraced him with tears in his eyes.

"You have come out yourself! No less could be expected from a Decoud. Alas! our worst fears have been realized," he moaned, affectionately. And again he hugged his god-son. This was indeed the time for men of intellect and conscience to rally round the endangered cause.

It was then that Martin Decoud, the adopted child of Western Europe, felt the absolute change of atmosphere. He submitted to being embraced and talked to without a word. He was moved in spite of himself by that note of passion and sorrow unknown on the more refined stage of European politics. But when the tall Antonia, advancing with her light step in the dimness of the big bare Sala of the Avellanos house, offered him her hand (in her emancipated way), and murmured, "I am glad to see you here, Don Martin," he felt how impossible it would be to tell these two people that he had intended to go away by the next month's packet. Don Jose, meantime, continued his praises. Every accession added to public confidence, and, besides, what an example to the young men at home from the brilliant defender of the country's regeneration, the worthy expounder of the party's political faith before the world! Everybody had read the magnificent article in the famous Parisian Review. The world was now informed: and the author's appearance at this moment was like a public act of faith. Young Decoud felt overcome by a feeling of impatient confusion. His plan had been to return by way of the United States through California, visit Yellowstone Park, see Chicago, Niagara, have a look at Canada, perhaps make a short stay in New York, a longer one in Newport, use his letters of introduction. The pressure of Antonia's hand was so frank, the tone of her voice was so unexpectedly unchanged in its approving warmth, that all he found to say after his low bow was —

"I am inexpressibly grateful for your welcome; but why need a man be thanked for returning to his native country? I am sure Dona Antonia does not think so."

“Certainly not, senor,” she said, with that perfectly calm openness of manner which characterized all her utterances. “But when he returns, as you return, one may be glad — for the sake of both.”

Martin Decoud said nothing of his plans. He not only never breathed a word of them to any one, but only a fortnight later asked the mistress of the Casa Gould (where he had of course obtained admission at once), leaning forward in his chair with an air of well-bred familiarity, whether she could not detect in him that day a marked change — an air, he explained, of more excellent gravity. At this Mrs. Gould turned her face full towards him with the silent inquiry of slightly widened eyes and the merest ghost of a smile, an habitual movement with her, which was very fascinating to men by something subtly devoted, finely self-forgetful in its lively readiness of attention. Because, Decoud continued imperturbably, he felt no longer an idle cumberer of the earth. She was, he assured her, actually beholding at that moment the Journalist of Sulaco. At once Mrs. Gould glanced towards Antonia, posed upright in the corner of a high, straight-backed Spanish sofa, a large black fan waving slowly against the curves of her fine figure, the tips of crossed feet peeping from under the hem of the black skirt. Decoud’s eyes also remained fixed there, while in an undertone he added that Miss Avellanos was quite aware of his new and unexpected vocation, which in Costaguana was generally the speciality of half-educated negroes and wholly penniless lawyers. Then, confronting with a sort of urbane effrontery Mrs. Gould’s gaze, now turned sympathetically upon himself, he breathed out the words, “Pro Patria!”

What had happened was that he had all at once yielded to Don Jose’s pressing entreaties to take the direction of a newspaper that would “voice the aspirations of the province.” It had been Don Jose’s old and cherished idea. The necessary plant (on a modest scale) and a large consignment of paper had been received from America some time before; the right man alone was wanted. Even Senor Moraga in Sta. Marta had not been able to find one, and the matter was now becoming pressing; some organ was absolutely needed to counteract the effect of the lies disseminated by the Monterist press: the atrocious calumnies, the appeals to the people calling upon them to rise with their knives in their hands and put an end once for all to the Blancos, to these Gothic remnants, to these sinister mummies, these impotent paraliticos, who plotted with foreigners for the surrender of the lands and the slavery of the people.

The clamour of this Negro Liberalism frightened Senor Avellanos. A newspaper was the only remedy. And now that the right man had been found in Decoud, great black letters appeared painted between the windows above the arcaded ground floor of a house on the Plaza. It was next to Anzani’s great emporium of boots, silks, iron-ware, muslins, wooden toys, tiny silver arms, legs, heads, hearts (for ex-voto offerings), rosaries, champagne, women’s hats, patent medicines, even a few dusty books in paper covers and mostly in the French language. The big black letters formed the words, “Offices of the Porvenir.” From these offices a single folded sheet of Martin’s journalism issued three times a week; and the sleek yellow Anzani prowling in a suit of ample black and carpet slippers, before the many doors of his establishment, greeted by a

deep, side-long inclination of his body the Journalist of Sulaco going to and fro on the business of his august calling.

Chapter 4

Perhaps it was in the exercise of his calling that he had come to see the troops depart. The Porvenir of the day after next would no doubt relate the event, but its editor, leaning his side against the landau, seemed to look at nothing. The front rank of the company of infantry drawn up three deep across the shore end of the jetty when pressed too close would bring their bayonets to the charge ferociously, with an awful rattle; and then the crowd of spectators swayed back bodily, even under the noses of the big white mules. Notwithstanding the great multitude there was only a low, muttering noise; the dust hung in a brown haze, in which the horsemen, wedged in the throng here and there, towered from the hips upwards, gazing all one way over the heads. Almost every one of them had mounted a friend, who steadied himself with both hands grasping his shoulders from behind; and the rims of their hats touching, made like one disc sustaining the cones of two pointed crowns with a double face underneath. A hoarse mozo would bawl out something to an acquaintance in the ranks, or a woman would shriek suddenly the word *Adios!* followed by the Christian name of a man.

General Barrios, in a shabby blue tunic and white peg-top trousers falling upon strange red boots, kept his head uncovered and stooped slightly, propping himself up with a thick stick. No! He had earned enough military glory to satiate any man, he insisted to Mrs. Gould, trying at the same time to put an air of gallantry into his attitude. A few jetty hairs hung sparsely from his upper lip, he had a salient nose, a thin, long jaw, and a black silk patch over one eye. His other eye, small and deep-set, twinkled erratically in all directions, aimlessly affable. The few European spectators, all men, who had naturally drifted into the neighbourhood of the Gould carriage, betrayed by the solemnity of their faces their impression that the general must have had too much punch (Swedish punch, imported in bottles by Anzani) at the Amarilla Club before he had started with his Staff on a furious ride to the harbour. But Mrs. Gould bent forward, self-possessed, and declared her conviction that still more glory awaited the general in the near future.

“Senora!” he remonstrated, with great feeling, “in the name of God, reflect! How can there be any glory for a man like me in overcoming that bald-headed embustero with the dyed moustaches?”

Pablo Ignacio Barrios, son of a village alcalde, general of division, commanding in chief the Occidental Military district, did not frequent the higher society of the town. He preferred the unceremonious gatherings of men where he could tell jaguar-hunt stories, boast of his powers with the lasso, with which he could perform extremely difficult feats of the sort “no married man should attempt,” as the saying goes amongst the llaneros; relate tales of extraordinary night rides, encounters with wild bulls, strug-

gles with crocodiles, adventures in the great forests, crossings of swollen rivers. And it was not mere boastfulness that prompted the general's reminiscences, but a genuine love of that wild life which he had led in his young days before he turned his back for ever on the thatched roof of the parental *tolderia* in the woods. Wandering away as far as Mexico he had fought against the French by the side (as he said) of Juarez, and was the only military man of Costaguana who had ever encountered European troops in the field. That fact shed a great lustre upon his name till it became eclipsed by the rising star of Montero. All his life he had been an inveterate gambler. He alluded himself quite openly to the current story how once, during some campaign (when in command of a brigade), he had gambled away his horses, pistols, and accoutrements, to the very epaulettes, playing monte with his colonels the night before the battle. Finally, he had sent under escort his sword (a presentation sword, with a gold hilt) to the town in the rear of his position to be immediately pledged for five hundred pesetas with a sleepy and frightened shop-keeper. By daybreak he had lost the last of that money, too, when his only remark, as he rose calmly, was, "Now let us go and fight to the death." From that time he had become aware that a general could lead his troops into battle very well with a simple stick in his hand. "It has been my custom ever since," he would say.

He was always overwhelmed with debts; even during the periods of splendour in his varied fortunes of a Costaguana general, when he held high military commands, his gold-laced uniforms were almost always in pawn with some tradesman. And at last, to avoid the incessant difficulties of costume caused by the anxious lenders, he had assumed a disdain of military trappings, an eccentric fashion of shabby old tunics, which had become like a second nature. But the faction Barrios joined needed to fear no political betrayal. He was too much of a real soldier for the ignoble traffic of buying and selling victories. A member of the foreign diplomatic body in Sta. Marta had once passed a judgment upon him: "Barrios is a man of perfect honesty and even of some talent for war, *mais il manque de tenue.*" After the triumph of the Ribierists he had obtained the reputedly lucrative Occidental command, mainly through the exertions of his creditors (the Sta. Marta shopkeepers, all great politicians), who moved heaven and earth in his interest publicly, and privately besieged Senor Moraga, the influential agent of the San Tome mine, with the exaggerated lamentations that if the general were passed over, "We shall all be ruined." An incidental but favourable mention of his name in Mr. Gould senior's long correspondence with his son had something to do with his appointment, too; but most of all undoubtedly his established political honesty. No one questioned the personal bravery of the Tiger-killer, as the populace called him. He was, however, said to be unlucky in the field — but this was to be the beginning of an era of peace. The soldiers liked him for his humane temper, which was like a strange and precious flower unexpectedly blooming on the hotbed of corrupt revolutions; and when he rode slowly through the streets during some military display, the contemptuous good humour of his solitary eye roaming over the crowds extorted the acclamations of the populace. The women of that class especially seemed positively fascinated by the long drooping nose, the peaked chin, the heavy lower lip, the black silk

eyepatch and band slanting rakishly over the forehead. His high rank always procured an audience of Caballeros for his sporting stories, which he detailed very well with a simple, grave enjoyment. As to the society of ladies, it was irksome by the restraints it imposed without any equivalent, as far as he could see. He had not, perhaps, spoken three times on the whole to Mrs. Gould since he had taken up his high command; but he had observed her frequently riding with the Senor Administrador, and had pronounced that there was more sense in her little bridle-hand than in all the female heads in Sulaco. His impulse had been to be very civil on parting to a woman who did not wobble in the saddle, and happened to be the wife of a personality very important to a man always short of money. He even pushed his attentions so far as to desire the aide-de-camp at his side (a thick-set, short captain with a Tartar physiognomy) to bring along a corporal with a file of men in front of the carriage, lest the crowd in its backward surges should "incommode the mules of the senora." Then, turning to the small knot of silent Europeans looking on within earshot, he raised his voice protectingly —

"Senores, have no apprehension. Go on quietly making your Ferro Carril — your railways, your telegraphs. Your — There's enough wealth in Costaguana to pay for everything — or else you would not be here. Ha! ha! Don't mind this little picardia of my friend Montero. In a little while you shall behold his dyed moustaches through the bars of a strong wooden cage. Si, senores! Fear nothing, develop the country, work, work!"

The little group of engineers received this exhortation without a word, and after waving his hand at them loftily, he addressed himself again to Mrs. Gould —

"That is what Don Jose says we must do. Be enterprising! Work! Grow rich! To put Montero in a cage is my work; and when that insignificant piece of business is done, then, as Don Jose wishes us, we shall grow rich, one and all, like so many Englishmen, because it is money that saves a country, and —"

But a young officer in a very new uniform, hurrying up from the direction of the jetty, interrupted his interpretation of Senor Avellanos's ideals. The general made a movement of impatience; the other went on talking to him insistently, with an air of respect. The horses of the Staff had been embarked, the steamer's gig was awaiting the general at the boat steps; and Barrios, after a fierce stare of his one eye, began to take leave. Don Jose roused himself for an appropriate phrase pronounced mechanically. The terrible strain of hope and fear was telling on him, and he seemed to husband the last sparks of his fire for those oratorical efforts of which even the distant Europe was to hear. Antonia, her red lips firmly closed, averted her head behind the raised fan; and young Decoud, though he felt the girl's eyes upon him, gazed away persistently, hooked on his elbow, with a scornful and complete detachment. Mrs. Gould heroically concealed her dismay at the appearance of men and events so remote from her racial conventions, dismay too deep to be uttered in words even to her husband. She understood his voiceless reserve better now. Their confidential intercourse fell, not in moments of privacy, but precisely in public, when the quick meeting of their glances

would comment upon some fresh turn of events. She had gone to his school of uncompromising silence, the only one possible, since so much that seemed shocking, weird, and grotesque in the working out of their purposes had to be accepted as normal in this country. Decidedly, the stately Antonia looked more mature and infinitely calm; but she would never have known how to reconcile the sudden sinkings of her heart with an amiable mobility of expression.

Mrs. Gould smiled a good-bye at Barrios, nodded round to the Europeans (who raised their hats simultaneously) with an engaging invitation, "I hope to see you all presently, at home"; then said nervously to Decoud, "Get in, Don Martin," and heard him mutter to himself in French, as he opened the carriage door, "Le sort en est jete." She heard him with a sort of exasperation. Nobody ought to have known better than himself that the first cast of dice had been already thrown long ago in a most desperate game. Distant acclamations, words of command yelled out, and a roll of drums on the jetty greeted the departing general. Something like a slight faintness came over her, and she looked blankly at Antonia's still face, wondering what would happen to Charley if that absurd man failed. "A la casa, Ignacio," she cried at the motionless broad back of the coachman, who gathered the reins without haste, mumbling to himself under his breath, "Si, la casa. Si, si nina."

The carriage rolled noiselessly on the soft track, the shadows fell long on the dusty little plain interspersed with dark bushes, mounds of turned-up earth, low wooden buildings with iron roofs of the Railway Company; the sparse row of telegraph poles strode obliquely clear of the town, bearing a single, almost invisible wire far into the great campo — like a slender, vibrating feeler of that progress waiting outside for a moment of peace to enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land.

The cafe window of the Albergo d'Italia Una was full of sunburnt, whiskered faces of railway men. But at the other end of the house, the end of the Signori Inglesi, old Giorgio, at the door with one of his girls on each side, bared his bushy head, as white as the snows of Higuerota. Mrs. Gould stopped the carriage. She seldom failed to speak to her protegee; moreover, the excitement, the heat, and the dust had made her thirsty. She asked for a glass of water. Giorgio sent the children indoors for it, and approached with pleasure expressed in his whole rugged countenance. It was not often that he had occasion to see his benefactress, who was also an Englishwoman — another title to his regard. He offered some excuses for his wife. It was a bad day with her; her oppressions — he tapped his own broad chest. She could not move from her chair that day.

Decoud, ensconced in the corner of his seat, observed gloomily Mrs. Gould's old revolutionist, then, offhand —

"Well, and what do you think of it all, Garibaldino?"

Old Giorgio, looking at him with some curiosity, said civilly that the troops had marched very well. One-eyed Barrios and his officers had done wonders with the recruits in a short time. Those Indios, only caught the other day, had gone swinging past in double quick time, like bersaglieri; they looked well fed, too, and had whole uniforms. "Uniforms!" he repeated with a half-smile of pity. A look of grim retrospect stole over

his piercing, steady eyes. It had been otherwise in his time when men fought against tyranny, in the forests of Brazil, or on the plains of Uruguay, starving on half-raw beef without salt, half naked, with often only a knife tied to a stick for a weapon. "And yet we used to prevail against the oppressor," he concluded, proudly.

His animation fell; the slight gesture of his hand expressed discouragement; but he added that he had asked one of the sergeants to show him the new rifle. There was no such weapon in his fighting days; and if Barrios could not —

"Yes, yes," broke in Don Jose, almost trembling with eagerness. "We are safe. The good Senor Viola is a man of experience. Extremely deadly — is it not so? You have accomplished your mission admirably, my dear Martin."

Decoud, lolling back moodily, contemplated old Viola.

"Ah! Yes. A man of experience. But who are you for, really, in your heart?"

Mrs. Gould leaned over to the children. Linda had brought out a glass of water on a tray, with extreme care; Giselle presented her with a bunch of flowers gathered hastily.

"For the people," declared old Viola, sternly.

"We are all for the people — in the end."

"Yes," muttered old Viola, savagely. "And meantime they fight for you. Blind. Esclavos!"

At that moment young Scarfe of the railway staff emerged from the door of the part reserved for the Signori Inglesi. He had come down to headquarters from somewhere up the line on a light engine, and had had just time to get a bath and change his clothes. He was a nice boy, and Mrs. Gould welcomed him.

"It's a delightful surprise to see you, Mrs. Gould. I've just come down. Usual luck. Missed everything, of course. This show is just over, and I hear there has been a great dance at Don Juste Lopez's last night. Is it true?"

"The young patricians," Decoud began suddenly in his precise English, "have indeed been dancing before they started off to the war with the Great Pompey."

Young Scarfe stared, astounded. "You haven't met before," Mrs. Gould intervened. "Mr. Decoud — Mr. Scarfe."

"Ah! But we are not going to Pharsalia," protested Don Jose, with nervous haste, also in English. "You should not jest like this, Martin."

Antonia's breast rose and fell with a deeper breath. The young engineer was utterly in the dark. "Great what?" he muttered, vaguely.

"Luckily, Montero is not a Caesar," Decoud continued. "Not the two Monteros put together would make a decent parody of a Caesar." He crossed his arms on his breast, looking at Senor Avellanos, who had returned to his immobility. "It is only you, Don Jose, who are a genuine old Roman — *vir Romanus* — eloquent and inflexible."

Since he had heard the name of Montero pronounced, young Scarfe had been eager to express his simple feelings. In a loud and youthful tone he hoped that this Montero was going to be licked once for all and done with. There was no saying what would happen to the railway if the revolution got the upper hand. Perhaps it would have to be abandoned. It would not be the first railway gone to pot in Costaguana. "You

know, it's one of their so-called national things," he ran on, wrinkling up his nose as if the word had a suspicious flavour to his profound experience of South American affairs. And, of course, he chatted with animation, it had been such an immense piece of luck for him at his age to get appointed on the staff "of a big thing like that — don't you know." It would give him the pull over a lot of chaps all through life, he asserted. "Therefore — down with Montero! Mrs. Gould." His artless grin disappeared slowly before the unanimous gravity of the faces turned upon him from the carriage; only that "old chap," Don Jose, presenting a motionless, waxy profile, stared straight on as if deaf. Scarfe did not know the Avellanos very well. They did not give balls, and Antonia never appeared at a ground-floor window, as some other young ladies used to do attended by elder women, to chat with the caballeros on horseback in the Calle. The stares of these creoles did not matter much; but what on earth had come to Mrs. Gould? She said, "Go on, Ignacio," and gave him a slow inclination of the head. He heard a short laugh from that round-faced, Frenchified fellow. He coloured up to the eyes, and stared at Giorgio Viola, who had fallen back with the children, hat in hand.

"I shall want a horse presently," he said with some asperity to the old man.

"Si, senor. There are plenty of horses," murmured the Garibaldino, smoothing absently, with his brown hands, the two heads, one dark with bronze glints, the other fair with a coppery ripple, of the two girls by his side. The returning stream of sightseers raised a great dust on the road. Horsemen noticed the group. "Go to your mother," he said. "They are growing up as I am growing older, and there is nobody —"

He looked at the young engineer and stopped, as if awakened from a dream; then, folding his arms on his breast, took up his usual position, leaning back in the doorway with an upward glance fastened on the white shoulder of Higuerota far away.

In the carriage Martin Decoud, shifting his position as though he could not make himself comfortable, muttered as he swayed towards Antonia, "I suppose you hate me." Then in a loud voice he began to congratulate Don Jose upon all the engineers being convinced Ribierists. The interest of all those foreigners was gratifying. "You have heard this one. He is an enlightened well-wisher. It is pleasant to think that the prosperity of Costaguana is of some use to the world."

"He is very young," Mrs. Gould remarked, quietly.

"And so very wise for his age," retorted Decoud. "But here we have the naked truth from the mouth of that child. You are right, Don Jose. The natural treasures of Costaguana are of importance to the progressive Europe represented by this youth, just as three hundred years ago the wealth of our Spanish fathers was a serious object to the rest of Europe — as represented by the bold buccaneers. There is a curse of futility upon our character: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption. We convulsed a continent for our independence only to become the passive prey of a democratic parody, the helpless victims of scoundrels and cut-throats, our institutions a mockery, our laws a farce — a Guzman Bento our master! And we have sunk so low that when a man like you

has awakened our conscience, a stupid barbarian of a Montero — Great Heavens! a Montero! — becomes a deadly danger, and an ignorant, boastful Indio, like Barrios, is our defender.”

But Don Jose, disregarding the general indictment as though he had not heard a word of it, took up the defence of Barrios. The man was competent enough for his special task in the plan of campaign. It consisted in an offensive movement, with Cayta as base, upon the flank of the Revolutionist forces advancing from the south against Sta. Marta, which was covered by another army with the President-Dictator in its midst. Don Jose became quite animated with a great flow of speech, bending forward anxiously under the steady eyes of his daughter. Decoud, as if silenced by so much ardour, did not make a sound. The bells of the city were striking the hour of Oracion when the carriage rolled under the old gateway facing the harbour like a shapeless monument of leaves and stones. The rumble of wheels under the sonorous arch was traversed by a strange, piercing shriek, and Decoud, from his back seat, had a view of the people behind the carriage trudging along the road outside, all turning their heads, in sombreros and rebozos, to look at a locomotive which rolled quickly out of sight behind Giorgio Viola's house, under a white trail of steam that seemed to vanish in the breathless, hysterically prolonged scream of warlike triumph. And it was all like a fleeting vision, the shrieking ghost of a railway engine fleeing across the frame of the archway, behind the startled movement of the people streaming back from a military spectacle with silent footsteps on the dust of the road. It was a material train returning from the Campo to the palisaded yards. The empty cars rolled lightly on the single track; there was no rumble of wheels, no tremor of the ground. The engine-driver, running past the Casa Viola with the salute of an uplifted arm, checked his speed smartly before entering the yard; and when the ear-splitting screech of the steam-whistle for the brakes had stopped, a series of hard, battering shocks, mingled with the clanking of chain-couplings, made a tumult of blows and shaken fetters under the vault of the gate.

Chapter 5

The Gould carriage was the first to return from the harbour to the empty town. On the ancient pavement, laid out in patterns, sunk into ruts and holes, the portly Ignacio, mindful of the springs of the Parisian-built landau, had pulled up to a walk, and Decoud in his corner contemplated moodily the inner aspect of the gate. The squat turreted sides held up between them a mass of masonry with bunches of grass growing at the top, and a grey, heavily scrolled, armorial shield of stone above the apex of the arch with the arms of Spain nearly smoothed out as if in readiness for some new device typical of the impending progress.

The explosive noise of the railway trucks seemed to augment Decoud's irritation. He muttered something to himself, then began to talk aloud in curt, angry phrases

thrown at the silence of the two women. They did not look at him at all; while Don Jose, with his semi-translucent, waxy complexion, overshadowed by the soft grey hat, swayed a little to the jolts of the carriage by the side of Mrs. Gould.

“This sound puts a new edge on a very old truth.”

Decoud spoke in French, perhaps because of Ignacio on the box above him; the old coachman, with his broad back filling a short, silver-braided jacket, had a big pair of ears, whose thick rims stood well away from his cropped head.

“Yes, the noise outside the city wall is new, but the principle is old.”

He ruminated his discontent for a while, then began afresh with a sidelong glance at Antonia —

“No, but just imagine our forefathers in morions and corselets drawn up outside this gate, and a band of adventurers just landed from their ships in the harbour there. Thieves, of course. Speculators, too. Their expeditions, each one, were the speculations of grave and reverend persons in England. That is history, as that absurd sailor Mitchell is always saying.”

“Mitchell’s arrangements for the embarkation of the troops were excellent!” exclaimed Don Jose.

“That! — that! oh, that’s really the work of that Genoese seaman! But to return to my noises; there used to be in the old days the sound of trumpets outside that gate. War trumpets! I’m sure they were trumpets. I have read somewhere that Drake, who was the greatest of these men, used to dine alone in his cabin on board ship to the sound of trumpets. In those days this town was full of wealth. Those men came to take it. Now the whole land is like a treasure-house, and all these people are breaking into it, whilst we are cutting each other’s throats. The only thing that keeps them out is mutual jealousy. But they’ll come to an agreement some day — and by the time we’ve settled our quarrels and become decent and honourable, there’ll be nothing left for us. It has always been the same. We are a wonderful people, but it has always been our fate to be” — he did not say “robbed,” but added, after a pause — “exploited!”

Mrs. Gould said, “Oh, this is unjust!” And Antonia interjected, “Don’t answer him, Emilia. He is attacking me.”

“You surely do not think I was attacking Don Carlos!” Decoud answered.

And then the carriage stopped before the door of the Casa Gould. The young man offered his hand to the ladies. They went in first together; Don Jose walked by the side of Decoud, and the gouty old porter tottered after them with some light wraps on his arm.

Don Jose slipped his hand under the arm of the journalist of Sulaco.

“The Porvenir must have a long and confident article upon Barrios and the irresistibility of his army of Cayta! The moral effect should be kept up in the country. We must cable encouraging extracts to Europe and the United States to maintain a favourable impression abroad.”

Decoud muttered, “Oh, yes, we must comfort our friends, the speculators.”

The long open gallery was in shadow, with its screen of plants in vases along the balustrade, holding out motionless blossoms, and all the glass doors of the reception-rooms thrown open. A jingle of spurs died out at the further end.

Basilio, standing aside against the wall, said in a soft tone to the passing ladies, "The Senor Administrador is just back from the mountain."

In the great sala, with its groups of ancient Spanish and modern European furniture making as if different centres under the high white spread of the ceiling, the silver and porcelain of the tea-service gleamed among a cluster of dwarf chairs, like a bit of a lady's boudoir, putting in a note of feminine and intimate delicacy.

Don Jose in his rocking-chair placed his hat on his lap, and Decoud walked up and down the whole length of the room, passing between tables loaded with knick-knacks and almost disappearing behind the high backs of leathern sofas. He was thinking of the angry face of Antonia; he was confident that he would make his peace with her. He had not stayed in Sulaco to quarrel with Antonia.

Martin Decoud was angry with himself. All he saw and heard going on around him exasperated the preconceived views of his European civilization. To contemplate revolutions from the distance of the Parisian Boulevards was quite another matter. Here on the spot it was not possible to dismiss their tragic comedy with the expression, "Quelle farce!"

The reality of the political action, such as it was, seemed closer, and acquired poignancy by Antonia's belief in the cause. Its crudeness hurt his feelings. He was surprised at his own sensitiveness.

"I suppose I am more of a Costaguanero than I would have believed possible," he thought to himself.

His disdain grew like a reaction of his scepticism against the action into which he was forced by his infatuation for Antonia. He soothed himself by saying he was not a patriot, but a lover.

The ladies came in bareheaded, and Mrs. Gould sank low before the little tea-table. Antonia took up her usual place at the reception hour — the corner of a leathern couch, with a rigid grace in her pose and a fan in her hand. Decoud, swerving from the straight line of his march, came to lean over the high back of her seat.

For a long time he talked into her ear from behind, softly, with a half smile and an air of apologetic familiarity. Her fan lay half grasped on her knees. She never looked at him. His rapid utterance grew more and more insistent and caressing. At last he ventured a slight laugh.

"No, really. You must forgive me. One must be serious sometimes." He paused. She turned her head a little; her blue eyes glided slowly towards him, slightly upwards, mollified and questioning.

"You can't think I am serious when I call Montero a gran' bestia every second day in the Porvenir? That is not a serious occupation. No occupation is serious, not even when a bullet through the heart is the penalty of failure!"

Her hand closed firmly on her fan.

“Some reason, you understand, I mean some sense, may creep into thinking; some glimpse of truth. I mean some effective truth, for which there is no room in politics or journalism. I happen to have said what I thought. And you are angry! If you do me the kindness to think a little you will see that I spoke like a patriot.”

She opened her red lips for the first time, not unkindly.

“Yes, but you never see the aim. Men must be used as they are. I suppose nobody is really disinterested, unless, perhaps, you, Don Martin.”

“God forbid! It’s the last thing I should like you to believe of me.” He spoke lightly, and paused.

She began to fan herself with a slow movement without raising her hand. After a time he whispered passionately —

“Antonia!”

She smiled, and extended her hand after the English manner towards Charles Gould, who was bowing before her; while Decoud, with his elbows spread on the back of the sofa, dropped his eyes and murmured, “Bonjour.”

The Senor Administrador of the San Tome mine bent over his wife for a moment. They exchanged a few words, of which only the phrase, “The greatest enthusiasm,” pronounced by Mrs. Gould, could be heard.

“Yes,” Decoud began in a murmur. “Even he!”

“This is sheer calumny,” said Antonia, not very severely.

“You just ask him to throw his mine into the melting-pot for the great cause,” Decoud whispered.

Don Jose had raised his voice. He rubbed his hands cheerily. The excellent aspect of the troops and the great quantity of new deadly rifles on the shoulders of those brave men seemed to fill him with an ecstatic confidence.

Charles Gould, very tall and thin before his chair, listened, but nothing could be discovered in his face except a kind and deferential attention.

Meantime, Antonia had risen, and, crossing the room, stood looking out of one of the three long windows giving on the street. Decoud followed her. The window was thrown open, and he leaned against the thickness of the wall. The long folds of the damask curtain, falling straight from the broad brass cornice, hid him partly from the room. He folded his arms on his breast, and looked steadily at Antonia’s profile.

The people returning from the harbour filled the pavements; the shuffle of sandals and a low murmur of voices ascended to the window. Now and then a coach rolled slowly along the disjointed roadway of the Calle de la Constitucion. There were not many private carriages in Sulaco; at the most crowded hour on the Alameda they could be counted with one glance of the eye. The great family arks swayed on high leathern springs, full of pretty powdered faces in which the eyes looked intensely alive and black. And first Don Juste Lopez, the President of the Provincial Assembly, passed with his three lovely daughters, solemn in a black frock-coat and stiff white tie, as when directing a debate from a high tribune. Though they all raised their eyes, Antonia did not make the usual greeting gesture of a fluttered hand, and they affected not to see

the two young people, Costaguaneros with European manners, whose eccentricities were discussed behind the barred windows of the first families in Sulaco. And then the widowed Senora Gavilaso de Valdes rolled by, handsome and dignified, in a great machine in which she used to travel to and from her country house, surrounded by an armed retinue in leather suits and big sombreros, with carbines at the bows of their saddles. She was a woman of most distinguished family, proud, rich, and kind-hearted. Her second son, Jaime, had just gone off on the Staff of Barrios. The eldest, a worthless fellow of a moody disposition, filled Sulaco with the noise of his dissipations, and gambled heavily at the club. The two youngest boys, with yellow Ribierist cockades in their caps, sat on the front seat. She, too, affected not to see the Senor Decoud talking publicly with Antonia in defiance of every convention. And he not even her novio as far as the world knew! Though, even in that case, it would have been scandal enough. But the dignified old lady, respected and admired by the first families, would have been still more shocked if she could have heard the words they were exchanging.

“Did you say I lost sight of the aim? I have only one aim in the world.”

She made an almost imperceptible negative movement of her head, still staring across the street at the Avellanos’s house, grey, marked with decay, and with iron bars like a prison.

“And it would be so easy of attainment,” he continued, “this aim which, whether knowingly or not, I have always had in my heart — ever since the day when you snubbed me so horribly once in Paris, you remember.”

A slight smile seemed to move the corner of the lip that was on his side.

“You know you were a very terrible person, a sort of Charlotte Corday in a school-girl’s dress; a ferocious patriot. I suppose you would have stuck a knife into Guzman Bento?”

She interrupted him. “You do me too much honour.”

“At any rate,” he said, changing suddenly to a tone of bitter levity, “you would have sent me to stab him without compunction.”

“Ah, par exemple!” she murmured in a shocked tone.

“Well,” he argued, mockingly, “you do keep me here writing deadly nonsense. Deadly to me! It has already killed my self-respect. And you may imagine,” he continued, his tone passing into light banter, “that Montero, should he be successful, would get even with me in the only way such a brute can get even with a man of intelligence who condescends to call him a gran’ bestia three times a week. It’s a sort of intellectual death; but there is the other one in the background for a journalist of my ability.”

“If he is successful!” said Antonia, thoughtfully.

“You seem satisfied to see my life hang on a thread,” Decoud replied, with a broad smile. “And the other Montero, the ‘my trusted brother’ of the proclamations, the guerrillero — haven’t I written that he was taking the guests’ overcoats and changing plates in Paris at our Legation in the intervals of spying on our refugees there, in the time of Rojas? He will wash out that sacred truth in blood. In my blood! Why do you look annoyed? This is simply a bit of the biography of one of our great men. What

do you think he will do to me? There is a certain convent wall round the corner of the Plaza, opposite the door of the Bull Ring. You know? Opposite the door with the inscription, *Intrada de la Sombra.* Appropriate, perhaps! That's where the uncle of our host gave up his Anglo-South-American soul. And, note, he might have run away. A man who has fought with weapons may run away. You might have let me go with Barrios if you had cared for me. I would have carried one of those rifles, in which Don Jose believes, with the greatest satisfaction, in the ranks of poor peons and Indios, that know nothing either of reason or politics. The most forlorn hope in the most forlorn army on earth would have been safer than that for which you made me stay here. When you make war you may retreat, but not when you spend your time in inciting poor ignorant fools to kill and to die."

His tone remained light, and as if unaware of his presence she stood motionless, her hands clasped lightly, the fan hanging down from her interlaced fingers. He waited for a while, and then —

"I shall go to the wall," he said, with a sort of jocular desperation.

Even that declaration did not make her look at him. Her head remained still, her eyes fixed upon the house of the Avellanos, whose chipped pilasters, broken cornices, the whole degradation of dignity was hidden now by the gathering dusk of the street. In her whole figure her lips alone moved, forming the words —

"Martin, you will make me cry."

He remained silent for a minute, startled, as if overwhelmed by a sort of awed happiness, with the lines of the mocking smile still stiffened about his mouth, and incredulous surprise in his eyes. The value of a sentence is in the personality which utters it, for nothing new can be said by man or woman; and those were the last words, it seemed to him, that could ever have been spoken by Antonia. He had never made it up with her so completely in all their intercourse of small encounters; but even before she had time to turn towards him, which she did slowly with a rigid grace, he had begun to plead —

"My sister is only waiting to embrace you. My father is transported with joy. I won't say anything of my mother! Our mothers were like sisters. There is the mail-boat for the south next week — let us go. That Moraga is a fool! A man like Montero is bribed. It's the practice of the country. It's tradition — it's politics. Read 'Fifty Years of Misrule.'"

"Leave poor papa alone, Don Martin. He believes — "

"I have the greatest tenderness for your father," he began, hurriedly. "But I love you, Antonia! And Moraga has miserably mismanaged this business. Perhaps your father did, too; I don't know. Montero was bribeable. Why, I suppose he only wanted his share of this famous loan for national development. Why didn't the stupid Sta. Marta people give him a mission to Europe, or something? He would have taken five years' salary in advance, and gone on loafing in Paris, this stupid, ferocious Indio!"

"The man," she said, thoughtfully, and very calm before this outburst, "was intoxicated with vanity. We had all the information, not from Moraga only; from others, too. There was his brother intriguing, too."

"Oh, yes!" he said. "Of course you know. You know everything. You read all the correspondence, you write all the papers — all those State papers that are inspired here, in this room, in blind deference to a theory of political purity. Hadn't you Charles Gould before your eyes? Rey de Sulaco! He and his mine are the practical demonstration of what could have been done. Do you think he succeeded by his fidelity to a theory of virtue? And all those railway people, with their honest work! Of course, their work is honest! But what if you cannot work honestly till the thieves are satisfied? Could he not, a gentleman, have told this Sir John what's-his-name that Montero had to be bought off — he and all his Negro Liberals hanging on to his gold-laced sleeve? He ought to have been bought off with his own stupid weight of gold — his weight of gold, I tell you, boots, sabre, spurs, cocked hat, and all."

She shook her head slightly. "It was impossible," she murmured.

"He wanted the whole lot? What?"

She was facing him now in the deep recess of the window, very close and motionless. Her lips moved rapidly. Decoud, leaning his back against the wall, listened with crossed arms and lowered eyelids. He drank the tones of her even voice, and watched the agitated life of her throat, as if waves of emotion had run from her heart to pass out into the air in her reasonable words. He also had his aspirations, he aspired to carry her away out of these deadly futilities of pronunciamientos and reforms. All this was wrong — utterly wrong; but she fascinated him, and sometimes the sheer sagacity of a phrase would break the charm, replace the fascination by a sudden unwilling thrill of interest. Some women hovered, as it were, on the threshold of genius, he reflected. They did not want to know, or think, or understand. Passion stood for all that, and he was ready to believe that some startlingly profound remark, some appreciation of character, or a judgment upon an event, bordered on the miraculous. In the mature Antonia he could see with an extraordinary vividness the austere schoolgirl of the earlier days. She seduced his attention; sometimes he could not restrain a murmur of assent; now and then he advanced an objection quite seriously. Gradually they began to argue; the curtain half hid them from the people in the sala.

Outside it had grown dark. From the deep trench of shadow between the houses, lit up vaguely by the glimmer of street lamps, ascended the evening silence of Sulaco; the silence of a town with few carriages, of unshod horses, and a softly sandalled population. The windows of the Casa Gould flung their shining parallelograms upon the house of the Avellanos. Now and then a shuffle of feet passed below with the pulsating red glow of a cigarette at the foot of the walls; and the night air, as if cooled by the snows of Higueroa, refreshed their faces.

"We Occidentals," said Martin Decoud, using the usual term the provincials of Sulaco applied to themselves, "have been always distinct and separated. As long as we hold Cayta nothing can reach us. In all our troubles no army has marched over those

mountains. A revolution in the central provinces isolates us at once. Look how complete it is now! The news of Barrios' movement will be cabled to the United States, and only in that way will it reach Sta. Marta by the cable from the other seaboard. We have the greatest riches, the greatest fertility, the purest blood in our great families, the most laborious population. The Occidental Province should stand alone. The early Federalism was not bad for us. Then came this union which Don Henrique Gould resisted. It opened the road to tyranny; and, ever since, the rest of Costaguana hangs like a millstone round our necks. The Occidental territory is large enough to make any man's country. Look at the mountains! Nature itself seems to cry to us, 'Separate!'

She made an energetic gesture of negation. A silence fell.

"Oh, yes, I know it's contrary to the doctrine laid down in the 'History of Fifty Years' Misrule.' I am only trying to be sensible. But my sense seems always to give you cause for offence. Have I startled you very much with this perfectly reasonable aspiration?"

She shook her head. No, she was not startled, but the idea shocked her early convictions. Her patriotism was larger. She had never considered that possibility.

"It may yet be the means of saving some of your convictions," he said, prophetically.

She did not answer. She seemed tired. They leaned side by side on the rail of the little balcony, very friendly, having exhausted politics, giving themselves up to the silent feeling of their nearness, in one of those profound pauses that fall upon the rhythm of passion. Towards the plaza end of the street the glowing coals in the brazeros of the market women cooking their evening meal gleamed red along the edge of the pavement. A man appeared without a sound in the light of a street lamp, showing the coloured inverted triangle of his bordered poncho, square on his shoulders, hanging to a point below his knees. From the harbour end of the Calle a horseman walked his soft-stepping mount, gleaming silver-grey abreast each lamp under the dark shape of the rider.

"Behold the illustrious Capataz de Cargadores," said Decoud, gently, "coming in all his splendour after his work is done. The next great man of Sulaco after Don Carlos Gould. But he is good-natured, and let me make friends with him."

"Ah, indeed!" said Antonia. "How did you make friends?"

"A journalist ought to have his finger on the popular pulse, and this man is one of the leaders of the populace. A journalist ought to know remarkable men — and this man is remarkable in his way."

"Ah, yes!" said Antonia, thoughtfully. "It is known that this Italian has a great influence."

The horseman had passed below them, with a gleam of dim light on the shining broad quarters of the grey mare, on a bright heavy stirrup, on a long silver spur; but the short flick of yellowish flame in the dusk was powerless against the muffled-up mysteriousness of the dark figure with an invisible face concealed by a great sombrero.

Decoud and Antonia remained leaning over the balcony, side by side, touching elbows, with their heads overhanging the darkness of the street, and the brilliantly lighted sala at their backs. This was a *tete-a-tete* of extreme impropriety; something

of which in the whole extent of the Republic only the extraordinary Antonia could be capable — the poor, motherless girl, never accompanied, with a careless father, who had thought only of making her learned. Even Decoud himself seemed to feel that this was as much as he could expect of having her to himself till — till the revolution was over and he could carry her off to Europe, away from the endlessness of civil strife, whose folly seemed even harder to bear than its ignominy. After one Montero there would be another, the lawlessness of a populace of all colours and races, barbarism, irremediable tyranny. As the great Liberator Bolivar had said in the bitterness of his spirit, “America is ungovernable. Those who worked for her independence have ploughed the sea.” He did not care, he declared boldly; he seized every opportunity to tell her that though she had managed to make a Blanco journalist of him, he was no patriot. First of all, the word had no sense for cultured minds, to whom the narrowness of every belief is odious; and secondly, in connection with the everlasting troubles of this unhappy country it was hopelessly besmirched; it had been the cry of dark barbarism, the cloak of lawlessness, of crimes, of rapacity, of simple thieving.

He was surprised at the warmth of his own utterance. He had no need to drop his voice; it had been low all the time, a mere murmur in the silence of dark houses with their shutters closed early against the night air, as is the custom of Sulaco. Only the sala of the Casa Gould flung out defiantly the blaze of its four windows, the bright appeal of light in the whole dumb obscurity of the street. And the murmur on the little balcony went on after a short pause.

“But we are labouring to change all that,” Antonia protested. “It is exactly what we desire. It is our object. It is the great cause. And the word you despise has stood also for sacrifice, for courage, for constancy, for suffering. Papa, who — ”

“Ploughing the sea,” interrupted Decoud, looking down.

There was below the sound of hasty and ponderous footsteps.

“Your uncle, the grand-vicar of the cathedral, has just turned under the gate,” observed Decoud. “He said Mass for the troops in the Plaza this morning. They had built for him an altar of drums, you know. And they brought outside all the painted blocks to take the air. All the wooden saints stood militarily in a row at the top of the great flight of steps. They looked like a gorgeous escort attending the Vicar-General. I saw the great function from the windows of the Porvenir. He is amazing, your uncle, the last of the Corbelans. He glittered exceedingly in his vestments with a great crimson velvet cross down his back. And all the time our saviour Barrios sat in the Amarilla Club drinking punch at an open window. Esprit fort — our Barrios. I expected every moment your uncle to launch an excommunication there and then at the black eye-patch in the window across the Plaza. But not at all. Ultimately the troops marched off. Later Barrios came down with some of the officers, and stood with his uniform all unbuttoned, discoursing at the edge of the pavement. Suddenly your uncle appeared, no longer glittering, but all black, at the cathedral door with that threatening aspect he has — you know, like a sort of avenging spirit. He gives one look, strides over straight at the group of uniforms, and leads away the general by the elbow. He walked him

for a quarter of an hour in the shade of a wall. Never let go his elbow for a moment, talking all the time with exaltation, and gesticulating with a long black arm. It was a curious scene. The officers seemed struck with astonishment. Remarkable man, your missionary uncle. He hates an infidel much less than a heretic, and prefers a heathen many times to an infidel. He condescends graciously to call me a heathen, sometimes, you know.”

Antonia listened with her hands over the balustrade, opening and shutting the fan gently; and Decoud talked a little nervously, as if afraid that she would leave him at the first pause. Their comparative isolation, the precious sense of intimacy, the slight contact of their arms, affected him softly; for now and then a tender inflection crept into the flow of his ironic murmurs.

“Any slight sign of favour from a relative of yours is welcome, Antonia. And perhaps he understands me, after all! But I know him, too, our Padre Corbelan. The idea of political honour, justice, and honesty for him consists in the restitution of the confiscated Church property. Nothing else could have drawn that fierce converter of savage Indians out of the wilds to work for the Ribierist cause! Nothing else but that wild hope! He would make a pronunciamiento himself for such an object against any Government if he could only get followers! What does Don Carlos Gould think of that? But, of course, with his English impenetrability, nobody can tell what he thinks. Probably he thinks of nothing apart from his mine; of his ‘Imperium in Imperio.’ As to Mrs. Gould, she thinks of her schools, of her hospitals, of the mothers with the young babies, of every sick old man in the three villages. If you were to turn your head now you would see her extracting a report from that sinister doctor in a check shirt — what’s his name? Monygham — or else catechising Don Pepe or perhaps listening to Padre Roman. They are all down here to-day — all her ministers of state. Well, she is a sensible woman, and perhaps Don Carlos is a sensible man. It’s a part of solid English sense not to think too much; to see only what may be of practical use at the moment. These people are not like ourselves. We have no political reason; we have political passions — sometimes. What is a conviction? A particular view of our personal advantage either practical or emotional. No one is a patriot for nothing. The word serves us well. But I am clear-sighted, and I shall not use that word to you, Antonia! I have no patriotic illusions. I have only the supreme illusion of a lover.”

He paused, then muttered almost inaudibly, “That can lead one very far, though.”

Behind their backs the political tide that once in every twenty-four hours set with a strong flood through the Gould drawing-room could be heard, rising higher in a hum of voices. Men had been dropping in singly, or in twos and threes: the higher officials of the province, engineers of the railway, sunburnt and in tweeds, with the frosted head of their chief smiling with slow, humorous indulgence amongst the young eager faces. Scarfe, the lover of fandangos, had already slipped out in search of some dance, no matter where, on the outskirts of the town. Don Juste Lopez, after taking his daughters home, had entered solemnly, in a black creased coat buttoned up under his spreading brown beard. The few members of the Provincial Assembly present clustered

at once around their President to discuss the news of the war and the last proclamation of the rebel Montero, the miserable Montero, calling in the name of "a justly incensed democracy" upon all the Provincial Assemblies of the Republic to suspend their sittings till his sword had made peace and the will of the people could be consulted. It was practically an invitation to dissolve: an unheard-of audacity of that evil madman.

The indignation ran high in the knot of deputies behind Jose Avellanos. Don Jose, lifting up his voice, cried out to them over the high back of his chair, "Sulaco has answered by sending to-day an army upon his flank. If all the other provinces show only half as much patriotism as we Occidentals — "

A great outburst of acclamations covered the vibrating treble of the life and soul of the party. Yes! Yes! This was true! A great truth! Sulaco was in the forefront, as ever! It was a boastful tumult, the hopefulness inspired by the event of the day breaking out amongst those caballeros of the Campo thinking of their herds, of their lands, of the safety of their families. Everything was at stake. . . . No! It was impossible that Montero should succeed! This criminal, this shameless Indio! The clamour continued for some time, everybody else in the room looking towards the group where Don Juste had put on his air of impartial solemnity as if presiding at a sitting of the Provincial Assembly. Decoud had turned round at the noise, and, leaning his back on the balustrade, shouted into the room with all the strength of his lungs, "Gran' bestia!"

This unexpected cry had the effect of stilling the noise. All the eyes were directed to the window with an approving expectation; but Decoud had already turned his back upon the room, and was again leaning out over the quiet street.

"This is the quintessence of my journalism; that is the supreme argument," he said to Antonia. "I have invented this definition, this last word on a great question. But I am no patriot. I am no more of a patriot than the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores, this Genoese who has done such great things for this harbour — this active usher-in of the material implements for our progress. You have heard Captain Mitchell confess over and over again that till he got this man he could never tell how long it would take to unload a ship. That is bad for progress. You have seen him pass by after his labours on his famous horse to dazzle the girls in some ballroom with an earthen floor. He is a fortunate fellow! His work is an exercise of personal powers; his leisure is spent in receiving the marks of extraordinary adulation. And he likes it, too. Can anybody be more fortunate? To be feared and admired is — "

"And are these your highest aspirations, Don Martin?" interrupted Antonia.

"I was speaking of a man of that sort," said Decoud, curtly. "The heroes of the world have been feared and admired. What more could he want?"

Decoud had often felt his familiar habit of ironic thought fall shattered against Antonia's gravity. She irritated him as if she, too, had suffered from that inexplicable feminine obtuseness which stands so often between a man and a woman of the more ordinary sort. But he overcame his vexation at once. He was very far from thinking Antonia ordinary, whatever verdict his scepticism might have pronounced upon him-

self. With a touch of penetrating tenderness in his voice he assured her that his only aspiration was to a felicity so high that it seemed almost unrealizable on this earth.

She coloured invisibly, with a warmth against which the breeze from the sierra seemed to have lost its cooling power in the sudden melting of the snows. His whisper could not have carried so far, though there was enough ardour in his tone to melt a heart of ice. Antonia turned away abruptly, as if to carry his whispered assurance into the room behind, full of light, noisy with voices.

The tide of political speculation was beating high within the four walls of the great sala, as if driven beyond the marks by a great gust of hope. Don Juste's fan-shaped beard was still the centre of loud and animated discussions. There was a self-confident ring in all the voices. Even the few Europeans around Charles Gould — a Dane, a couple of Frenchmen, a discreet fat German, smiling, with down-cast eyes, the representatives of those material interests that had got a footing in Sulaco under the protecting might of the San Tome mine — had infused a lot of good humour into their deference. Charles Gould, to whom they were paying their court, was the visible sign of the stability that could be achieved on the shifting ground of revolutions. They felt hopeful about their various undertakings. One of the two Frenchmen, small, black, with glittering eyes lost in an immense growth of bushy beard, waved his tiny brown hands and delicate wrists. He had been travelling in the interior of the province for a syndicate of European capitalists. His forcible "Monsieur l'Administrateur" returning every minute shrilled above the steady hum of conversations. He was relating his discoveries. He was ecstatic. Charles Gould glanced down at him courteously.

At a given moment of these necessary receptions it was Mrs. Gould's habit to withdraw quietly into a little drawing-room, especially her own, next to the great sala. She had risen, and, waiting for Antonia, listened with a slightly worried graciousness to the engineer-in-chief of the railway, who stooped over her, relating slowly, without the slightest gesture, something apparently amusing, for his eyes had a humorous twinkle. Antonia, before she advanced into the room to join Mrs. Gould, turned her head over her shoulder towards Decoud, only for a moment.

"Why should any one of us think his aspirations unrealizable?" she said, rapidly.

"I am going to cling to mine to the end, Antonia," he answered, through clenched teeth, then bowed very low, a little distantly.

The engineer-in-chief had not finished telling his amusing story. The humours of railway building in South America appealed to his keen appreciation of the absurd, and he told his instances of ignorant prejudice and as ignorant cunning very well. Now, Mrs. Gould gave him all her attention as he walked by her side escorting the ladies out of the room. Finally all three passed unnoticed through the glass doors in the gallery. Only a tall priest stalking silently in the noise of the sala checked himself to look after them. Father Corbelan, whom Decoud had seen from the balcony turning into the gateway of the Casa Gould, had addressed no one since coming in. The long, skimpy soutane accentuated the tallness of his stature; he carried his powerful torso thrown forward; and the straight, black bar of his joined eyebrows, the pugnacious outline of

the bony face, the white spot of a scar on the bluish shaven cheeks (a testimonial to his apostolic zeal from a party of unconverted Indians), suggested something unlawful behind his priesthood, the idea of a chaplain of bandits.

He separated his bony, knotted hands clasped behind his back, to shake his finger at Martin.

Decoud had stepped into the room after Antonia. But he did not go far. He had remained just within, against the curtain, with an expression of not quite genuine gravity, like a grown-up person taking part in a game of children. He gazed quietly at the threatening finger.

“I have watched your reverence converting General Barrios by a special sermon on the Plaza,” he said, without making the slightest movement.

“What miserable nonsense!” Father Corbelan’s deep voice resounded all over the room, making all the heads turn on the shoulders. “The man is a drunkard. Senores, the God of your General is a bottle!”

His contemptuous, arbitrary voice caused an uneasy suspension of every sound, as if the self-confidence of the gathering had been staggered by a blow. But nobody took up Father Corbelan’s declaration.

It was known that Father Corbelan had come out of the wilds to advocate the sacred rights of the Church with the same fanatical fearlessness with which he had gone preaching to bloodthirsty savages, devoid of human compassion or worship of any kind. Rumours of legendary proportions told of his successes as a missionary beyond the eye of Christian men. He had baptized whole nations of Indians, living with them like a savage himself. It was related that the padre used to ride with his Indians for days, half naked, carrying a bullock-hide shield, and, no doubt, a long lance, too — who knows? That he had wandered clothed in skins, seeking for proselytes somewhere near the snow line of the Cordillera. Of these exploits Padre Corbelan himself was never known to talk. But he made no secret of his opinion that the politicians of Sta. Marta had harder hearts and more corrupt minds than the heathen to whom he had carried the word of God. His injudicious zeal for the temporal welfare of the Church was damaging the Ribierist cause. It was common knowledge that he had refused to be made titular bishop of the Occidental diocese till justice was done to a despoiled Church. The political Gefe of Sulaco (the same dignitary whom Captain Mitchell saved from the mob afterwards) hinted with naive cynicism that doubtless their Excellencies the Ministers sent the padre over the mountains to Sulaco in the worst season of the year in the hope that he would be frozen to death by the icy blasts of the high paramos. Every year a few hardy muleteers — men inured to exposure — were known to perish in that way. But what would you have? Their Excellencies possibly had not realized what a tough priest he was. Meantime, the ignorant were beginning to murmur that the Ribierist reforms meant simply the taking away of the land from the people. Some of it was to be given to foreigners who made the railway; the greater part was to go to the padres.

These were the results of the Grand Vicar's zeal. Even from the short allocution to the troops on the Plaza (which only the first ranks could have heard) he had not been able to keep out his fixed idea of an outraged Church waiting for reparation from a penitent country. The political Gefe had been exasperated. But he could not very well throw the brother-in-law of Don Jose into the prison of the Cabildo. The chief magistrate, an easy-going and popular official, visited the Casa Gould, walking over after sunset from the Intendencia, unattended, acknowledging with dignified courtesy the salutations of high and low alike. That evening he had walked up straight to Charles Gould and had hissed out to him that he would have liked to deport the Grand Vicar out of Sulaco, anywhere, to some desert island, to the Isabels, for instance. "The one without water preferably — eh, Don Carlos?" he had added in a tone between jest and earnest. This uncontrollable priest, who had rejected his offer of the episcopal palace for a residence and preferred to hang his shabby hammock amongst the rubble and spiders of the sequestered Dominican Convent, had taken into his head to advocate an unconditional pardon for Hernandez the Robber! And this was not enough; he seemed to have entered into communication with the most audacious criminal the country had known for years. The Sulaco police knew, of course, what was going on. Padre Corbelan had got hold of that reckless Italian, the Capataz de Cargadores, the only man fit for such an errand, and had sent a message through him. Father Corbelan had studied in Rome, and could speak Italian. The Capataz was known to visit the old Dominican Convent at night. An old woman who served the Grand Vicar had heard the name of Hernandez pronounced; and only last Saturday afternoon the Capataz had been observed galloping out of town. He did not return for two days. The police would have laid the Italian by the heels if it had not been for fear of the Cargadores, a turbulent body of men, quite apt to raise a tumult. Nowadays it was not so easy to govern Sulaco. Bad characters flocked into it, attracted by the money in the pockets of the railway workmen. The populace was made restless by Father Corbelan's discourses. And the first magistrate explained to Charles Gould that now the province was stripped of troops any outbreak of lawlessness would find the authorities with their boots off, as it were.

Then he went away moodily to sit in an armchair, smoking a long, thin cigar, not very far from Don Jose, with whom, bending over sideways, he exchanged a few words from time to time. He ignored the entrance of the priest, and whenever Father Corbelan's voice was raised behind him, he shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

Father Corbelan had remained quite motionless for a time with that something vengeful in his immobility which seemed to characterize all his attitudes. A lurid glow of strong convictions gave its peculiar aspect to the black figure. But its fierceness became softened as the padre, fixing his eyes upon Decoud, raised his long, black arm slowly, impressively —

"And you — you are a perfect heathen," he said, in a subdued, deep voice.

He made a step nearer, pointing a forefinger at the young man's breast. Decoud, very calm, felt the wall behind the curtain with the back of his head. Then, with his chin tilted well up, he smiled.

"Very well," he agreed with the slightly weary nonchalance of a man well used to these passages. "But is it perhaps that you have not discovered yet what is the God of my worship? It was an easier task with our Barrios."

The priest suppressed a gesture of discouragement. "You believe neither in stick nor stone," he said.

"Nor bottle," added Decoud without stirring. "Neither does the other of your reverence's confidants. I mean the Capataz of the Cargadores. He does not drink. Your reading of my character does honour to your perspicacity. But why call me a heathen?"

"True," retorted the priest. "You are ten times worse. A miracle could not convert you."

"I certainly do not believe in miracles," said Decoud, quietly. Father Corbelan shrugged his high, broad shoulders doubtfully.

"A sort of Frenchman — godless — a materialist," he pronounced slowly, as if weighing the terms of a careful analysis. "Neither the son of his own country nor of any other," he continued, thoughtfully.

"Scarcely human, in fact," Decoud commented under his breath, his head at rest against the wall, his eyes gazing up at the ceiling.

"The victim of this faithless age," Father Corbelan resumed in a deep but subdued voice.

"But of some use as a journalist." Decoud changed his pose and spoke in a more animated tone. "Has your worship neglected to read the last number of the *Porvenir*? I assure you it is just like the others. On the general policy it continues to call Montero a gran' bestia, and stigmatize his brother, the guerrillero, for a combination of lackey and spy. What could be more effective? In local affairs it urges the Provincial Government to enlist bodily into the national army the band of Hernandez the Robber — who is apparently the protege of the Church — or at least of the Grand Vicar. Nothing could be more sound."

The priest nodded and turned on the heels of his square-toed shoes with big steel buckles. Again, with his hands clasped behind his back, he paced to and fro, planting his feet firmly. When he swung about, the skirt of his soutane was inflated slightly by the brusqueness of his movements.

The great sala had been emptying itself slowly. When the Gefe Politico rose to go, most of those still remaining stood up suddenly in sign of respect, and Don Jose Avellanos stopped the rocking of his chair. But the good-natured First Official made a deprecatory gesture, waved his hand to Charles Gould, and went out discreetly.

In the comparative peace of the room the screaming "Monsieur l'Administrateur" of the frail, hairy Frenchman seemed to acquire a preternatural shrillness. The explorer of the Capitalist syndicate was still enthusiastic. "Ten million dollars' worth of copper practically in sight, Monsieur l'Administrateur. Ten millions in sight! And a railway

coming — a railway! They will never believe my report. C'est trop beau." He fell a prey to a screaming ecstasy, in the midst of sagely nodding heads, before Charles Gould's imperturbable calm.

And only the priest continued his pacing, flinging round the skirt of his soutane at each end of his beat. Decoud murmured to him ironically: "Those gentlemen talk about their gods."

Father Corbelan stopped short, looked at the journalist of Sulaco fixedly for a moment, shrugged his shoulders slightly, and resumed his plodding walk of an obstinate traveller.

And now the Europeans were dropping off from the group around Charles Gould till the Administrador of the Great Silver Mine could be seen in his whole lank length, from head to foot, left stranded by the ebbing tide of his guests on the great square of carpet, as it were a multi-coloured shoal of flowers and arabesques under his brown boots. Father Corbelan approached the rocking-chair of Don Jose Avellanos.

"Come, brother," he said, with kindly brusqueness and a touch of relieved impatience a man may feel at the end of a perfectly useless ceremony. "A la Casa! A la Casa! This has been all talk. Let us now go and think and pray for guidance from Heaven."

He rolled his black eyes upwards. By the side of the frail diplomatist — the life and soul of the party — he seemed gigantic, with a gleam of fanaticism in the glance. But the voice of the party, or, rather, its mouthpiece, the "son Decoud" from Paris, turned journalist for the sake of Antonia's eyes, knew very well that it was not so, that he was only a strenuous priest with one idea, feared by the women and execrated by the men of the people. Martin Decoud, the dilettante in life, imagined himself to derive an artistic pleasure from watching the picturesque extreme of wrongheadedness into which an honest, almost sacred, conviction may drive a man. "It is like madness. It must be — because it's self-destructive," Decoud had said to himself often. It seemed to him that every conviction, as soon as it became effective, turned into that form of dementia the gods send upon those they wish to destroy. But he enjoyed the bitter flavour of that example with the zest of a connoisseur in the art of his choice. Those two men got on well together, as if each had felt respectively that a masterful conviction, as well as utter scepticism, may lead a man very far on the by-paths of political action.

Don Jose obeyed the touch of the big hairy hand. Decoud followed out the brothers-in-law. And there remained only one visitor in the vast empty sala, bluishly hazy with tobacco smoke, a heavy-eyed, round-cheeked man, with a drooping moustache, a hide merchant from Esmeralda, who had come overland to Sulaco, riding with a few peons across the coast range. He was very full of his journey, undertaken mostly for the purpose of seeing the Senor Administrador of San Tome in relation to some assistance he required in his hide-exporting business. He hoped to enlarge it greatly now that the country was going to be settled. It was going to be settled, he repeated several times, degrading by a strange, anxious whine the sonority of the Spanish language, which he pattered rapidly, like some sort of cringing jargon. A plain man could carry on his little business now in the country, and even think of enlarging it — with safety. Was

it not so? He seemed to beg Charles Gould for a confirmatory word, a grunt of assent, a simple nod even.

He could get nothing. His alarm increased, and in the pauses he would dart his eyes here and there; then, loth to give up, he would branch off into feeling allusion to the dangers of his journey. The audacious Hernandez, leaving his usual haunts, had crossed the Campo of Sulaco, and was known to be lurking in the ravines of the coast range. Yesterday, when distant only a few hours from Sulaco, the hide merchant and his servants had seen three men on the road arrested suspiciously, with their horses' heads together. Two of these rode off at once and disappeared in a shallow quebrada to the left. "We stopped," continued the man from Esmeralda, "and I tried to hide behind a small bush. But none of my mozos would go forward to find out what it meant, and the third horseman seemed to be waiting for us to come up. It was no use. We had been seen. So we rode slowly on, trembling. He let us pass — a man on a grey horse with his hat down on his eyes — without a word of greeting; but by-and-by we heard him galloping after us. We faced about, but that did not seem to intimidate him. He rode up at speed, and touching my foot with the toe of his boot, asked me for a cigar, with a blood-curdling laugh. He did not seem armed, but when he put his hand back to reach for the matches I saw an enormous revolver strapped to his waist. I shuddered. He had very fierce whiskers, Don Carlos, and as he did not offer to go on we dared not move. At last, blowing the smoke of my cigar into the air through his nostrils, he said, 'Senor, it would be perhaps better for you if I rode behind your party. You are not very far from Sulaco now. Go you with God.' What would you? We went on. There was no resisting him. He might have been Hernandez himself; though my servant, who has been many times to Sulaco by sea, assured me that he had recognized him very well for the Capataz of the Steamship Company's Cargadores. Later, that same evening, I saw that very man at the corner of the Plaza talking to a girl, a Morenita, who stood by the stirrup with her hand on the grey horse's mane."

"I assure you, Senor Hirsch," murmured Charles Gould, "that you ran no risk on this occasion."

"That may be, senor, though I tremble yet. A most fierce man — to look at. And what does it mean? A person employed by the Steamship Company talking with salteadores — no less, senor; the other horsemen were salteadores — in a lonely place, and behaving like a robber himself! A cigar is nothing, but what was there to prevent him asking me for my purse?"

"No, no, Senor Hirsch," Charles Gould murmured, letting his glance stray away a little vacantly from the round face, with its hooked beak upturned towards him in an almost childlike appeal. "If it was the Capataz de Cargadores you met — and there is no doubt, is there? — you were perfectly safe."

"Thank you. You are very good. A very fierce-looking man, Don Carlos. He asked me for a cigar in a most familiar manner. What would have happened if I had not had a cigar? I shudder yet. What business had he to be talking with robbers in a lonely place?"

But Charles Gould, openly preoccupied now, gave not a sign, made no sound. The impenetrability of the embodied Gould Concession had its surface shades. To be dumb is merely a fatal affliction; but the King of Sulaco had words enough to give him all the mysterious weight of a taciturn force. His silences, backed by the power of speech, had as many shades of significance as uttered words in the way of assent, of doubt, of negation — even of simple comment. Some seemed to say plainly, “Think it over”; others meant clearly, “Go ahead”; a simple, low “I see,” with an affirmative nod, at the end of a patient listening half-hour was the equivalent of a verbal contract, which men had learned to trust implicitly, since behind it all there was the great San Tome mine, the head and front of the material interests, so strong that it depended on no man’s goodwill in the whole length and breadth of the Occidental Province — that is, on no goodwill which it could not buy ten times over. But to the little hook-nosed man from Esmeralda, anxious about the export of hides, the silence of Charles Gould portended a failure. Evidently this was no time for extending a modest man’s business. He enveloped in a swift mental malediction the whole country, with all its inhabitants, partisans of Ribiera and Montero alike; and there were incipient tears in his mute anger at the thought of the innumerable ox-hides going to waste upon the dreamy expanse of the Campo, with its single palms rising like ships at sea within the perfect circle of the horizon, its clumps of heavy timber motionless like solid islands of leaves above the running waves of grass. There were hides there, rotting, with no profit to anybody — rotting where they had been dropped by men called away to attend the urgent necessities of political revolutions. The practical, mercantile soul of Senor Hirsch rebelled against all that foolishness, while he was taking a respectful but disconcerted leave of the might and majesty of the San Tome mine in the person of Charles Gould. He could not restrain a heart-broken murmur, wrung out of his very aching heart, as it were.

“It is a great, great foolishness, Don Carlos, all this. The price of hides in Hamburg is gone up — up. Of course the Ribierist Government will do away with all that — when it gets established firmly. Meantime — ”

He sighed.

“Yes, meantime,” repeated Charles Gould, inscrutably.

The other shrugged his shoulders. But he was not ready to go yet. There was a little matter he would like to mention very much if permitted. It appeared he had some good friends in Hamburg (he murmured the name of the firm) who were very anxious to do business, in dynamite, he explained. A contract for dynamite with the San Tome mine, and then, perhaps, later on, other mines, which were sure to — The little man from Esmeralda was ready to enlarge, but Charles interrupted him. It seemed as though the patience of the Senor Administrador was giving way at last.

“Senor Hirsch,” he said, “I have enough dynamite stored up at the mountain to send it down crashing into the valley” — his voice rose a little — ”to send half Sulaco into the air if I liked.”

Charles Gould smiled at the round, startled eyes of the dealer in hides, who was murmuring hastily, "Just so. Just so." And now he was going. It was impossible to do business in explosives with an Administrador so well provided and so discouraging. He had suffered agonies in the saddle and had exposed himself to the atrocities of the bandit Hernandez for nothing at all. Neither hides nor dynamite — and the very shoulders of the enterprising Israelite expressed dejection. At the door he bowed low to the engineer-in-chief. But at the bottom of the stairs in the patio he stopped short, with his podgy hand over his lips in an attitude of meditative astonishment.

"What does he want to keep so much dynamite for?" he muttered. "And why does he talk like this to me?"

The engineer-in-chief, looking in at the door of the empty sala, whence the political tide had ebbed out to the last insignificant drop, nodded familiarly to the master of the house, standing motionless like a tall beacon amongst the deserted shoals of furniture.

"Good-night, I am going. Got my bike downstairs. The railway will know where to go for dynamite should we get short at any time. We have done cutting and chopping for a while now. We shall begin soon to blast our way through."

"Don't come to me," said Charles Gould, with perfect serenity. "I shan't have an ounce to spare for anybody. Not an ounce. Not for my own brother, if I had a brother, and he were the engineer-in-chief of the most promising railway in the world."

"What's that?" asked the engineer-in-chief, with equanimity. "Unkindness?"

"No," said Charles Gould, stolidly. "Policy."

"Radical, I should think," the engineer-in-chief observed from the doorway.

"Is that the right name?" Charles Gould said, from the middle of the room.

"I mean, going to the roots, you know," the engineer explained, with an air of enjoyment.

"Why, yes," Charles pronounced, slowly. "The Gould Concession has struck such deep roots in this country, in this province, in that gorge of the mountains, that nothing but dynamite shall be allowed to dislodge it from there. It's my choice. It's my last card to play."

The engineer-in-chief whistled low. "A pretty game," he said, with a shade of discretion. "And have you told Holroyd of that extraordinary trump card you hold in your hand?"

"Card only when it's played; when it falls at the end of the game. Till then you may call it a — a —"

"Weapon," suggested the railway man.

"No. You may call it rather an argument," corrected Charles Gould, gently. "And that's how I've presented it to Mr. Holroyd."

"And what did he say to it?" asked the engineer, with undisguised interest.

"He" — Charles Gould spoke after a slight pause — "he said something about holding on like grim death and putting our trust in God. I should imagine he must have been rather startled. But then" — pursued the Administrador of the San Tome mine — "but

then, he is very far away, you know, and, as they say in this country, God is very high above."

The engineer's appreciative laugh died away down the stairs, where the Madonna with the Child on her arm seemed to look after his shaking broad back from her shallow niche.

Chapter 6

A profound stillness reigned in the Casa Gould. The master of the house, walking along the corredor, opened the door of his room, and saw his wife sitting in a big armchair — his own smoking armchair — thoughtful, contemplating her little shoes. And she did not raise her eyes when he walked in.

"Tired?" asked Charles Gould.

"A little," said Mrs. Gould. Still without looking up, she added with feeling, "There is an awful sense of unreality about all this."

Charles Gould, before the long table strewn with papers, on which lay a hunting crop and a pair of spurs, stood looking at his wife: "The heat and dust must have been awful this afternoon by the waterside," he murmured, sympathetically. "The glare on the water must have been simply terrible."

"One could close one's eyes to the glare," said Mrs. Gould. "But, my dear Charley, it is impossible for me to close my eyes to our position; to this awful . . ."

She raised her eyes and looked at her husband's face, from which all sign of sympathy or any other feeling had disappeared. "Why don't you tell me something?" she almost wailed.

"I thought you had understood me perfectly from the first," Charles Gould said, slowly. "I thought we had said all there was to say a long time ago. There is nothing to say now. There were things to be done. We have done them; we have gone on doing them. There is no going back now. I don't suppose that, even from the first, there was really any possible way back. And, what's more, we can't even afford to stand still."

"Ah, if one only knew how far you mean to go," said his wife inwardly trembling, but in an almost playful tone.

"Any distance, any length, of course," was the answer, in a matter-of-fact tone, which caused Mrs. Gould to make another effort to repress a shudder.

She stood up, smiling graciously, and her little figure seemed to be diminished still more by the heavy mass of her hair and the long train of her gown.

"But always to success," she said, persuasively.

Charles Gould, enveloping her in the steely blue glance of his attentive eyes, answered without hesitation —

"Oh, there is no alternative."

He put an immense assurance into his tone. As to the words, this was all that his conscience would allow him to say.

Mrs. Gould's smile remained a shade too long upon her lips. She murmured —
“I will leave you; I've a slight headache. The heat, the dust, were indeed — I suppose you are going back to the mine before the morning?”

“At midnight,” said Charles Gould. “We are bringing down the silver to-morrow. Then I shall take three whole days off in town with you.”

“Ah, you are going to meet the escort. I shall be on the balcony at five o'clock to see you pass. Till then, good-bye.”

Charles Gould walked rapidly round the table, and, seizing her hands, bent down, pressing them both to his lips. Before he straightened himself up again to his full height she had disengaged one to smooth his cheek with a light touch, as if he were a little boy.

“Try to get some rest for a couple of hours,” she murmured, with a glance at a hammock stretched in a distant part of the room. Her long train swished softly after her on the red tiles. At the door she looked back.

Two big lamps with unpolished glass globes bathed in a soft and abundant light the four white walls of the room, with a glass case of arms, the brass hilt of Henry Gould's cavalry sabre on its square of velvet, and the water-colour sketch of the San Tome gorge. And Mrs. Gould, gazing at the last in its black wooden frame, sighed out

“Ah, if we had left it alone, Charley!”

“No,” Charles Gould said, moodily; “it was impossible to leave it alone.”

“Perhaps it was impossible,” Mrs. Gould admitted, slowly. Her lips quivered a little, but she smiled with an air of dainty bravado. “We have disturbed a good many snakes in that Paradise, Charley, haven't we?”

“Yes, I remember,” said Charles Gould, “it was Don Pepe who called the gorge the Paradise of snakes. No doubt we have disturbed a great many. But remember, my dear, that it is not now as it was when you made that sketch.” He waved his hand towards the small water-colour hanging alone upon the great bare wall. “It is no longer a Paradise of snakes. We have brought mankind into it, and we cannot turn our backs upon them to go and begin a new life elsewhere.”

He confronted his wife with a firm, concentrated gaze, which Mrs. Gould returned with a brave assumption of fearlessness before she went out, closing the door gently after her.

In contrast with the white glaring room the dimly lit corridor had a restful mysteriousness of a forest glade, suggested by the stems and the leaves of the plants ranged along the balustrade of the open side. In the streaks of light falling through the open doors of the reception-rooms, the blossoms, white and red and pale lilac, came out vivid with the brilliance of flowers in a stream of sunshine; and Mrs. Gould, passing on, had the vividness of a figure seen in the clear patches of sun that chequer the gloom of open glades in the woods. The stones in the rings upon her hand pressed to her forehead glittered in the lamplight abreast of the door of the sala.

“Who’s there?” she asked, in a startled voice. “Is that you, Basilio?” She looked in, and saw Martin Decoud walking about, with an air of having lost something, amongst the chairs and tables.

“Antonia has forgotten her fan in here,” said Decoud, with a strange air of distraction; “so I entered to see.”

But, even as he said this, he had obviously given up his search, and walked straight towards Mrs. Gould, who looked at him with doubtful surprise.

“Senora,” he began, in a low voice.

“What is it, Don Martin?” asked Mrs. Gould. And then she added, with a slight laugh, “I am so nervous to-day,” as if to explain the eagerness of the question.

“Nothing immediately dangerous,” said Decoud, who now could not conceal his agitation. “Pray don’t distress yourself. No, really, you must not distress yourself.”

Mrs. Gould, with her candid eyes very wide open, her lips composed into a smile, was steadying herself with a little bejewelled hand against the side of the door.

“Perhaps you don’t know how alarming you are, appearing like this unexpectedly — ”

“I! Alarming!” he protested, sincerely vexed and surprised. “I assure you that I am not in the least alarmed myself. A fan is lost; well, it will be found again. But I don’t think it is here. It is a fan I am looking for. I cannot understand how Antonia could — Well! Have you found it, amigo?”

“No, senor,” said behind Mrs. Gould the soft voice of Basilio, the head servant of the Casa. “I don’t think the senorita could have left it in this house at all.”

“Go and look for it in the patio again. Go now, my friend; look for it on the steps, under the gate; examine every flagstone; search for it till I come down again. . . . That fellow” — he addressed himself in English to Mrs. Gould — “is always stealing up behind one’s back on his bare feet. I set him to look for that fan directly I came in to justify my reappearance, my sudden return.”

He paused and Mrs. Gould said, amiably, “You are always welcome.” She paused for a second, too. “But I am waiting to learn the cause of your return.”

Decoud affected suddenly the utmost nonchalance.

“I can’t bear to be spied upon. Oh, the cause? Yes, there is a cause; there is something else that is lost besides Antonia’s favourite fan. As I was walking home after seeing Don Jose and Antonia to their house, the Capataz de Cargadores, riding down the street, spoke to me.”

“Has anything happened to the Violas?” inquired Mrs. Gould.

“The Violas? You mean the old Garibaldino who keeps the hotel where the engineers live? Nothing happened there. The Capataz said nothing of them; he only told me that the telegraphist of the Cable Company was walking on the Plaza, bareheaded, looking out for me. There is news from the interior, Mrs. Gould. I should rather say rumours of news.”

“Good news?” said Mrs. Gould in a low voice.

“Worthless, I should think. But if I must define them, I would say bad. They are to the effect that a two days’ battle had been fought near Sta. Marta, and that the Ribierists are defeated. It must have happened a few days ago — perhaps a week. The rumour has just reached Cayta, and the man in charge of the cable station there has telegraphed the news to his colleague here. We might just as well have kept Barrios in Sulaco.”

“What’s to be done now?” murmured Mrs. Gould.

“Nothing. He’s at sea with the troops. He will get to Cayta in a couple of days’ time and learn the news there. What he will do then, who can say? Hold Cayta? Offer his submission to Montero? Disband his army — this last most likely, and go himself in one of the O.S.N. Company’s steamers, north or south — to Valparaiso or to San Francisco, no matter where. Our Barrios has a great practice in exiles and repatriations, which mark the points in the political game.”

Decoud, exchanging a steady stare with Mrs. Gould, added, tentatively, as it were, “And yet, if we had could have been done.”

“Montero victorious, completely victorious!” Mrs. Gould breathed out in a tone of unbelief.

“A canard, probably. That sort of bird is hatched in great numbers in such times as these. And even if it were true? Well, let us put things at their worst, let us say it is true.”

“Then everything is lost,” said Mrs. Gould, with the calmness of despair.

Suddenly she seemed to divine, she seemed to see Decoud’s tremendous excitement under its cloak of studied carelessness. It was, indeed, becoming visible in his audacious and watchful stare, in the curve, half-reckless, half-contemptuous, of his lips. And a French phrase came upon them as if, for this Costaguanero of the Boulevard, that had been the only forcible language —

“Non, Madame. Rien n’est perdu.”

It electrified Mrs. Gould out of her benumbed attitude, and she said, vivaciously —

“What would you think of doing?”

But already there was something of mockery in Decoud’s suppressed excitement.

“What would you expect a true Costaguanero to do? Another revolution, of course. On my word of honour, Mrs. Gould, I believe I am a true hijo del pays, a true son of the country, whatever Father Corbelan may say. And I’m not so much of an unbeliever as not to have faith in my own ideas, in my own remedies, in my own desires.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Gould, doubtfully.

“You don’t seem convinced,” Decoud went on again in French. “Say, then, in my passions.”

Mrs. Gould received this addition unflinchingly. To understand it thoroughly she did not require to hear his muttered assurance —

“There is nothing I would not do for the sake of Antonia. There is nothing I am not prepared to undertake. There is no risk I am not ready to run.”

Decoud seemed to find a fresh audacity in this voicing of his thoughts. "You would not believe me if I were to say that it is the love of the country which — "

She made a sort of discouraged protest with her arm, as if to express that she had given up expecting that motive from any one.

"A Sulaco revolution," Decoud pursued in a forcible undertone. "The Great Cause may be served here, on the very spot of its inception, in the place of its birth, Mrs. Gould."

Frowning, and biting her lower lip thoughtfully, she made a step away from the door.

"You are not going to speak to your husband?" Decoud arrested her anxiously.

"But you will need his help?"

"No doubt," Decoud admitted without hesitation. "Everything turns upon the San Tome mine, but I would rather he didn't know anything as yet of my — my hopes."

A puzzled look came upon Mrs. Gould's face, and Decoud, approaching, explained confidentially —

"Don't you see, he's such an idealist."

Mrs. Gould flushed pink, and her eyes grew darker at the same time.

"Charley an idealist!" she said, as if to herself, wonderingly. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Yes," conceded Decoud, "it's a wonderful thing to say with the sight of the San Tome mine, the greatest fact in the whole of South America, perhaps, before our very eyes. But look even at that, he has idealized this fact to a point — " He paused. "Mrs. Gould, are you aware to what point he has idealized the existence, the worth, the meaning of the San Tome mine? Are you aware of it?"

He must have known what he was talking about.

The effect he expected was produced. Mrs. Gould, ready to take fire, gave it up suddenly with a low little sound that resembled a moan.

"What do you know?" she asked in a feeble voice.

"Nothing," answered Decoud, firmly. "But, then, don't you see, he's an Englishman?"

"Well, what of that?" asked Mrs. Gould.

"Simply that he cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale. The earth is not quite good enough for him, I fear. Do you excuse my frankness? Besides, whether you excuse it or not, it is part of the truth of things which hurts the — what do you call them? — the Anglo-Saxon's susceptibilities, and at the present moment I don't feel as if I could treat seriously either his conception of things or — if you allow me to say so — or yet yours."

Mrs. Gould gave no sign of being offended. "I suppose Antonia understands you thoroughly?"

"Understands? Well, yes. But I am not sure that she approves. That, however, makes no difference. I am honest enough to tell you that, Mrs. Gould."

"Your idea, of course, is separation," she said.

“Separation, of course,” declared Martin. “Yes; separation of the whole Occidental Province from the rest of the unquiet body. But my true idea, the only one I care for, is not to be separated from Antonia.”

“And that is all?” asked Mrs. Gould, without severity.

“Absolutely. I am not deceiving myself about my motives. She won’t leave Sulaco for my sake, therefore Sulaco must leave the rest of the Republic to its fate. Nothing could be clearer than that. I like a clearly defined situation. I cannot part with Antonia, therefore the one and indivisible Republic of Costaguana must be made to part with its western province. Fortunately it happens to be also a sound policy. The richest, the most fertile part of this land may be saved from anarchy. Personally, I care little, very little; but it’s a fact that the establishment of Montero in power would mean death to me. In all the proclamations of general pardon which I have seen, my name, with a few others, is specially excepted. The brothers hate me, as you know very well, Mrs. Gould; and behold, here is the rumour of them having won a battle. You say that supposing it is true, I have plenty of time to run away.”

The slight, protesting murmur on the part of Mrs. Gould made him pause for a moment, while he looked at her with a sombre and resolute glance.

“Ah, but I would, Mrs. Gould. I would run away if it served that which at present is my only desire. I am courageous enough to say that, and to do it, too. But women, even our women, are idealists. It is Antonia that won’t run away. A novel sort of vanity.”

“You call it vanity,” said Mrs. Gould, in a shocked voice.

“Say pride, then, which. Father Corbelan would tell you, is a mortal sin. But I am not proud. I am simply too much in love to run away. At the same time I want to live. There is no love for a dead man. Therefore it is necessary that Sulaco should not recognize the victorious Montero.”

“And you think my husband will give you his support?”

“I think he can be drawn into it, like all idealists, when he once sees a sentimental basis for his action. But I wouldn’t talk to him. Mere clear facts won’t appeal to his sentiment. It is much better for him to convince himself in his own way. And, frankly, I could not, perhaps, just now pay sufficient respect to either his motives or even, perhaps, to yours, Mrs. Gould.”

It was evident that Mrs. Gould was very determined not to be offended. She smiled vaguely, while she seemed to think the matter over. As far as she could judge from the girl’s half-confidences, Antonia understood that young man. Obviously there was promise of safety in his plan, or rather in his idea. Moreover, right or wrong, the idea could do no harm. And it was quite possible, also, that the rumour was false.

“You have some sort of a plan,” she said.

“Simplicity itself. Barrios has started, let him go on then; he will hold Cayta, which is the door of the sea route to Sulaco. They cannot send a sufficient force over the mountains. No; not even to cope with the band of Hernandez. Meantime we shall organize our resistance here. And for that, this very Hernandez will be useful. He has defeated troops as a bandit; he will no doubt accomplish the same thing if he is made

a colonel or even a general. You know the country well enough not to be shocked by what I say, Mrs. Gould. I have heard you assert that this poor bandit was the living, breathing example of cruelty, injustice, stupidity, and oppression, that ruin men's souls as well as their fortunes in this country. Well, there would be some poetical retribution in that man arising to crush the evils which had driven an honest ranchero into a life of crime. A fine idea of retribution in that, isn't there?"

Decoud had dropped easily into English, which he spoke with precision, very correctly, but with too many z sounds.

"Think also of your hospitals, of your schools, of your ailing mothers and feeble old men, of all that population which you and your husband have brought into the rocky gorge of San Tome. Are you not responsible to your conscience for all these people? Is it not worth while to make another effort, which is not at all so desperate as it looks, rather than — "

Decoud finished his thought with an upward toss of the arm, suggesting annihilation; and Mrs. Gould turned away her head with a look of horror.

"Why don't you say all this to my husband?" she asked, without looking at Decoud, who stood watching the effect of his words.

"Ah! But Don Carlos is so English," he began. Mrs. Gould interrupted —

"Leave that alone, Don Martin. He's as much a Costaguanero — No! He's more of a Costaguanero than yourself."

"Sentimentalist, sentimentalist," Decoud almost cooed, in a tone of gentle and soothing deference. "Sentimentalist, after the amazing manner of your people. I have been watching El Rey de Sulaco since I came here on a fool's errand, and perhaps impelled by some treason of fate lurking behind the unaccountable turns of a man's life. But I don't matter, I am not a sentimentalist, I cannot endow my personal desires with a shining robe of silk and jewels. Life is not for me a moral romance derived from the tradition of a pretty fairy tale. No, Mrs. Gould; I am practical. I am not afraid of my motives. But, pardon me, I have been rather carried away. What I wish to say is that I have been observing. I won't tell you what I have discovered — "

"No. That is unnecessary," whispered Mrs. Gould, once more averting her head.

"It is. Except one little fact, that your husband does not like me. It's a small matter, which, in the circumstances, seems to acquire a perfectly ridiculous importance. Ridiculous and immense; for, clearly, money is required for my plan," he reflected; then added, meaningly, "and we have two sentimentalist to deal with."

"I don't know that I understand you, Don Martin," said Mrs. Gould, coldly, preserving the low key of their conversation. "But, speaking as if I did, who is the other?"

"The great Holroyd in San Francisco, of course," Decoud whispered, lightly. "I think you understand me very well. Women are idealists; but then they are so perspicacious."

But whatever was the reason of that remark, disparaging and complimentary at the same time, Mrs. Gould seemed not to pay attention to it. The name of Holroyd had given a new tone to her anxiety.

"The silver escort is coming down to the harbour tomorrow; a whole six months' working, Don Martin!" she cried in dismay.

"Let it come down, then," breathed out Decoud, earnestly, almost into her ear.

"But if the rumour should get about, and especially if it turned out true, troubles might break out in the town," objected Mrs. Gould.

Decoud admitted that it was possible. He knew well the town children of the Sulaco Campo: sullen, thievish, vindictive, and bloodthirsty, whatever great qualities their brothers of the plain might have had. But then there was that other sentimentalist, who attached a strangely idealistic meaning to concrete facts. This stream of silver must be kept flowing north to return in the form of financial backing from the great house of Holroyd. Up at the mountain in the strong room of the mine the silver bars were worth less for his purpose than so much lead, from which at least bullets may be run. Let it come down to the harbour, ready for shipment.

The next north-going steamer would carry it off for the very salvation of the San Tome mine, which had produced so much treasure. And, moreover, the rumour was probably false, he remarked, with much conviction in his hurried tone.

"Besides, senora," concluded Decoud, "we may suppress it for many days. I have been talking with the telegraphist in the middle of the Plaza Mayor; thus I am certain that we could not have been overheard. There was not even a bird in the air near us. And also let me tell you something more. I have been making friends with this man called Nostromo, the Capataz. We had a conversation this very evening, I walking by the side of his horse as he rode slowly out of the town just now. He promised me that if a riot took place for any reason — even for the most political of reasons, you understand — his Cargadores, an important part of the populace, you will admit, should be found on the side of the Europeans."

"He has promised you that?" Mrs. Gould inquired, with interest. "What made him make that promise to you?"

"Upon my word, I don't know," declared Decoud, in a slightly surprised tone. "He certainly promised me that, but now you ask me why, I could not tell you his reasons. He talked with his usual carelessness, which, if he had been anything else but a common sailor, I would call a pose or an affectation."

Decoud, interrupting himself, looked at Mrs. Gould curiously.

"Upon the whole," he continued, "I suppose he expects something to his advantage from it. You mustn't forget that he does not exercise his extraordinary power over the lower classes without a certain amount of personal risk and without a great profusion in spending his money. One must pay in some way or other for such a solid thing as individual prestige. He told me after we made friends at a dance, in a Posada kept by a Mexican just outside the walls, that he had come here to make his fortune. I suppose he looks upon his prestige as a sort of investment."

"Perhaps he prizes it for its own sake," Mrs. Gould said in a tone as if she were repelling an undeserved aspersion. "Viola, the Garibaldino, with whom he has lived for some years, calls him the Incorruptible."

“Ah! he belongs to the group of your proteges out there towards the harbour, Mrs. Gould. Muy bien. And Captain Mitchell calls him wonderful. I have heard no end of tales of his strength, his audacity, his fidelity. No end of fine things. H’m! incorruptible! It is indeed a name of honour for the Capataz of the Cargadores of Sulaco. Incorruptible! Fine, but vague. However, I suppose he’s sensible, too. And I talked to him upon that sane and practical assumption.”

“I prefer to think him disinterested, and therefore trustworthy,” Mrs. Gould said, with the nearest approach to curtness it was in her nature to assume.

“Well, if so, then the silver will be still more safe. Let it come down, senora. Let it come down, so that it may go north and return to us in the shape of credit.”

Mrs. Gould glanced along the corredor towards the door of her husband’s room. Decoud, watching her as if she had his fate in her hands, detected an almost imperceptible nod of assent. He bowed with a smile, and, putting his hand into the breast pocket of his coat, pulled out a fan of light feathers set upon painted leaves of sandal-wood. “I had it in my pocket,” he murmured, triumphantly, “for a plausible pretext.” He bowed again. “Good-night, senora.”

Mrs. Gould continued along the corredor away from her husband’s room. The fate of the San Tome mine was lying heavy upon her heart. It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She had watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver-bricks, erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, the sick mothers and the feeble old men, mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration. “Those poor people!” she murmured to herself.

Below she heard the voice of Martin Decoud in the patio speaking loudly:

“I have found Dona Antonia’s fan, Basilio. Look, here it is!”

Chapter 7

It was part of what Decoud would have called his sane materialism that he did not believe in the possibility of friendship between man and woman.

The one exception he allowed confirmed, he maintained, that absolute rule. Friendship was possible between brother and sister, meaning by friendship the frank unreserve, as before another human being, of thoughts and sensations; all the objectless and necessary sincerity of one’s innermost life trying to re-act upon the profound sympathies of another existence.

His favourite sister, the handsome, slightly arbitrary and resolute angel, ruling the father and mother Decoud in the first-floor apartments of a very fine Parisian house,

was the recipient of Martin Decoud's confidences as to his thoughts, actions, purposes, doubts, and even failures. . . .

"Prepare our little circle in Paris for the birth of another South American Republic. One more or less, what does it matter? They may come into the world like evil flowers on a hotbed of rotten institutions; but the seed of this one has germinated in your brother's brain, and that will be enough for your devoted assent. I am writing this to you by the light of a single candle, in a sort of inn, near the harbour, kept by an Italian called Viola, a protegee of Mrs. Gould. The whole building, which, for all I know, may have been contrived by a Conquistador farmer of the pearl fishery three hundred years ago, is perfectly silent. So is the plain between the town and the harbour; silent, but not so dark as the house, because the pickets of Italian workmen guarding the railway have lighted little fires all along the line. It was not so quiet around here yesterday. We had an awful riot — a sudden outbreak of the populace, which was not suppressed till late today. Its object, no doubt, was loot, and that was defeated, as you may have learned already from the cablegram sent via San Francisco and New York last night, when the cables were still open. You have read already there that the energetic action of the Europeans of the railway has saved the town from destruction, and you may believe that. I wrote out the cable myself. We have no Reuter's agency man here. I have also fired at the mob from the windows of the club, in company with some other young men of position. Our object was to keep the Calle de la Constitucion clear for the exodus of the ladies and children, who have taken refuge on board a couple of cargo ships now in the harbour here. That was yesterday. You should also have learned from the cable that the missing President, Ribiera, who had disappeared after the battle of Sta. Marta, has turned up here in Sulaco by one of those strange coincidences that are almost incredible, riding on a lame mule into the very midst of the street fighting. It appears that he had fled, in company of a muleteer called Bonifacio, across the mountains from the threats of Montero into the arms of an enraged mob.

"The Capataz of Cargadores, that Italian sailor of whom I have written to you before, has saved him from an ignoble death. That man seems to have a particular talent for being on the spot whenever there is something picturesque to be done.

"He was with me at four o'clock in the morning at the offices of the Porvenir, where he had turned up so early in order to warn me of the coming trouble, and also to assure me that he would keep his Cargadores on the side of order. When the full daylight came we were looking together at the crowd on foot and on horseback, demonstrating on the Plaza and shying stones at the windows of the Intendencia. Nostromo (that is the name they call him by here) was pointing out to me his Cargadores interspersed in the mob.

"The sun shines late upon Sulaco, for it has first to climb above the mountains. In that clear morning light, brighter than twilight, Nostromo saw right across the vast Plaza, at the end of the street beyond the cathedral, a mounted man apparently in difficulties with a yelling knot of leperos. At once he said to me, 'That's a stranger. What is it they are doing to him?' Then he took out the silver whistle he is in the habit

of using on the wharf (this man seems to disdain the use of any metal less precious than silver) and blew into it twice, evidently a preconcerted signal for his Cargadores. He ran out immediately, and they rallied round him. I ran out, too, but was too late to follow them and help in the rescue of the stranger, whose animal had fallen. I was set upon at once as a hated aristocrat, and was only too glad to get into the club, where Don Jaime Berges (you may remember him visiting at our house in Paris some three years ago) thrust a sporting gun into my hands. They were already firing from the windows. There were little heaps of cartridges lying about on the open card-tables. I remember a couple of overturned chairs, some bottles rolling on the floor amongst the packs of cards scattered suddenly as the caballeros rose from their game to open fire upon the mob. Most of the young men had spent the night at the club in the expectation of some such disturbance. In two of the candelabra, on the consoles, the candles were burning down in their sockets. A large iron nut, probably stolen from the railway workshops, flew in from the street as I entered, and broke one of the large mirrors set in the wall. I noticed also one of the club servants tied up hand and foot with the cords of the curtain and flung in a corner. I have a vague recollection of Don Jaime assuring me hastily that the fellow had been detected putting poison into the dishes at supper. But I remember distinctly he was shrieking for mercy, without stopping at all, continuously, and so absolutely disregarded that nobody even took the trouble to gag him. The noise he made was so disagreeable that I had half a mind to do it myself. But there was no time to waste on such trifles. I took my place at one of the windows and began firing.

“I didn’t learn till later in the afternoon whom it was that Nostromo, with his Cargadores and some Italian workmen as well, had managed to save from those drunken rascals. That man has a peculiar talent when anything striking to the imagination has to be done. I made that remark to him afterwards when we met after some sort of order had been restored in the town, and the answer he made rather surprised me. He said quite moodily, ‘And how much do I get for that, senor?’ Then it dawned upon me that perhaps this man’s vanity has been satiated by the adulation of the common people and the confidence of his superiors!”

Decoud paused to light a cigarette, then, with his head still over his writing, he blew a cloud of smoke, which seemed to rebound from the paper. He took up the pencil again.

“That was yesterday evening on the Plaza, while he sat on the steps of the cathedral, his hands between his knees, holding the bridle of his famous silver-grey mare. He had led his body of Cargadores splendidly all day long. He looked fatigued. I don’t know how I looked. Very dirty, I suppose. But I suppose I also looked pleased. From the time the fugitive President had been got off to the S. S. Minerva, the tide of success had turned against the mob. They had been driven off the harbour, and out of the better streets of the town, into their own maze of ruins and tolderias. You must understand that this riot, whose primary object was undoubtedly the getting hold of the San Tome silver stored in the lower rooms of the Custom House (besides the general looting of the Ricos), had

acquired a political colouring from the fact of two Deputies to the Provincial Assembly, Senores Gamacho and Fuentes, both from Bolson, putting themselves at the head of it — late in the afternoon, it is true, when the mob, disappointed in their hopes of loot, made a stand in the narrow streets to the cries of ‘Viva la Libertad! Down with Feudalism!’ (I wonder what they imagine feudalism to be?) ‘Down with the Goths and Paralytics.’ I suppose the Senores Gamacho and Fuentes knew what they were doing. They are prudent gentlemen. In the Assembly they called themselves Moderates, and opposed every energetic measure with philanthropic pensiveness. At the first rumours of Montero’s victory, they showed a subtle change of the pensive temper, and began to defy poor Don Juste Lopez in his Presidential tribune with an effrontery to which the poor man could only respond by a dazed smoothing of his beard and the ringing of the presidential bell. Then, when the downfall of the Ribierist cause became confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt, they have blossomed into convinced Liberals, acting together as if they were Siamese twins, and ultimately taking charge, as it were, of the riot in the name of Monterist principles.

“Their last move of eight o’clock last night was to organize themselves into a Monterist Committee which sits, as far as I know, in a posada kept by a retired Mexican bull-fighter, a great politician, too, whose name I have forgotten. Thence they have issued a communication to us, the Goths and Paralytics of the Amarilla Club (who have our own committee), inviting us to come to some provisional understanding for a truce, in order, they have the impudence to say, that the noble cause of Liberty ‘should not be stained by the criminal excesses of Conservative selfishness!’ As I came out to sit with Nostromo on the cathedral steps the club was busy considering a proper reply in the principal room, littered with exploded cartridges, with a lot of broken glass, blood smears, candlesticks, and all sorts of wreckage on the floor. But all this is nonsense. Nobody in the town has any real power except the railway engineers, whose men occupy the dismantled houses acquired by the Company for their town station on one side of the Plaza, and Nostromo, whose Cargadores were sleeping under the arcades along the front of Anzani’s shops. A fire of broken furniture out of the Intendencia saloons, mostly gilt, was burning on the Plaza, in a high flame swaying right upon the statue of Charles IV. The dead body of a man was lying on the steps of the pedestal, his arms thrown wide open, and his sombrero covering his face — the attention of some friend, perhaps. The light of the flames touched the foliage of the first trees on the Alameda, and played on the end of a side street near by, blocked up by a jumble of ox-carts and dead bullocks. Sitting on one of the carcasses, a lepero, muffled up, smoked a cigarette. It was a truce, you understand. The only other living being on the Plaza besides ourselves was a Cargador walking to and fro, with a long, bare knife in his hand, like a sentry before the Arcades, where his friends were sleeping. And the only other spot of light in the dark town were the lighted windows of the club, at the corner of the Calle.”

After having written so far, Don Martin Decoud, the exotic dandy of the Parisian boulevard, got up and walked across the sanded floor of the cafe at one end of the

Albergo of United Italy, kept by Giorgio Viola, the old companion of Garibaldi. The highly coloured lithograph of the Faithful Hero seemed to look dimly, in the light of one candle, at the man with no faith in anything except the truth of his own sensations. Looking out of the window, Decoud was met by a darkness so impenetrable that he could see neither the mountains nor the town, nor yet the buildings near the harbour; and there was not a sound, as if the tremendous obscurity of the Placid Gulf, spreading from the waters over the land, had made it dumb as well as blind. Presently Decoud felt a light tremor of the floor and a distant clank of iron. A bright white light appeared, deep in the darkness, growing bigger with a thundering noise. The rolling stock usually kept on the sidings in Rincon was being run back to the yards for safe keeping. Like a mysterious stirring of the darkness behind the headlight of the engine, the train passed in a gust of hollow uproar, by the end of the house, which seemed to vibrate all over in response. And nothing was clearly visible but, on the end of the last flat car, a negro, in white trousers and naked to the waist, swinging a blazing torch basket incessantly with a circular movement of his bare arm. Decoud did not stir.

Behind him, on the back of the chair from which he had risen, hung his elegant Parisian overcoat, with a pearl-grey silk lining. But when he turned back to come to the table the candlelight fell upon a face that was grimy and scratched. His rosy lips were blackened with heat, the smoke of gun-powder. Dirt and rust tarnished the lustre of his short beard. His shirt collar and cuffs were crumpled; the blue silken tie hung down his breast like a rag; a greasy smudge crossed his white brow. He had not taken off his clothing nor used water, except to snatch a hasty drink greedily, for some forty hours. An awful restlessness had made him its own, had marked him with all the signs of desperate strife, and put a dry, sleepless stare into his eyes. He murmured to himself in a hoarse voice, "I wonder if there's any bread here," looked vaguely about him, then dropped into the chair and took the pencil up again. He became aware he had not eaten anything for many hours.

It occurred to him that no one could understand him so well as his sister. In the most sceptical heart there lurks at such moments, when the chances of existence are involved, a desire to leave a correct impression of the feelings, like a light by which the action may be seen when personality is gone, gone where no light of investigation can ever reach the truth which every death takes out of the world. Therefore, instead of looking for something to eat, or trying to snatch an hour or so of sleep, Decoud was filling the pages of a large pocket-book with a letter to his sister.

In the intimacy of that intercourse he could not keep out his weariness, his great fatigue, the close touch of his bodily sensations. He began again as if he were talking to her. With almost an illusion of her presence, he wrote the phrase, "I am very hungry."

"I have the feeling of a great solitude around me," he continued. "Is it, perhaps, because I am the only man with a definite idea in his head, in the complete collapse of every resolve, intention, and hope about me? But the solitude is also very real. All the engineers are out, and have been for two days, looking after the property of the National Central Railway, of that great Costaguana undertaking which is to put money

into the pockets of Englishmen, Frenchmen, Americans, Germans, and God knows who else. The silence about me is ominous. There is above the middle part of this house a sort of first floor, with narrow openings like loopholes for windows, probably used in old times for the better defence against the savages, when the persistent barbarism of our native continent did not wear the black coats of politicians, but went about yelling, half-naked, with bows and arrows in its hands. The woman of the house is dying up there, I believe, all alone with her old husband. There is a narrow staircase, the sort of staircase one man could easily defend against a mob, leading up there, and I have just heard, through the thickness of the wall, the old fellow going down into their kitchen for something or other. It was a sort of noise a mouse might make behind the plaster of a wall. All the servants they had ran away yesterday and have not returned yet, if ever they do. For the rest, there are only two children here, two girls. The father has sent them downstairs, and they have crept into this cafe, perhaps because I am here. They huddle together in a corner, in each other's arms; I just noticed them a few minutes ago, and I feel more lonely than ever."

Decoud turned half round in his chair, and asked, "Is there any bread here?"

Linda's dark head was shaken negatively in response, above the fair head of her sister nestling on her breast.

"You couldn't get me some bread?" insisted Decoud. The child did not move; he saw her large eyes stare at him very dark from the corner. "You're not afraid of me?" he said.

"No," said Linda, "we are not afraid of you. You came here with Gian' Battista."

"You mean Nostromo?" said Decoud.

"The English call him so, but that is no name either for man or beast," said the girl, passing her hand gently over her sister's hair.

"But he lets people call him so," remarked Decoud.

"Not in this house," retorted the child.

"Ah! well, I shall call him the Capataz then."

Decoud gave up the point, and after writing steadily for a while turned round again.

"When do you expect him back?" he asked.

"After he brought you here he rode off to fetch the Senor Doctor from the town for mother. He will be back soon."

"He stands a good chance of getting shot somewhere on the road," Decoud murmured to himself audibly; and Linda declared in her high-pitched voice —

"Nobody would dare to fire a shot at Gian' Battista."

"You believe that," asked Decoud, "do you?"

"I know it," said the child, with conviction. "There is no one in this place brave enough to attack Gian' Battista."

"It doesn't require much bravery to pull a trigger behind a bush," muttered Decoud to himself. "Fortunately, the night is dark, or there would be but little chance of saving the silver of the mine."

He turned again to his pocket-book, glanced back through the pages, and again started his pencil.

“That was the position yesterday, after the *Minerva* with the fugitive President had gone out of harbour, and the rioters had been driven back into the side lanes of the town. I sat on the steps of the cathedral with Nostromo, after sending out the cable message for the information of a more or less attentive world. Strangely enough, though the offices of the Cable Company are in the same building as the *Porvenir*, the mob, which has thrown my presses out of the window and scattered the type all over the Plaza, has been kept from interfering with the instruments on the other side of the courtyard. As I sat talking with Nostromo, Bernhardt, the telegraphist, came out from under the Arcades with a piece of paper in his hand. The little man had tied himself up to an enormous sword and was hung all over with revolvers. He is ridiculous, but the bravest German of his size that ever tapped the key of a Morse transmitter. He had received the message from Cayta reporting the transports with Barrios’s army just entering the port, and ending with the words, ‘The greatest enthusiasm prevails.’ I walked off to drink some water at the fountain, and I was shot at from the Alameda by somebody hiding behind a tree. But I drank, and didn’t care; with Barrios in Cayta and the great Cordillera between us and Montero’s victorious army I seemed, notwithstanding Messrs. Gamacho and Fuentes, to hold my new State in the hollow of my hand. I was ready to sleep, but when I got as far as the Casa Gould I found the patio full of wounded laid out on straw. Lights were burning, and in that enclosed courtyard on that hot night a faint odour of chloroform and blood hung about. At one end Doctor Monygham, the doctor of the mine, was dressing the wounds; at the other, near the stairs, Father Corbelan, kneeling, listened to the confession of a dying Cargador. Mrs. Gould was walking about through these shambles with a large bottle in one hand and a lot of cotton wool in the other. She just looked at me and never even winked. Her camerista was following her, also holding a bottle, and sobbing gently to herself.

“I busied myself for some time in fetching water from the cistern for the wounded. Afterwards I wandered upstairs, meeting some of the first ladies of Sulaco, paler than I had ever seen them before, with bandages over their arms. Not all of them had fled to the ships. A good many had taken refuge for the day in the Casa Gould. On the landing a girl, with her hair half down, was kneeling against the wall under the niche where stands a Madonna in blue robes and a gilt crown on her head. I think it was the eldest Miss Lopez; I couldn’t see her face, but I remember looking at the high French heel of her little shoe. She did not make a sound, she did not stir, she was not sobbing; she remained there, perfectly still, all black against the white wall, a silent figure of passionate piety. I am sure she was no more frightened than the other white-faced ladies I met carrying bandages. One was sitting on the top step tearing a piece of linen hastily into strips — the young wife of an elderly man of fortune here. She interrupted herself to wave her hand to my bow, as though she were in her carriage on the Alameda. The women of our country are worth looking at during a revolution. The rouge and pearl powder fall off, together with that passive attitude towards the outer

world which education, tradition, custom impose upon them from the earliest infancy. I thought of your face, which from your infancy had the stamp of intelligence instead of that patient and resigned cast which appears when some political commotion tears down the veil of cosmetics and usage.

“In the great sala upstairs a sort of Junta of Notables was sitting, the remnant of the vanished Provincial Assembly. Don Juste Lopez had had half his beard singed off at the muzzle of a trabuco loaded with slugs, of which every one missed him, providentially. And as he turned his head from side to side it was exactly as if there had been two men inside his frock-coat, one nobly whiskered and solemn, the other untidy and scared.

“They raised a cry of ‘Decoud! Don Martin!’ at my entrance. I asked them, ‘What are you deliberating upon, gentlemen?’ There did not seem to be any president, though Don Jose Avellanos sat at the head of the table. They all answered together, ‘On the preservation of life and property.’ ‘Till the new officials arrive,’ Don Juste explained to me, with the solemn side of his face offered to my view. It was as if a stream of water had been poured upon my glowing idea of a new State. There was a hissing sound in my ears, and the room grew dim, as if suddenly filled with vapour.

“I walked up to the table blindly, as though I had been drunk. ‘You are deliberating upon surrender,’ I said. They all sat still, with their noses over the sheet of paper each had before him, God only knows why. Only Don Jose hid his face in his hands, muttering, ‘Never, never!’ But as I looked at him, it seemed to me that I could have blown him away with my breath, he looked so frail, so weak, so worn out. Whatever happens, he will not survive. The deception is too great for a man of his age; and hasn’t he seen the sheets of ‘Fifty Years of Misrule,’ which we have begun printing on the presses of the Porvenir, littering the Plaza, floating in the gutters, fired out as wads for trabucos loaded with handfuls of type, blown in the wind, trampled in the mud? I have seen pages floating upon the very waters of the harbour. It would be unreasonable to expect him to survive. It would be cruel.

“‘Do you know,’ I cried, ‘what surrender means to you, to your women, to your children, to your property?’

“I declaimed for five minutes without drawing breath, it seems to me, harping on our best chances, on the ferocity of Montero, whom I made out to be as great a beast as I have no doubt he would like to be if he had intelligence enough to conceive a systematic reign of terror. And then for another five minutes or more I poured out an impassioned appeal to their courage and manliness, with all the passion of my love for Antonia. For if ever man spoke well, it would be from a personal feeling, denouncing an enemy, defending himself, or pleading for what really may be dearer than life. My dear girl, I absolutely thundered at them. It seemed as if my voice would burst the walls asunder, and when I stopped I saw all their scared eyes looking at me dubiously. And that was all the effect I had produced! Only Don Jose’s head had sunk lower and lower on his breast. I bent my ear to his withered lips, and made out his whisper, something like, ‘In God’s name, then, Martin, my son!’ I don’t know exactly. There was the name

of God in it, I am certain. It seems to me I have caught his last breath — the breath of his departing soul on his lips.

“He lives yet, it is true. I have seen him since; but it was only a senile body, lying on its back, covered to the chin, with open eyes, and so still that you might have said it was breathing no longer. I left him thus, with Antonia kneeling by the side of the bed, just before I came to this Italian’s posada, where the ubiquitous death is also waiting. But I know that Don Jose has really died there, in the Casa Gould, with that whisper urging me to attempt what no doubt his soul, wrapped up in the sanctity of diplomatic treaties and solemn declarations, must have abhorred. I had exclaimed very loud, ‘There is never any God in a country where men will not help themselves.’

“Meanwhile, Don Juste had begun a pondered oration whose solemn effect was spoiled by the ridiculous disaster to his beard. I did not wait to make it out. He seemed to argue that Montero’s (he called him The General) intentions were probably not evil, though, he went on, ‘that distinguished man’ (only a week ago we used to call him a gran’ bestia) ‘was perhaps mistaken as to the true means.’ As you may imagine, I didn’t stay to hear the rest. I know the intentions of Montero’s brother, Pedrito, the guerrillero, whom I exposed in Paris, some years ago, in a cafe frequented by South American students, where he tried to pass himself off for a Secretary of Legation. He used to come in and talk for hours, twisting his felt hat in his hairy paws, and his ambition seemed to become a sort of Duc de Morny to a sort of Napoleon. Already, then, he used to talk of his brother in inflated terms. He seemed fairly safe from being found out, because the students, all of the Blanco families, did not, as you may imagine, frequent the Legation. It was only Decoud, a man without faith and principles, as they used to say, that went in there sometimes for the sake of the fun, as it were to an assembly of trained monkeys. I know his intentions. I have seen him change the plates at table. Whoever is allowed to live on in terror, I must die the death.

“No, I didn’t stay to the end to hear Don Juste Lopez trying to persuade himself in a grave oration of the clemency and justice, and honesty, and purity of the brothers Montero. I went out abruptly to seek Antonia. I saw her in the gallery. As I opened the door, she extended to me her clasped hands.

“‘What are they doing in there?’ she asked.

“‘Talking,’ I said, with my eyes looking into hers.

“‘Yes, yes, but — ’

“‘Empty speeches,’ I interrupted her. ‘Hiding their fears behind imbecile hopes. They are all great Parliamentarians there — on the English model, as you know.’ I was so furious that I could hardly speak. She made a gesture of despair.

“Through the door I held a little ajar behind me, we heard Dun Juste’s measured mouthing monotone go on from phrase to phrase, like a sort of awful and solemn madness.

“‘After all, the Democratic aspirations have, perhaps, their legitimacy. The ways of human progress are inscrutable, and if the fate of the country is in the hand of Montero, we ought — ’

"I crashed the door to on that; it was enough; it was too much. There was never a beautiful face expressing more horror and despair than the face of Antonia. I couldn't bear it; I seized her wrists.

"Have they killed my father in there?" she asked.

"Her eyes blazed with indignation, but as I looked on, fascinated, the light in them went out.

"It is a surrender," I said. And I remember I was shaking her wrists I held apart in my hands. 'But it's more than talk. Your father told me to go on in God's name.'

"My dear girl, there is that in Antonia which would make me believe in the feasibility of anything. One look at her face is enough to set my brain on fire. And yet I love her as any other man would — with the heart, and with that alone. She is more to me than his Church to Father Corbelan (the Grand Vicar disappeared last night from the town; perhaps gone to join the band of Hernandez). She is more to me than his precious mine to that sentimental Englishman. I won't speak of his wife. She may have been sentimental once. The San Tome mine stands now between those two people. 'Your father himself, Antonia,' I repeated; 'your father, do you understand? has told me to go on.'

"She averted her face, and in a pained voice —

"He has?" she cried. "Then, indeed, I fear he will never speak again."

"She freed her wrists from my clutch and began to cry in her handkerchief. I disregarded her sorrow; I would rather see her miserable than not see her at all, never any more; for whether I escaped or stayed to die, there was for us no coming together, no future. And that being so, I had no pity to waste upon the passing moments of her sorrow. I sent her off in tears to fetch Dona Emilia and Don Carlos, too. Their sentiment was necessary to the very life of my plan; the sentimentalism of the people that will never do anything for the sake of their passionate desire, unless it comes to them clothed in the fair robes of an idea.

"Late at night we formed a small junta of four — the two women, Don Carlos, and myself — in Mrs. Gould's blue-and-white boudoir.

"El Rey de Sulaco thinks himself, no doubt, a very honest man. And so he is, if one could look behind his taciturnity. Perhaps he thinks that this alone makes his honesty unstained. Those Englishmen live on illusions which somehow or other help them to get a firm hold of the substance. When he speaks it is by a rare 'yes' or 'no' that seems as impersonal as the words of an oracle. But he could not impose on me by his dumb reserve. I knew what he had in his head; he has his mine in his head; and his wife had nothing in her head but his precious person, which he has bound up with the Gould Concession and tied up to that little woman's neck. No matter. The thing was to make him present the affair to Holroyd (the Steel and Silver King) in such a manner as to secure his financial support. At that time last night, just twenty-four hours ago, we thought the silver of the mine safe in the Custom House vaults till the north-bound steamer came to take it away. And as long as the treasure flowed north, without a break, that utter sentimentalist, Holroyd, would not drop his idea of introducing, not

only justice, industry, peace, to the benighted continents, but also that pet dream of his of a purer form of Christianity. Later on, the principal European really in Sulaco, the engineer-in-chief of the railway, came riding up the Calle, from the harbour, and was admitted to our conclave. Meantime, the Junta of the Notables in the great sala was still deliberating; only, one of them had run out in the corredor to ask the servant whether something to eat couldn't be sent in. The first words the engineer-in-chief said as he came into the boudoir were, 'What is your house, dear Mrs. Gould? A war hospital below, and apparently a restaurant above. I saw them carrying trays full of good things into the sala.'

"'And here, in this boudoir,' I said, 'you behold the inner cabinet of the Occidental Republic that is to be.'

"He was so preoccupied that he didn't smile at that, he didn't even look surprised.

"He told us that he was attending to the general dispositions for the defence of the railway property at the railway yards when he was sent for to go into the railway telegraph office. The engineer of the railhead, at the foot of the mountains, wanted to talk to him from his end of the wire. There was nobody in the office but himself and the operator of the railway telegraph, who read off the clicks aloud as the tape coiled its length upon the floor. And the purport of that talk, clicked nervously from a wooden shed in the depths of the forests, had informed the chief that President Ribiera had been, or was being, pursued. This was news, indeed, to all of us in Sulaco. Ribiera himself, when rescued, revived, and soothed by us, had been inclined to think that he had not been pursued.

"Ribiera had yielded to the urgent solicitations of his friends, and had left the headquarters of his discomfited army alone, under the guidance of Bonifacio, the muleteer, who had been willing to take the responsibility with the risk. He had departed at daybreak of the third day. His remaining forces had melted away during the night. Bonifacio and he rode hard on horses towards the Cordillera; then they obtained mules, entered the passes, and crossed the Paramo of Ivie just before a freezing blast swept over that stony plateau, burying in a drift of snow the little shelter-hut of stones in which they had spent the night. Afterwards poor Ribiera had many adventures, got separated from his guide, lost his mount, struggled down to the Campo on foot, and if he had not thrown himself on the mercy of a ranchoero would have perished a long way from Sulaco. That man, who, as a matter of fact, recognized him at once, let him have a fresh mule, which the fugitive, heavy and unskilful, had ridden to death. And it was true he had been pursued by a party commanded by no less a person than Pedro Montero, the brother of the general. The cold wind of the Paramo luckily caught the pursuers on the top of the pass. Some few men, and all the animals, perished in the icy blast. The stragglers died, but the main body kept on. They found poor Bonifacio lying half-dead at the foot of a snow slope, and bayoneted him promptly in the true Civil War style. They would have had Ribiera, too, if they had not, for some reason or other, turned off the track of the old Camino Real, only to lose their way in the forests at the foot of the lower slopes. And there they were at last, having stumbled in

unexpectedly upon the construction camp. The engineer at the railhead told his chief by wire that he had Pedro Montero absolutely there, in the very office, listening to the clicks. He was going to take possession of Sulaco in the name of the Democracy. He was very overbearing. His men slaughtered some of the Railway Company's cattle without asking leave, and went to work broiling the meat on the embers. Pedrito made many pointed inquiries as to the silver mine, and what had become of the product of the last six months' working. He had said peremptorily, 'Ask your chief up there by wire, he ought to know; tell him that Don Pedro Montero, Chief of the Campo and Minister of the Interior of the new Government, desires to be correctly informed.'

"He had his feet wrapped up in blood-stained rags, a lean, haggard face, ragged beard and hair, and had walked in limping, with a crooked branch of a tree for a staff. His followers were perhaps in a worse plight, but apparently they had not thrown away their arms, and, at any rate, not all their ammunition. Their lean faces filled the door and the windows of the telegraph hut. As it was at the same time the bedroom of the engineer-in-charge there, Montero had thrown himself on his clean blankets and lay there shivering and dictating requisitions to be transmitted by wire to Sulaco. He demanded a train of cars to be sent down at once to transport his men up.

"'To this I answered from my end,' the engineer-in-chief related to us, 'that I dared not risk the rolling-stock in the interior, as there had been attempts to wreck trains all along the line several times. I did that for your sake, Gould,' said the chief engineer. 'The answer to this was, in the words of my subordinate, "The filthy brute on my bed said, "Suppose I were to have you shot?"' To which my subordinate, who, it appears, was himself operating, remarked that it would not bring the cars up. Upon that, the other, yawning, said, "Never mind, there is no lack of horses on the Campo." And, turning over, went to sleep on Harris's bed.'

"This is why, my dear girl, I am a fugitive to-night. The last wire from railhead says that Pedro Montero and his men left at daybreak, after feeding on asado beef all night. They took all the horses; they will find more on the road; they'll be here in less than thirty hours, and thus Sulaco is no place either for me or the great store of silver belonging to the Gould Concession.

"But that is not the worst. The garrison of Esmeralda has gone over to the victorious party. We have heard this by means of the telegraphist of the Cable Company, who came to the Casa Gould in the early morning with the news. In fact, it was so early that the day had not yet quite broken over Sulaco. His colleague in Esmeralda had called him up to say that the garrison, after shooting some of their officers, had taken possession of a Government steamer laid up in the harbour. It is really a heavy blow for me. I thought I could depend on every man in this province. It was a mistake. It was a Monterist Revolution in Esmeralda, just such as was attempted in Sulaco, only that that one came off. The telegraphist was signalling to Bernhardt all the time, and his last transmitted words were, 'They are bursting in the door, and taking possession of the cable office. You are cut off. Can do no more.'

“But, as a matter of fact, he managed somehow to escape the vigilance of his captors, who had tried to stop the communication with the outer world. He did manage it. How it was done I don’t know, but a few hours afterwards he called up Sulaco again, and what he said was, ‘The insurgent army has taken possession of the Government transport in the bay and are filling her with troops, with the intention of going round the coast to Sulaco. Therefore look out for yourselves. They will be ready to start in a few hours, and may be upon you before daybreak.’

“This is all he could say. They drove him away from his instrument this time for good, because Bernhardt has been calling up Esmeralda ever since without getting an answer.”

After setting these words down in the pocket-book which he was filling up for the benefit of his sister, Decoud lifted his head to listen. But there were no sounds, neither in the room nor in the house, except the drip of the water from the filter into the vast earthenware jar under the wooden stand. And outside the house there was a great silence. Decoud lowered his head again over the pocket-book.

“I am not running away, you understand,” he wrote on. “I am simply going away with that great treasure of silver which must be saved at all costs. Pedro Montero from the Campo and the revolted garrison of Esmeralda from the sea are converging upon it. That it is there lying ready for them is only an accident. The real objective is the San Tome mine itself, as you may well imagine; otherwise the Occidental Province would have been, no doubt, left alone for many weeks, to be gathered at leisure into the arms of the victorious party. Don Carlos Gould will have enough to do to save his mine, with its organization and its people; this ‘Imperium in Imperio,’ this wealth-producing thing, to which his sentimentalism attaches a strange idea of justice. He holds to it as some men hold to the idea of love or revenge. Unless I am much mistaken in the man, it must remain inviolate or perish by an act of his will alone. A passion has crept into his cold and idealistic life. A passion which I can only comprehend intellectually. A passion that is not like the passions we know, we men of another blood. But it is as dangerous as any of ours.

“His wife has understood it, too. That is why she is such a good ally of mine. She seizes upon all my suggestions with a sure instinct that in the end they make for the safety of the Gould Concession. And he defers to her because he trusts her perhaps, but I fancy rather as if he wished to make up for some subtle wrong, for that sentimental unfaithfulness which surrenders her happiness, her life, to the seduction of an idea. The little woman has discovered that he lives for the mine rather than for her. But let them be. To each his fate, shaped by passion or sentiment. The principal thing is that she has backed up my advice to get the silver out of the town, out of the country, at once, at any cost, at any risk. Don Carlos’ mission is to preserve unstained the fair fame of his mine; Mrs. Gould’s mission is to save him from the effects of that cold and overmastering passion, which she dreads more than if it were an infatuation for another woman. Nostromo’s mission is to save the silver. The plan is to load it into the largest of the Company’s lighters, and send it across the gulf to a small port out

of Costaguana territory just on the other side the Azuera, where the first northbound steamer will get orders to pick it up. The waters here are calm. We shall slip away into the darkness of the gulf before the Esmeralda rebels arrive; and by the time the day breaks over the ocean we shall be out of sight, invisible, hidden by Azuera, which itself looks from the Sulaco shore like a faint blue cloud on the horizon.

“The incorruptible Capataz de Cargadores is the man for that work; and I, the man with a passion, but without a mission, I go with him to return — to play my part in the farce to the end, and, if successful, to receive my reward, which no one but Antonia can give me.

“I shall not see her again now before I depart. I left her, as I have said, by Don Jose’s bedside. The street was dark, the houses shut up, and I walked out of the town in the night. Not a single street-lamp had been lit for two days, and the archway of the gate was only a mass of darkness in the vague form of a tower, in which I heard low, dismal groans, that seemed to answer the murmurs of a man’s voice.

“I recognized something impassive and careless in its tone, characteristic of that Genoese sailor who, like me, has come casually here to be drawn into the events for which his scepticism as well as mine seems to entertain a sort of passive contempt. The only thing he seems to care for, as far as I have been able to discover, is to be well spoken of. An ambition fit for noble souls, but also a profitable one for an exceptionally intelligent scoundrel. Yes. His very words, ‘To be well spoken of. Si, señor.’ He does not seem to make any difference between speaking and thinking. Is it sheer naiveness or the practical point of view, I wonder? Exceptional individualities always interest me, because they are true to the general formula expressing the moral state of humanity.

“He joined me on the harbour road after I had passed them under the dark archway without stopping. It was a woman in trouble he had been talking to. Through discretion I kept silent while he walked by my side. After a time he began to talk himself. It was not what I expected. It was only an old woman, an old lace-maker, in search of her son, one of the street-sweepers employed by the municipality. Friends had come the day before at daybreak to the door of their hovel calling him out. He had gone with them, and she had not seen him since; so she had left the food she had been preparing half-cooked on the extinct embers and had crawled out as far as the harbour, where she had heard that some town mozos had been killed on the morning of the riot. One of the Cargadores guarding the Custom House had brought out a lantern, and had helped her to look at the few dead left lying about there. Now she was creeping back, having failed in her search. So she sat down on the stone seat under the arch, moaning, because she was very tired. The Capataz had questioned her, and after hearing her broken and groaning tale had advised her to go and look amongst the wounded in the patio of the Casa Gould. He had also given her a quarter dollar, he mentioned carelessly.”

“‘Why did you do that?’ I asked. ‘Do you know her?’

“‘No, señor. I don’t suppose I have ever seen her before. How should I? She has not probably been out in the streets for years. She is one of those old women that you

find in this country at the back of huts, crouching over fireplaces, with a stick on the ground by their side, and almost too feeble to drive away the stray dogs from their cooking-pots. Caramba! I could tell by her voice that death had forgotten her. But, old or young, they like money, and will speak well of the man who gives it to them.' He laughed a little. 'Senor, you should have felt the clutch of her paw as I put the piece in her palm.' He paused. 'My last, too,' he added.

"I made no comment. He's known for his liberality and his bad luck at the game of monte, which keeps him as poor as when he first came here.

"'I suppose, Don Martin,' he began, in a thoughtful, speculative tone, 'that the Senor Administrador of San Tome will reward me some day if I save his silver?'

"I said that it could not be otherwise, surely. He walked on, muttering to himself. 'Si, si, without doubt, without doubt; and, look you, Senor Martin, what it is to be well spoken of! There is not another man that could have been even thought of for such a thing. I shall get something great for it some day. And let it come soon,' he mumbled. 'Time passes in this country as quick as anywhere else.'

"This, soeur cherie, is my companion in the great escape for the sake of the great cause. He is more naive than shrewd, more masterful than crafty, more generous with his personality than the people who make use of him are with their money. At least, that is what he thinks himself with more pride than sentiment. I am glad I have made friends with him. As a companion he acquires more importance than he ever had as a sort of minor genius in his way — as an original Italian sailor whom I allowed to come in in the small hours and talk familiarly to the editor of the *Porvenir* while the paper was going through the press. And it is curious to have met a man for whom the value of life seems to consist in personal prestige.

"I am waiting for him here now. On arriving at the posada kept by Viola we found the children alone down below, and the old Genoese shouted to his countryman to go and fetch the doctor. Otherwise we would have gone on to the wharf, where it appears Captain Mitchell with some volunteer Europeans and a few picked Cargadores are loading the lighter with the silver that must be saved from Montero's clutches in order to be used for Montero's defeat. Nostromo galloped furiously back towards the town. He has been long gone already. This delay gives me time to talk to you. By the time this pocket-book reaches your hands much will have happened. But now it is a pause under the hovering wing of death in this silent house buried in the black night, with this dying woman, the two children crouching without a sound, and that old man whom I can hear through the thickness of the wall passing up and down with a light rubbing noise no louder than a mouse. And I, the only other with them, don't really know whether to count myself with the living or with the dead. 'Quien sabe?' as the people here are prone to say in answer to every question. But no! feeling for you is certainly not dead, and the whole thing, the house, the dark night, the silent children in this dim room, my very presence here — all this is life, must be life, since it is so much like a dream."

With the writing of the last line there came upon Decoud a moment of sudden and complete oblivion. He swayed over the table as if struck by a bullet. The next moment he sat up, confused, with the idea that he had heard his pencil roll on the floor. The low door of the cafe, wide open, was filled with the glare of a torch in which was visible half of a horse, switching its tail against the leg of a rider with a long iron spur strapped to the naked heel. The two girls were gone, and Nostromo, standing in the middle of the room, looked at him from under the round brim of the sombrero low down over his brow.

"I have brought that sour-faced English doctor in Senora Gould's carriage," said Nostromo. "I doubt if, with all his wisdom, he can save the Padrona this time. They have sent for the children. A bad sign that."

He sat down on the end of a bench. "She wants to give them her blessing, I suppose."

Dazedly Decoud observed that he must have fallen sound asleep, and Nostromo said, with a vague smile, that he had looked in at the window and had seen him lying still across the table with his head on his arms. The English senora had also come in the carriage, and went upstairs at once with the doctor. She had told him not to wake up Don Martin yet; but when they sent for the children he had come into the cafe.

The half of the horse with its half of the rider swung round outside the door; the torch of tow and resin in the iron basket which was carried on a stick at the saddle-bow flared right into the room for a moment, and Mrs. Gould entered hastily with a very white, tired face. The hood of her dark, blue cloak had fallen back. Both men rose.

"Teresa wants to see you, Nostromo," she said. The Capataz did not move. Decoud, with his back to the table, began to button up his coat.

"The silver, Mrs. Gould, the silver," he murmured in English. "Don't forget that the Esmeralda garrison have got a steamer. They may appear at any moment at the harbour entrance."

"The doctor says there is no hope," Mrs. Gould spoke rapidly, also in English. "I shall take you down to the wharf in my carriage and then come back to fetch away the girls." She changed swiftly into Spanish to address Nostromo. "Why are you wasting time? Old Giorgio's wife wishes to see you."

"I am going to her, senora," muttered the Capataz. Dr. Monygham now showed himself, bringing back the children. To Mrs. Gould's inquiring glance he only shook his head and went outside at once, followed by Nostromo.

The horse of the torch-bearer, motionless, hung his head low, and the rider had dropped the reins to light a cigarette. The glare of the torch played on the front of the house crossed by the big black letters of its inscription in which only the word Italia was lighted fully. The patch of wavering glare reached as far as Mrs. Gould's carriage waiting on the road, with the yellow-faced, portly Ignacio apparently dozing on the box. By his side Basilio, dark and skinny, held a Winchester carbine in front of him, with both hands, and peered fearfully into the darkness. Nostromo touched lightly the doctor's shoulder.

"Is she really dying, senor doctor?"

“Yes,” said the doctor, with a strange twitch of his scarred cheek. “And why she wants to see you I cannot imagine.”

“She has been like that before,” suggested Nostromo, looking away.

“Well, Capataz, I can assure you she will never be like that again,” snarled Dr. Monygham. “You may go to her or stay away. There is very little to be got from talking to the dying. But she told Dona Emilia in my hearing that she has been like a mother to you ever since you first set foot ashore here.”

“Si! And she never had a good word to say for me to anybody. It is more as if she could not forgive me for being alive, and such a man, too, as she would have liked her son to be.”

“Maybe!” exclaimed a mournful deep voice near them. “Women have their own ways of tormenting themselves.” Giorgio Viola had come out of the house. He threw a heavy black shadow in the torchlight, and the glare fell on his big face, on the great bushy head of white hair. He motioned the Capataz indoors with his extended arm.

Dr. Monygham, after busying himself with a little medicament box of polished wood on the seat of the landau, turned to old Giorgio and thrust into his big, trembling hand one of the glass-stoppered bottles out of the case.

“Give her a spoonful of this now and then, in water,” he said. “It will make her easier.”

“And there is nothing more for her?” asked the old man, patiently.

“No. Not on earth,” said the doctor, with his back to him, clicking the lock of the medicine case.

Nostromo slowly crossed the large kitchen, all dark but for the glow of a heap of charcoal under the heavy mantel of the cooking-range, where water was boiling in an iron pot with a loud bubbling sound. Between the two walls of a narrow staircase a bright light streamed from the sick-room above; and the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores stepping noiselessly in soft leather sandals, bushy whiskered, his muscular neck and bronzed chest bare in the open check shirt, resembled a Mediterranean sailor just come ashore from some wine or fruit-laden felucca. At the top he paused, broad shouldered, narrow hipped and supple, looking at the large bed, like a white couch of state, with a profusion of snowy linen, amongst which the Padrona sat unpropped and bowed, her handsome, black-browed face bent over her chest. A mass of raven hair with only a few white threads in it covered her shoulders; one thick strand fallen forward half veiled her cheek. Perfectly motionless in that pose, expressing physical anxiety and unrest, she turned her eyes alone towards Nostromo.

The Capataz had a red sash wound many times round his waist, and a heavy silver ring on the forefinger of the hand he raised to give a twist to his moustache.

“Their revolutions, their revolutions,” gasped Senora Teresa. “Look, Gian’ Battista, it has killed me at last!”

Nostromo said nothing, and the sick woman with an upward glance insisted. “Look, this one has killed me, while you were away fighting for what did not concern you, foolish man.”

“Why talk like this?” mumbled the Capataz between his teeth. “Will you never believe in my good sense? It concerns me to keep on being what I am: every day alike.”

“You never change, indeed,” she said, bitterly. “Always thinking of yourself and taking your pay out in fine words from those who care nothing for you.”

There was between them an intimacy of antagonism as close in its way as the intimacy of accord and affection. He had not walked along the way of Teresa’s expectations. It was she who had encouraged him to leave his ship, in the hope of securing a friend and defender for the girls. The wife of old Giorgio was aware of her precarious health, and was haunted by the fear of her aged husband’s loneliness and the unprotected state of the children. She had wanted to annex that apparently quiet and steady young man, affectionate and pliable, an orphan from his tenderest age, as he had told her, with no ties in Italy except an uncle, owner and master of a felucca, from whose ill-usage he had run away before he was fourteen. He had seemed to her courageous, a hard worker, determined to make his way in the world. From gratitude and the ties of habit he would become like a son to herself and Giorgio; and then, who knows, when Linda had grown up. . . . Ten years’ difference between husband and wife was not so much. Her own great man was nearly twenty years older than herself. Gian’ Battista was an attractive young fellow, besides; attractive to men, women, and children, just by that profound quietness of personality which, like a serene twilight, rendered more seductive the promise of his vigorous form and the resolution of his conduct.

Old Giorgio, in profound ignorance of his wife’s views and hopes, had a great regard for his young countryman. “A man ought not to be tame,” he used to tell her, quoting the Spanish proverb in defence of the splendid Capataz. She was growing jealous of his success. He was escaping from her, she feared. She was practical, and he seemed to her to be an absurd spendthrift of these qualities which made him so valuable. He got too little for them. He scattered them with both hands amongst too many people, she thought. He laid no money by. She railed at his poverty, his exploits, his adventures, his loves and his reputation; but in her heart she had never given him up, as though, indeed, he had been her son.

Even now, ill as she was, ill enough to feel the chill, black breath of the approaching end, she had wished to see him. It was like putting out her benumbed hand to regain her hold. But she had presumed too much on her strength. She could not command her thoughts; they had become dim, like her vision. The words faltered on her lips, and only the paramount anxiety and desire of her life seemed to be too strong for death.

The Capataz said, “I have heard these things many times. You are unjust, but it does not hurt me. Only now you do not seem to have much strength to talk, and I have but little time to listen. I am engaged in a work of very great moment.”

She made an effort to ask him whether it was true that he had found time to go and fetch a doctor for her. Nostromo nodded affirmatively.

She was pleased: it relieved her sufferings to know that the man had condescended to do so much for those who really wanted his help. It was a proof of his friendship. Her voice become stronger.

"I want a priest more than a doctor," she said, pathetically. She did not move her head; only her eyes ran into the corners to watch the Capataz standing by the side of her bed. "Would you go to fetch a priest for me now? Think! A dying woman asks you!"

Nostromo shook his head resolutely. He did not believe in priests in their sacerdotal character. A doctor was an efficacious person; but a priest, as priest, was nothing, incapable of doing either good or harm. Nostromo did not even dislike the sight of them as old Giorgio did. The utter uselessness of the errand was what struck him most.

"Padrona," he said, "you have been like this before, and got better after a few days. I have given you already the very last moments I can spare. Ask Senora Gould to send you one."

He was feeling uneasy at the impiety of this refusal. The Padrona believed in priests, and confessed herself to them. But all women did that. It could not be of much consequence. And yet his heart felt oppressed for a moment — at the thought what absolution would mean to her if she believed in it only ever so little. No matter. It was quite true that he had given her already the very last moment he could spare.

"You refuse to go?" she gasped. "Ah! you are always yourself, indeed."

"Listen to reason, Padrona," he said. "I am needed to save the silver of the mine. Do you hear? A greater treasure than the one which they say is guarded by ghosts and devils on Azuera. It is true. I am resolved to make this the most desperate affair I was ever engaged on in my whole life."

She felt a despairing indignation. The supreme test had failed. Standing above her, Nostromo did not see the distorted features of her face, distorted by a paroxysm of pain and anger. Only she began to tremble all over. Her bowed head shook. The broad shoulders quivered.

"Then God, perhaps, will have mercy upon me! But do you look to it, man, that you get something for yourself out of it, besides the remorse that shall overtake you some day."

She laughed feebly. "Get riches at least for once, you indispensable, admired Gian' Battista, to whom the peace of a dying woman is less than the praise of people who have given you a silly name — and nothing besides — in exchange for your soul and body."

The Capataz de Cargadores swore to himself under his breath.

"Leave my soul alone, Padrona, and I shall know how to take care of my body. Where is the harm of people having need of me? What are you envying me that I have robbed you and the children of? Those very people you are throwing in my teeth have done more for old Giorgio than they ever thought of doing for me."

He struck his breast with his open palm; his voice had remained low though he had spoken in a forcible tone. He twisted his moustaches one after another, and his eyes wandered a little about the room.

“Is it my fault that I am the only man for their purposes? What angry nonsense are you talking, mother? Would you rather have me timid and foolish, selling water-melons on the market-place or rowing a boat for passengers along the harbour, like a soft Neapolitan without courage or reputation? Would you have a young man live like a monk? I do not believe it. Would you want a monk for your eldest girl? Let her grow. What are you afraid of? You have been angry with me for everything I did for years; ever since you first spoke to me, in secret from old Giorgio, about your Linda. Husband to one and brother to the other, did you say? Well, why not! I like the little ones, and a man must marry some time. But ever since that time you have been making little of me to everyone. Why? Did you think you could put a collar and chain on me as if I were one of the watch-dogs they keep over there in the railway yards? Look here, Padrona, I am the same man who came ashore one evening and sat down in the thatched ranche you lived in at that time on the other side of the town and told you all about himself. You were not unjust to me then. What has happened since? I am no longer an insignificant youth. A good name, Giorgio says, is a treasure, Padrona.”

“They have turned your head with their praises,” gasped the sick woman. “They have been paying you with words. Your folly shall betray you into poverty, misery, starvation. The very leperos shall laugh at you — the great Capataz.”

Nostromo stood for a time as if struck dumb. She never looked at him. A self-confident, mirthless smile passed quickly from his lips, and then he backed away. His disregarded figure sank down beyond the doorway. He descended the stairs backwards, with the usual sense of having been somehow baffled by this woman’s disparagement of this reputation he had obtained and desired to keep.

Downstairs in the big kitchen a candle was burning, surrounded by the shadows of the walls, of the ceiling, but no ruddy glare filled the open square of the outer door. The carriage with Mrs. Gould and Don Martin, preceded by the horseman bearing the torch, had gone on to the jetty. Dr. Monygham, who had remained, sat on the corner of a hard wood table near the candlestick, his seamed, shaven face inclined sideways, his arms crossed on his breast, his lips pursed up, and his prominent eyes glaring stonily upon the floor of black earth. Near the overhanging mantel of the fireplace, where the pot of water was still boiling violently, old Giorgio held his chin in his hand, one foot advanced, as if arrested by a sudden thought.

“Adios, viejo,” said Nostromo, feeling the handle of his revolver in the belt and loosening his knife in its sheath. He picked up a blue poncho lined with red from the table, and put it over his head. “Adios, look after the things in my sleeping-room, and if you hear from me no more, give up the box to Paquita. There is not much of value there, except my new serape from Mexico, and a few silver buttons on my best jacket. No matter! The things will look well enough on the next lover she gets, and the man need not be afraid I shall linger on earth after I am dead, like those Gringos that haunt the Azuera.”

Dr. Monygham twisted his lips into a bitter smile. After old Giorgio, with an almost imperceptible nod and without a word, had gone up the narrow stairs, he said —

“Why, Capataz! I thought you could never fail in anything.”

Nostromo, glancing contemptuously at the doctor, lingered in the doorway rolling a cigarette, then struck a match, and, after lighting it, held the burning piece of wood above his head till the flame nearly touched his fingers.

“No wind!” he muttered to himself. “Look here, senor — do you know the nature of my undertaking?”

Dr. Monygham nodded sourly.

“It is as if I were taking up a curse upon me, senor doctor. A man with a treasure on this coast will have every knife raised against him in every place upon the shore. You see that, senor doctor? I shall float along with a spell upon my life till I meet somewhere the north-bound steamer of the Company, and then indeed they will talk about the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores from one end of America to another.”

Dr. Monygham laughed his short, throaty laugh. Nostromo turned round in the doorway.

“But if your worship can find any other man ready and fit for such business I will stand back. I am not exactly tired of my life, though I am so poor that I can carry all I have with myself on my horse’s back.”

“You gamble too much, and never say ‘no’ to a pretty face, Capataz,” said Dr. Monygham, with sly simplicity. “That’s not the way to make a fortune. But nobody that I know ever suspected you of being poor. I hope you have made a good bargain in case you come back safe from this adventure.”

“What bargain would your worship have made?” asked Nostromo, blowing the smoke out of his lips through the doorway.

Dr. Monygham listened up the staircase for a moment before he answered, with another of his short, abrupt laughs —

“Illustrious Capataz, for taking the curse of death upon my back, as you call it, nothing else but the whole treasure would do.”

Nostromo vanished out of the doorway with a grunt of discontent at this jeering answer. Dr. Monygham heard him gallop away. Nostromo rode furiously in the dark. There were lights in the buildings of the O.S.N. Company near the wharf, but before he got there he met the Gould carriage. The horseman preceded it with the torch, whose light showed the white mules trotting, the portly Ignacio driving, and Basilio with the carbine on the box. From the dark body of the landau Mrs. Gould’s voice cried, “They are waiting for you, Capataz!” She was returning, chilly and excited, with Decoud’s pocket-book still held in her hand. He had confided it to her to send to his sister. “Perhaps my last words to her,” he had said, pressing Mrs. Gould’s hand.

The Capataz never checked his speed. At the head of the wharf vague figures with rifles leapt to the head of his horse; others closed upon him — cargadores of the company posted by Captain Mitchell on the watch. At a word from him they fell back with subservient murmurs, recognizing his voice. At the other end of the jetty, near a

cargo crane, in a dark group with glowing cigars, his name was pronounced in a tone of relief. Most of the Europeans in Sulaco were there, rallied round Charles Gould, as if the silver of the mine had been the emblem of a common cause, the symbol of the supreme importance of material interests. They had loaded it into the lighter with their own hands. Nostromo recognized Don Carlos Gould, a thin, tall shape standing a little apart and silent, to whom another tall shape, the engineer-in-chief, said aloud, "If it must be lost, it is a million times better that it should go to the bottom of the sea."

Martin Decoud called out from the lighter, "Au revoir, messieurs, till we clasp hands again over the new-born Occidental Republic." Only a subdued murmur responded to his clear, ringing tones; and then it seemed to him that the wharf was floating away into the night; but it was Nostromo, who was already pushing against a pile with one of the heavy sweeps. Decoud did not move; the effect was that of being launched into space. After a splash or two there was not a sound but the thud of Nostromo's feet leaping about the boat. He hoisted the big sail; a breath of wind fanned Decoud's cheek. Everything had vanished but the light of the lantern Captain Mitchell had hoisted upon the post at the end of the jetty to guide Nostromo out of the harbour.

The two men, unable to see each other, kept silent till the lighter, slipping before the fitful breeze, passed out between almost invisible headlands into the still deeper darkness of the gulf. For a time the lantern on the jetty shone after them. The wind failed, then fanned up again, but so faintly that the big, half-decked boat slipped along with no more noise than if she had been suspended in the air.

"We are out in the gulf now," said the calm voice of Nostromo. A moment after he added, "Senor Mitchell has lowered the light."

"Yes," said Decoud; "nobody can find us now."

A great recrudescence of obscurity embraced the boat. The sea in the gulf was as black as the clouds above. Nostromo, after striking a couple of matches to get a glimpse of the boat-compass he had with him in the lighter, steered by the feel of the wind on his cheek.

It was a new experience for Decoud, this mysteriousness of the great waters spread out strangely smooth, as if their restlessness had been crushed by the weight of that dense night. The Placido was sleeping profoundly under its black poncho.

The main thing now for success was to get away from the coast and gain the middle of the gulf before day broke. The Isabels were somewhere at hand. "On your left as you look forward, senor," said Nostromo, suddenly. When his voice ceased, the enormous stillness, without light or sound, seemed to affect Decoud's senses like a powerful drug. He didn't even know at times whether he were asleep or awake. Like a man lost in slumber, he heard nothing, he saw nothing. Even his hand held before his face did not exist for his eyes. The change from the agitation, the passions and the dangers, from the sights and sounds of the shore, was so complete that it would have resembled death had it not been for the survival of his thoughts. In this foretaste of eternal peace they floated vivid and light, like unearthly clear dreams of earthly things that may haunt

the souls freed by death from the misty atmosphere of regrets and hopes. Decoud shook himself, shuddered a bit, though the air that drifted past him was warm. He had the strangest sensation of his soul having just returned into his body from the circumambient darkness in which land, sea, sky, the mountains, and the rocks were as if they had not been.

Nostromo's voice was speaking, though he, at the tiller, was also as if he were not. "Have you been asleep, Don Martin? Caramba! If it were possible I would think that I, too, have dozed off. I have a strange notion somehow of having dreamt that there was a sound of blubbering, a sound a sorrowing man could make, somewhere near this boat. Something between a sigh and a sob."

"Strange!" muttered Decoud, stretched upon the pile of treasure boxes covered by many tarpaulins. "Could it be that there is another boat near us in the gulf? We could not see it, you know."

Nostromo laughed a little at the absurdity of the idea. They dismissed it from their minds. The solitude could almost be felt. And when the breeze ceased, the blackness seemed to weigh upon Decoud like a stone.

"This is overpowering," he muttered. "Do we move at all, Capataz?"

"Not so fast as a crawling beetle tangled in the grass," answered Nostromo, and his voice seemed deadened by the thick veil of obscurity that felt warm and hopeless all about them. There were long periods when he made no sound, invisible and inaudible as if he had mysteriously stepped out of the lighter.

In the featureless night Nostromo was not even certain which way the lighter headed after the wind had completely died out. He peered for the islands. There was not a hint of them to be seen, as if they had sunk to the bottom of the gulf. He threw himself down by the side of Decoud at last, and whispered into his ear that if daylight caught them near the Sulaco shore through want of wind, it would be possible to sweep the lighter behind the cliff at the high end of the Great Isabel, where she would lie concealed. Decoud was surprised at the grimness of his anxiety. To him the removal of the treasure was a political move. It was necessary for several reasons that it should not fall into the hands of Montero, but here was a man who took another view of this enterprise. The Caballeros over there did not seem to have the slightest idea of what they had given him to do. Nostromo, as if affected by the gloom around, seemed nervously resentful. Decoud was surprised. The Capataz, indifferent to those dangers that seemed obvious to his companion, allowed himself to become scornfully exasperated by the deadly nature of the trust put, as a matter of course, into his hands. It was more dangerous, Nostromo said, with a laugh and a curse, than sending a man to get the treasure that people said was guarded by devils and ghosts in the deep ravines of Azuera. "Senor," he said, "we must catch the steamer at sea. We must keep out in the open looking for her till we have eaten and drunk all that has been put on board here. And if we miss her by some mischance, we must keep away from the land till we grow weak, and perhaps mad, and die, and drift dead, until one or another of the steamers of the Compania comes upon the boat with the two dead men who have

saved the treasure. That, senor, is the only way to save it; for, don't you see? for us to come to the land anywhere in a hundred miles along this coast with this silver in our possession is to run the naked breast against the point of a knife. This thing has been given to me like a deadly disease. If men discover it I am dead, and you, too, senor, since you would come with me. There is enough silver to make a whole province rich, let alone a seaboard pueblo inhabited by thieves and vagabonds. Senor, they would think that heaven itself sent these riches into their hands, and would cut our throats without hesitation. I would trust no fair words from the best man around the shores of this wild gulf. Reflect that, even by giving up the treasure at the first demand, we would not be able to save our lives. Do you understand this, or must I explain?"

"No, you needn't explain," said Decoud, a little listlessly. "I can see it well enough myself, that the possession of this treasure is very much like a deadly disease for men situated as we are. But it had to be removed from Sulaco, and you were the man for the task."

"I was; but I cannot believe," said Nostromo, "that its loss would have impoverished Don Carlos Gould very much. There is more wealth in the mountain. I have heard it rolling down the shoots on quiet nights when I used to ride to Rincon to see a certain girl, after my work at the harbour was done. For years the rich rocks have been pouring down with a noise like thunder, and the miners say that there is enough at the heart of the mountain to thunder on for years and years to come. And yet, the day before yesterday, we have been fighting to save it from the mob, and to-night I am sent out with it into this darkness, where there is no wind to get away with; as if it were the last lot of silver on earth to get bread for the hungry with. Ha! ha! Well, I am going to make it the most famous and desperate affair of my life — wind or no wind. It shall be talked about when the little children are grown up and the grown men are old. Aha! the Monterists must not get hold of it, I am told, whatever happens to Nostromo the Capataz; and they shall not have it, I tell you, since it has been tied for safety round Nostromo's neck."

"I see it," murmured Decoud. He saw, indeed, that his companion had his own peculiar view of this enterprise.

Nostromo interrupted his reflections upon the way men's qualities are made use of, without any fundamental knowledge of their nature, by the proposal they should slip the long oars out and sweep the lighter in the direction of the Isabels. It wouldn't do for daylight to reveal the treasure floating within a mile or so of the harbour entrance. The denser the darkness generally, the smarter were the puffs of wind on which he had reckoned to make his way; but tonight the gulf, under its poncho of clouds, remained breathless, as if dead rather than asleep.

Don Martin's soft hands suffered cruelly, tugging at the thick handle of the enormous oar. He stuck to it manfully, setting his teeth. He, too, was in the toils of an imaginative existence, and that strange work of pulling a lighter seemed to belong naturally to the inception of a new state, acquired an ideal meaning from his love for Antonia. For all their efforts, the heavily laden lighter hardly moved. Nostromo could be heard swearing

to himself between the regular splashes of the sweeps. "We are making a crooked path," he muttered to himself. "I wish I could see the islands."

In his unskilfulness Don Martin over-exerted himself. Now and then a sort of muscular faintness would run from the tips of his aching fingers through every fibre of his body, and pass off in a flush of heat. He had fought, talked, suffered mentally and physically, exerting his mind and body for the last forty-eight hours without intermission. He had had no rest, very little food, no pause in the stress of his thoughts and his feelings. Even his love for Antonia, whence he drew his strength and his inspiration, had reached the point of tragic tension during their hurried interview by Don Jose's bedside. And now, suddenly, he was thrown out of all this into a dark gulf, whose very gloom, silence, and breathless peace added a torment to the necessity for physical exertion. He imagined the lighter sinking to the bottom with an extraordinary shudder of delight. "I am on the verge of delirium," he thought. He mastered the trembling of all his limbs, of his breast, the inward trembling of all his body exhausted of its nervous force.

"Shall we rest, Capataz?" he proposed in a careless tone. "There are many hours of night yet before us."

"True. It is but a mile or so, I suppose. Rest your arms, senor, if that is what you mean. You will find no other sort of rest, I can promise you, since you let yourself be bound to this treasure whose loss would make no poor man poorer. No, senor; there is no rest till we find a north-bound steamer, or else some ship finds us drifting about stretched out dead upon the Englishman's silver. Or rather — no; por Dios! I shall cut down the gunwale with the axe right to the water's edge before thirst and hunger rob me of my strength. By all the saints and devils I shall let the sea have the treasure rather than give it up to any stranger. Since it was the good pleasure of the Caballeros to send me off on such an errand, they shall learn I am just the man they take me for."

Decoud lay on the silver boxes panting. All his active sensations and feelings from as far back as he could remember seemed to him the maddest of dreams. Even his passionate devotion to Antonia into which he had worked himself up out of the depths of his scepticism had lost all appearance of reality. For a moment he was the prey of an extremely languid but not unpleasant indifference.

"I am sure they didn't mean you to take such a desperate view of this affair," he said.

"What was it, then? A joke?" snarled the man, who on the pay-sheets of the O.S.N. Company's establishment in Sulaco was described as "Foreman of the wharf" against the figure of his wages. "Was it for a joke they woke me up from my sleep after two days of street fighting to make me stake my life upon a bad card? Everybody knows, too, that I am not a lucky gambler."

"Yes, everybody knows of your good luck with women, Capataz," Decoud propitiated his companion in a weary drawl.

"Look here, senor," Nostromo went on. "I never even remonstrated about this affair. Directly I heard what was wanted I saw what a desperate affair it must be, and I

made up my mind to see it out. Every minute was of importance. I had to wait for you first. Then, when we arrived at the Italia Una, old Giorgio shouted to me to go for the English doctor. Later on, that poor dying woman wanted to see me, as you know. Senor, I was reluctant to go. I felt already this cursed silver growing heavy upon my back, and I was afraid that, knowing herself to be dying, she would ask me to ride off again for a priest. Father Corbelan, who is fearless, would have come at a word; but Father Corbelan is far away, safe with the band of Hernandez, and the populace, that would have liked to tear him to pieces, are much incensed against the priests. Not a single fat padre would have consented to put his head out of his hiding-place to-night to save a Christian soul, except, perhaps, under my protection. That was in her mind. I pretended I did not believe she was going to die. Senor, I refused to fetch a priest for a dying woman. . . .”

Decoud was heard to stir.

“You did, Capataz!” he exclaimed. His tone changed. “Well, you know — it was rather fine.”

“You do not believe in priests, Don Martin? Neither do I. What was the use of wasting time? But she — she believes in them. The thing sticks in my throat. She may be dead already, and here we are floating helpless with no wind at all. Curse on all superstition. She died thinking I deprived her of Paradise, I suppose. It shall be the most desperate affair of my life.”

Decoud remained lost in reflection. He tried to analyze the sensations awaked by what he had been told. The voice of the Capataz was heard again:

“Now, Don Martin, let us take up the sweeps and try to find the Isabels. It is either that or sinking the lighter if the day overtakes us. We must not forget that the steamer from Esmeralda with the soldiers may be coming along. We will pull straight on now. I have discovered a bit of a candle here, and we must take the risk of a small light to make a course by the boat compass. There is not enough wind to blow it out — may the curse of Heaven fall upon this blind gulf!”

A small flame appeared burning quite straight. It showed fragmentarily the stout ribs and planking in the hollow, empty part of the lighter. Decoud could see Nostromo standing up to pull. He saw him as high as the red sash on his waist, with a gleam of a white-handled revolver and the wooden haft of a long knife protruding on his left side. Decoud nerved himself for the effort of rowing. Certainly there was not enough wind to blow the candle out, but its flame swayed a little to the slow movement of the heavy boat. It was so big that with their utmost efforts they could not move it quicker than about a mile an hour. This was sufficient, however, to sweep them amongst the Isabels long before daylight came. There was a good six hours of darkness before them, and the distance from the harbour to the Great Isabel did not exceed two miles. Decoud put this heavy toil to the account of the Capataz’s impatience. Sometimes they paused, and then strained their ears to hear the boat from Esmeralda. In this perfect quietness a steamer moving would have been heard from far off. As to seeing anything it was out

of the question. They could not see each other. Even the lighter's sail, which remained set, was invisible. Very often they rested.

"Caramba!" said Nostromo, suddenly, during one of those intervals when they lolled idly against the heavy handles of the sweeps. "What is it? Are you distressed, Don Martin?"

Decoud assured him that he was not distressed in the least. Nostromo for a time kept perfectly still, and then in a whisper invited Martin to come aft.

With his lips touching Decoud's ear he declared his belief that there was somebody else besides themselves upon the lighter. Twice now he had heard the sound of stifled sobbing.

"Senor," he whispered with awed wonder, "I am certain that there is somebody weeping in this lighter."

Decoud had heard nothing. He expressed his incredulity. However, it was easy to ascertain the truth of the matter.

"It is most amazing," muttered Nostromo. "Could anybody have concealed himself on board while the lighter was lying alongside the wharf?"

"And you say it was like sobbing?" asked Decoud, lowering his voice, too. "If he is weeping, whoever he is he cannot be very dangerous."

Clambering over the precious pile in the middle, they crouched low on the foreshore of the mast and groped under the half-deck. Right forward, in the narrowest part, their hands came upon the limbs of a man, who remained as silent as death. Too startled themselves to make a sound, they dragged him aft by one arm and the collar of his coat. He was limp — lifeless.

The light of the bit of candle fell upon a round, hook-nosed face with black moustaches and little side-whiskers. He was extremely dirty. A greasy growth of beard was sprouting on the shaven parts of the cheeks. The thick lips were slightly parted, but the eyes remained closed. Decoud, to his immense astonishment, recognized Senor Hirsch, the hide merchant from Esmeralda. Nostromo, too, had recognized him. And they gazed at each other across the body, lying with its naked feet higher than its head, in an absurd pretence of sleep, faintness, or death.

Chapter 8

For a moment, before this extraordinary find, they forgot their own concerns and sensations. Senor Hirsch's sensations as he lay there must have been those of extreme terror. For a long time he refused to give a sign of life, till at last Decoud's objurgatio#title 2222222 en 2022-09-16T07:27:26

ns, and, perhaps more, Nostromo's impatient suggestion that he should be thrown overboard, as he seemed to be dead, induced him to raise one eyelid first, and then the other.

It appeared that he had never found a safe opportunity to leave Sulaco. He lodged with Anzani, the universal storekeeper, on the Plaza Mayor. But when the riot broke out he had made his escape from his host's house before daylight, and in such a hurry that he had forgotten to put on his shoes. He had run out impulsively in his socks, and with his hat in his hand, into the garden of Anzani's house. Fear gave him the necessary agility to climb over several low walls, and afterwards he blundered into the overgrown cloisters of the ruined Franciscan convent in one of the by-streets. He forced himself into the midst of matted bushes with the recklessness of desperation, and this accounted for his scratched body and his torn clothing. He lay hidden there all day, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth with all the intensity of thirst engendered by heat and fear. Three times different bands of men invaded the place with shouts and imprecations, looking for Father Corbelan; but towards the evening, still lying on his face in the bushes, he thought he would die from the fear of silence. He was not very clear as to what had induced him to leave the place, but evidently he had got out and slunk successfully out of town along the deserted back lanes. He wandered in the darkness near the railway, so maddened by apprehension that he dared not even approach the fires of the pickets of Italian workmen guarding the line. He had a vague idea evidently of finding refuge in the railway yards, but the dogs rushed upon him, barking; men began to shout; a shot was fired at random. He fled away from the gates. By the merest accident, as it happened, he took the direction of the O.S.N. Company's offices. Twice he stumbled upon the bodies of men killed during the day. But everything living frightened him much more. He crouched, crept, crawled, made dashes, guided by a sort of animal instinct, keeping away from every light and from every sound of voices. His idea was to throw himself at the feet of Captain Mitchell and beg for shelter in the Company's offices. It was all dark there as he approached on his hands and knees, but suddenly someone on guard challenged loudly, "Quien vive?" There were more dead men lying about, and he flattened himself down at once by the side of a cold corpse. He heard a voice saying, "Here is one of those wounded rascals crawling about. Shall I go and finish him?" And another voice objected that it was not safe to go out without a lantern upon such an errand; perhaps it was only some negro Liberal looking for a chance to stick a knife into the stomach of an honest man. Hirsch didn't stay to hear any more, but crawling away to the end of the wharf, hid himself amongst a lot of empty casks. After a while some people came along, talking, and with glowing cigarettes. He did not stop to ask himself whether they would be likely to do him any harm, but bolted incontinently along the jetty, saw a lighter lying moored at the end, and threw himself into it. In his desire to find cover he crept right forward under the half-deck, and he had remained there more dead than alive, suffering agonies of hunger and thirst, and almost fainting with terror, when he heard numerous footsteps and the voices of the Europeans who came in a body escorting the wagonload of treasure, pushed along the rails by a squad of Cargadores. He understood perfectly what was being done from the talk, but did not disclose his presence from the fear that he would not be allowed to remain. His only idea at the time, overpowering and

masterful, was to get away from this terrible Sulaco. And now he regretted it very much. He had heard Nostromo talk to Decoud, and wished himself back on shore. He did not desire to be involved in any desperate affair — in a situation where one could not run away. The involuntary groans of his anguished spirit had betrayed him to the sharp ears of the Capataz.

They had propped him up in a sitting posture against the side of the lighter, and he went on with the moaning account of his adventures till his voice broke, his head fell forward. “Water,” he whispered, with difficulty. Decoud held one of the cans to his lips. He revived after an extraordinarily short time, and scrambled up to his feet wildly. Nostromo, in an angry and threatening voice, ordered him forward. Hirsch was one of those men whom fear lashes like a whip, and he must have had an appalling idea of the Capataz’s ferocity. He displayed an extraordinary agility in disappearing forward into the darkness. They heard him getting over the tarpaulin; then there was the sound of a heavy fall, followed by a weary sigh. Afterwards all was still in the fore-part of the lighter, as though he had killed himself in his headlong tumble. Nostromo shouted in a menacing voice —

“Lie still there! Do not move a limb. If I hear as much as a loud breath from you I shall come over there and put a bullet through your head.”

The mere presence of a coward, however passive, brings an element of treachery into a dangerous situation. Nostromo’s nervous impatience passed into gloomy thoughtfulness. Decoud, in an undertone, as if speaking to himself, remarked that, after all, this bizarre event made no great difference. He could not conceive what harm the man could do. At most he would be in the way, like an inanimate and useless object — like a block of wood, for instance.

“I would think twice before getting rid of a piece of wood,” said Nostromo, calmly. “Something may happen unexpectedly where you could make use of it. But in an affair like ours a man like this ought to be thrown overboard. Even if he were as brave as a lion we would not want him here. We are not running away for our lives. Senor, there is no harm in a brave man trying to save himself with ingenuity and courage; but you have heard his tale, Don Martin. His being here is a miracle of fear — ” Nostromo paused. “There is no room for fear in this lighter,” he added through his teeth.

Decoud had no answer to make. It was not a position for argument, for a display of scruples or feelings. There were a thousand ways in which a panic-stricken man could make himself dangerous. It was evident that Hirsch could not be spoken to, reasoned with, or persuaded into a rational line of conduct. The story of his own escape demonstrated that clearly enough. Decoud thought that it was a thousand pities the wretch had not died of fright. Nature, who had made him what he was, seemed to have calculated cruelly how much he could bear in the way of atrocious anguish without actually expiring. Some compassion was due to so much terror. Decoud, though imaginative enough for sympathy, resolved not to interfere with any action that Nostromo would take. But Nostromo did nothing. And the fate of Senor Hirsch remained suspended in the darkness of the gulf at the mercy of events which could not be foreseen.

The Capataz, extending his hand, put out the candle suddenly. It was to Decoud as if his companion had destroyed, by a single touch, the world of affairs, of loves, of revolution, where his complacent superiority analyzed fearlessly all motives and all passions, including his own.

He gasped a little. Decoud was affected by the novelty of his position. Intellectually self-confident, he suffered from being deprived of the only weapon he could use with effect. No intelligence could penetrate the darkness of the Placid Gulf. There remained only one thing he was certain of, and that was the overweening vanity of his companion. It was direct, uncomplicated, naive, and effectual. Decoud, who had been making use of him, had tried to understand his man thoroughly. He had discovered a complete singleness of motive behind the varied manifestations of a consistent character. This was why the man remained so astonishingly simple in the jealous greatness of his conceit. And now there was a complication. It was evident that he resented having been given a task in which there were so many chances of failure. "I wonder," thought Decoud, "how he would behave if I were not here."

He heard Nostromo mutter again, "No! there is no room for fear on this lighter. Courage itself does not seem good enough. I have a good eye and a steady hand; no man can say he ever saw me tired or uncertain what to do; but por Dios, Don Martin, I have been sent out into this black calm on a business where neither a good eye, nor a steady hand, nor judgment are any use. . . ." He swore a string of oaths in Spanish and Italian under his breath. "Nothing but sheer desperation will do for this affair."

These words were in strange contrast to the prevailing peace — to this almost solid stillness of the gulf. A shower fell with an abrupt whispering sound all round the boat, and Decoud took off his hat, and, letting his head get wet, felt greatly refreshed. Presently a steady little draught of air caressed his cheek. The lighter began to move, but the shower distanced it. The drops ceased to fall upon his head and hands, the whispering died out in the distance. Nostromo emitted a grunt of satisfaction, and grasping the tiller, chirruped softly, as sailors do, to encourage the wind. Never for the last three days had Decoud felt less the need for what the Capataz would call desperation.

"I fancy I hear another shower on the water," he observed in a tone of quiet content. "I hope it will catch us up."

Nostromo ceased chirruping at once. "You hear another shower?" he said, doubtfully. A sort of thinning of the darkness seemed to have taken place, and Decoud could see now the outline of his companion's figure, and even the sail came out of the night like a square block of dense snow.

The sound which Decoud had detected came along the water harshly. Nostromo recognized that noise partaking of a hiss and a rustle which spreads out on all sides of a steamer making her way through a smooth water on a quiet night. It could be nothing else but the captured transport with troops from Esmeralda. She carried no lights. The noise of her steaming, growing louder every minute, would stop at times altogether, and then begin again abruptly, and sound startlingly nearer; as if that invisible vessel,

whose position could not be precisely guessed, were making straight for the lighter. Meantime, that last kept on sailing slowly and noiselessly before a breeze so faint that it was only by leaning over the side and feeling the water slip through his fingers that Decoud convinced himself they were moving at all. His drowsy feeling had departed. He was glad to know that the lighter was moving. After so much stillness the noise of the steamer seemed uproarious and distracting. There was a weirdness in not being able to see her. Suddenly all was still. She had stopped, but so close to them that the steam, blowing off, sent its rumbling vibration right over their heads.

"They are trying to make out where they are," said Decoud in a whisper. Again he leaned over and put his fingers into the water. "We are moving quite smartly," he informed Nostromo.

"We seem to be crossing her bows," said the Capataz in a cautious tone. "But this is a blind game with death. Moving on is of no use. We mustn't be seen or heard."

His whisper was hoarse with excitement. Of all his face there was nothing visible but a gleam of white eyeballs. His fingers gripped Decoud's shoulder. "That is the only way to save this treasure from this steamer full of soldiers. Any other would have carried lights. But you observe there is not a gleam to show us where she is."

Decoud stood as if paralyzed; only his thoughts were wildly active. In the space of a second he remembered the desolate glance of Antonia as he left her at the bedside of her father in the gloomy house of Avellanos, with shuttered windows, but all the doors standing open, and deserted by all the servants except an old negro at the gate. He remembered the Casa Gould on his last visit, the arguments, the tones of his voice, the impenetrable attitude of Charles, Mrs. Gould's face so blanched with anxiety and fatigue that her eyes seemed to have changed colour, appearing nearly black by contrast. Even whole sentences of the proclamation which he meant to make Barrios issue from his headquarters at Cayta as soon as he got there passed through his mind; the very germ of the new State, the Separationist proclamation which he had tried before he left to read hurriedly to Don Jose, stretched out on his bed under the fixed gaze of his daughter. God knows whether the old statesman had understood it; he was unable to speak, but he had certainly lifted his arm off the coverlet; his hand had moved as if to make the sign of the cross in the air, a gesture of blessing, of consent. Decoud had that very draft in his pocket, written in pencil on several loose sheets of paper, with the heavily-printed heading, "Administration of the San Tome Silver Mine. Sulaco. Republic of Costaguana." He had written it furiously, snatching page after page on Charles Gould's table. Mrs. Gould had looked several times over his shoulder as he wrote; but the Senor Administrador, standing straddle-legged, would not even glance at it when it was finished. He had waved it away firmly. It must have been scorn, and not caution, since he never made a remark about the use of the Administration's paper for such a compromising document. And that showed his disdain, the true English disdain of common prudence, as if everything outside the range of their own thoughts and feelings were unworthy of serious recognition. Decoud had the time in a second or two to become furiously angry with Charles Gould, and

even resentful against Mrs. Gould, in whose care, tacitly it is true, he had left the safety of Antonia. Better perish a thousand times than owe your preservation to such people, he exclaimed mentally. The grip of Nostromo's fingers never removed from his shoulder, tightening fiercely, recalled him to himself.

"The darkness is our friend," the Capataz murmured into his ear. "I am going to lower the sail, and trust our escape to this black gulf. No eyes could make us out lying silent with a naked mast. I will do it now, before this steamer closes still more upon us. The faint creak of a block would betray us and the San Tome treasure into the hands of those thieves."

He moved about as warily as a cat. Decoud heard no sound; and it was only by the disappearance of the square blotch of darkness that he knew the yard had come down, lowered as carefully as if it had been made of glass. Next moment he heard Nostromo's quiet breathing by his side.

"You had better not move at all from where you are, Don Martin," advised the Capataz, earnestly. "You might stumble or displace something which would make a noise. The sweeps and the punting poles are lying about. Move not for your life. Por Dios, Don Martin," he went on in a keen but friendly whisper, "I am so desperate that if I didn't know your worship to be a man of courage, capable of standing stock still whatever happens, I would drive my knife into your heart."

A deathlike stillness surrounded the lighter. It was difficult to believe that there was near a steamer full of men with many pairs of eyes peering from her bridge for some hint of land in the night. Her steam had ceased blowing off, and she remained stopped too far off apparently for any other sound to reach the lighter.

"Perhaps you would, Capataz," Decoud began in a whisper. "However, you need not trouble. There are other things than the fear of your knife to keep my heart steady. It shall not betray you. Only, have you forgotten — "

"I spoke to you openly as to a man as desperate as myself," explained the Capataz. "The silver must be saved from the Monterists. I told Captain Mitchell three times that I preferred to go alone. I told Don Carlos Gould, too. It was in the Casa Gould. They had sent for me. The ladies were there; and when I tried to explain why I did not wish to have you with me, they promised me, both of them, great rewards for your safety. A strange way to talk to a man you are sending out to an almost certain death. Those gentlefolk do not seem to have sense enough to understand what they are giving one to do. I told them I could do nothing for you. You would have been safer with the bandit Hernandez. It would have been possible to ride out of the town with no greater risk than a chance shot sent after you in the dark. But it was as if they had been deaf. I had to promise I would wait for you under the harbour gate. I did wait. And now because you are a brave man you are as safe as the silver. Neither more nor less."

At that moment, as if by way of comment upon Nostromo's words, the invisible steamer went ahead at half speed only, as could be judged by the leisurely beat of her propeller. The sound shifted its place markedly, but without coming nearer. It even grew a little more distant right abeam of the lighter, and then ceased again.

“They are trying for a sight of the Isabels,” muttered Nostromo, “in order to make for the harbour in a straight line and seize the Custom House with the treasure in it. Have you ever seen the Commandant of Esmeralda, Sotillo? A handsome fellow, with a soft voice. When I first came here I used to see him in the Calle talking to the señoritas at the windows of the houses, and showing his white teeth all the time. But one of my Cargadores, who had been a soldier, told me that he had once ordered a man to be flayed alive in the remote Campo, where he was sent recruiting amongst the people of the Estancias. It has never entered his head that the Compania had a man capable of baffling his game.”

The murmuring loquacity of the Capataz disturbed Decoud like a hint of weakness. And yet, talkative resolution may be as genuine as grim silence.

“Sotillo is not baffled so far,” he said. “Have you forgotten that crazy man forward?”

Nostromo had not forgotten Senor Hirsch. He reproached himself bitterly for not having visited the lighter carefully before leaving the wharf. He reproached himself for not having stabbed and flung Hirsch overboard at the very moment of discovery without even looking at his face. That would have been consistent with the desperate character of the affair. Whatever happened, Sotillo was already baffled. Even if that wretch, now as silent as death, did anything to betray the nearness of the lighter, Sotillo — if Sotillo it was in command of the troops on board — would be still baffled of his plunder.

“I have an axe in my hand,” Nostromo whispered, wrathfully, “that in three strokes would cut through the side down to the water’s edge. Moreover, each lighter has a plug in the stern, and I know exactly where it is. I feel it under the sole of my foot.”

Decoud recognized the ring of genuine determination in the nervous murmurs, the vindictive excitement of the famous Capataz. Before the steamer, guided by a shriek or two (for there could be no more than that, Nostromo said, gnashing his teeth audibly), could find the lighter there would be plenty of time to sink this treasure tied up round his neck.

The last words he hissed into Decoud’s ear. Decoud said nothing. He was perfectly convinced. The usual characteristic quietness of the man was gone. It was not equal to the situation as he conceived it. Something deeper, something unsuspected by everyone, had come to the surface. Decoud, with careful movements, slipped off his overcoat and divested himself of his boots; he did not consider himself bound in honour to sink with the treasure. His object was to get down to Barrios, in Cayta, as the Capataz knew very well; and he, too, meant, in his own way, to put into that attempt all the desperation of which he was capable. Nostromo muttered, “True, true! You are a politician, señor. Rejoin the army, and start another revolution.” He pointed out, however, that there was a little boat belonging to every lighter fit to carry two men, if not more. Theirs was towing behind.

Of that Decoud had not been aware. Of course, it was too dark to see, and it was only when Nostromo put his hand upon its painter fastened to a cleat in the stern that he experienced a full measure of relief. The prospect of finding himself in the

water and swimming, overwhelmed by ignorance and darkness, probably in a circle, till he sank from exhaustion, was revolting. The barren and cruel futility of such an end intimidated his affectation of careless pessimism. In comparison to it, the chance of being left floating in a boat, exposed to thirst, hunger, discovery, imprisonment, execution, presented itself with an aspect of amenity worth securing even at the cost of some self-contempt. He did not accept Nostromo's proposal that he should get into the boat at once. "Something sudden may overwhelm us, senior," the Capataz remarked promising faithfully, at the same time, to let go the painter at the moment when the necessity became manifest.

But Decoud assured him lightly that he did not mean to take to the boat till the very last moment, and that then he meant the Capataz to come along, too. The darkness of the gulf was no longer for him the end of all things. It was part of a living world since, pervading it, failure and death could be felt at your elbow. And at the same time it was a shelter. He exulted in its impenetrable obscurity. "Like a wall, like a wall," he muttered to himself.

The only thing which checked his confidence was the thought of Senor Hirsch. Not to have bound and gagged him seemed to Decoud now the height of improvident folly. As long as the miserable creature had the power to raise a yell he was a constant danger. His abject terror was mute now, but there was no saying from what cause it might suddenly find vent in shrieks.

This very madness of fear which both Decoud and Nostromo had seen in the wild and irrational glances, and in the continuous twitchings of his mouth, protected Senor Hirsch from the cruel necessities of this desperate affair. The moment of silencing him for ever had passed. As Nostromo remarked, in answer to Decoud's regrets, it was too late! It could not be done without noise, especially in the ignorance of the man's exact position. Wherever he had elected to crouch and tremble, it was too hazardous to go near him. He would begin probably to yell for mercy. It was much better to leave him quite alone since he was keeping so still. But to trust to his silence became every moment a greater strain upon Decoud's composure.

"I wish, Capataz, you had not let the right moment pass," he murmured.

"What! To silence him for ever? I thought it good to hear first how he came to be here. It was too strange. Who could imagine that it was all an accident? Afterwards, senior, when I saw you giving him water to drink, I could not do it. Not after I had seen you holding up the can to his lips as though he were your brother. Senior, that sort of necessity must not be thought of too long. And yet it would have been no cruelty to take away from him his wretched life. It is nothing but fear. Your compassion saved him then, Don Martin, and now it is too late. It couldn't be done without noise."

In the steamer they were keeping a perfect silence, and the stillness was so profound that Decoud felt as if the slightest sound conceivable must travel unchecked and audible to the end of the world. What if Hirsch coughed or sneezed? To feel himself at the mercy of such an idiotic contingency was too exasperating to be looked upon with irony. Nostromo, too, seemed to be getting restless. Was it possible, he asked himself,

that the steamer, finding the night too dark altogether, intended to remain stopped where she was till daylight? He began to think that this, after all, was the real danger. He was afraid that the darkness, which was his protection, would, in the end, cause his undoing.

Sotillo, as Nostromo had surmised, was in command on board the transport. The events of the last forty-eight hours in Sulaco were not known to him; neither was he aware that the telegraphist in Esmeralda had managed to warn his colleague in Sulaco. Like a good many officers of the troops garrisoning the province, Sotillo had been influenced in his adoption of the Ribierist cause by the belief that it had the enormous wealth of the Gould Concession on its side. He had been one of the frequenters of the Casa Gould, where he had aired his Blanco convictions and his ardour for reform before Don Jose Avellanos, casting frank, honest glances towards Mrs. Gould and Antonia the while. He was known to belong to a good family persecuted and impoverished during the tyranny of Guzman Bento. The opinions he expressed appeared eminently natural and proper in a man of his parentage and antecedents. And he was not a deceiver; it was perfectly natural for him to express elevated sentiments while his whole faculties were taken up with what seemed then a solid and practical notion — the notion that the husband of Antonia Avellanos would be, naturally, the intimate friend of the Gould Concession. He even pointed this out to Anzani once, when negotiating the sixth or seventh small loan in the gloomy, damp apartment with enormous iron bars, behind the principal shop in the whole row under the Arcades. He hinted to the universal shopkeeper at the excellent terms he was on with the emancipated senorita, who was like a sister to the Englishwoman. He would advance one leg and put his arms akimbo, posing for Anzani's inspection, and fixing him with a haughty stare.

“Look, miserable shopkeeper! How can a man like me fail with any woman, let alone an emancipated girl living in scandalous freedom?” he seemed to say.

His manner in the Casa Gould was, of course, very different — devoid of all truculence, and even slightly mournful. Like most of his countrymen, he was carried away by the sound of fine words, especially if uttered by himself. He had no convictions of any sort upon anything except as to the irresistible power of his personal advantages. But that was so firm that even Decoud's appearance in Sulaco, and his intimacy with the Goulds and the Avellanos, did not disquiet him. On the contrary, he tried to make friends with that rich Costaguanero from Europe in the hope of borrowing a large sum by-and-by. The only guiding motive of his life was to get money for the satisfaction of his expensive tastes, which he indulged recklessly, having no self-control. He imagined himself a master of intrigue, but his corruption was as simple as an animal instinct. At times, in solitude, he had his moments of ferocity, and also on such occasions as, for instance, when alone in a room with Anzani trying to get a loan.

He had talked himself into the command of the Esmeralda garrison. That small seaport had its importance as the station of the main submarine cable connecting the Occidental Provinces with the outer world, and the junction with it of the Sulaco branch. Don Jose Avellanos proposed him, and Barrios, with a rude and jeering guffaw,

had said, "Oh, let Sotillo go. He is a very good man to keep guard over the cable, and the ladies of Esmeralda ought to have their turn." Barrios, an indubitably brave man, had no great opinion of Sotillo.

It was through the Esmeralda cable alone that the San Tome mine could be kept in constant touch with the great financier, whose tacit approval made the strength of the Ribierist movement. This movement had its adversaries even there. Sotillo governed Esmeralda with repressive severity till the adverse course of events upon the distant theatre of civil war forced upon him the reflection that, after all, the great silver mine was fated to become the spoil of the victors. But caution was necessary. He began by assuming a dark and mysterious attitude towards the faithful Ribierist municipality of Esmeralda. Later on, the information that the commandant was holding assemblies of officers in the dead of night (which had leaked out somehow) caused those gentlemen to neglect their civil duties altogether, and remain shut up in their houses. Suddenly one day all the letters from Sulaco by the overland courier were carried off by a file of soldiers from the post office to the Commandancia, without disguise, concealment, or apology. Sotillo had heard through Cayta of the final defeat of Ribiera.

This was the first open sign of the change in his convictions. Presently notorious democrats, who had been living till then in constant fear of arrest, leg irons, and even floggings, could be observed going in and out at the great door of the Commandancia, where the horses of the orderlies doze under their heavy saddles, while the men, in ragged uniforms and pointed straw hats, lounge on a bench, with their naked feet stuck out beyond the strip of shade; and a sentry, in a red baize coat with holes at the elbows, stands at the top of the steps glaring haughtily at the common people, who uncover their heads to him as they pass.

Sotillo's ideas did not soar above the care for his personal safety and the chance of plundering the town in his charge, but he feared that such a late adhesion would earn but scant gratitude from the victors. He had believed just a little too long in the power of the San Tome mine. The seized correspondence had confirmed his previous information of a large amount of silver ingots lying in the Sulaco Custom House. To gain possession of it would be a clear Monterist move; a sort of service that would have to be rewarded. With the silver in his hands he could make terms for himself and his soldiers. He was aware neither of the riots, nor of the President's escape to Sulaco and the close pursuit led by Montero's brother, the guerrillero. The game seemed in his own hands. The initial moves were the seizure of the cable telegraph office and the securing of the Government steamer lying in the narrow creek which is the harbour of Esmeralda. The last was effected without difficulty by a company of soldiers swarming with a rush over the gangways as she lay alongside the quay; but the lieutenant charged with the duty of arresting the telegraphist halted on the way before the only cafe in Esmeralda, where he distributed some brandy to his men, and refreshed himself at the expense of the owner, a known Ribierist. The whole party became intoxicated, and proceeded on their mission up the street yelling and firing random shots at the windows. This little festivity, which might have turned out dangerous to the telegraphist's life, enabled him

in the end to send his warning to Sulaco. The lieutenant, staggering upstairs with a drawn sabre, was before long kissing him on both cheeks in one of those swift changes of mood peculiar to a state of drunkenness. He clasped the telegraphist close round the neck, assuring him that all the officers of the Esmeralda garrison were going to be made colonels, while tears of happiness streamed down his sodden face. Thus it came about that the town major, coming along later, found the whole party sleeping on the stairs and in passages, and the telegraphist (who scorned this chance of escape) very busy clicking the key of the transmitter. The major led him away bareheaded, with his hands tied behind his back, but concealed the truth from Sotillo, who remained in ignorance of the warning despatched to Sulaco.

The colonel was not the man to let any sort of darkness stand in the way of the planned surprise. It appeared to him a dead certainty; his heart was set upon his object with an ungovernable, childlike impatience. Ever since the steamer had rounded Punta Mala, to enter the deeper shadow of the gulf, he had remained on the bridge in a group of officers as excited as himself. Distracted between the coaxings and menaces of Sotillo and his Staff, the miserable commander of the steamer kept her moving with as much prudence as they would let him exercise. Some of them had been drinking heavily, no doubt; but the prospect of laying hands on so much wealth made them absurdly foolhardy, and, at the same time, extremely anxious. The old major of the battalion, a stupid, suspicious man, who had never been afloat in his life, distinguished himself by putting out suddenly the binnacle light, the only one allowed on board for the necessities of navigation. He could not understand of what use it could be for finding the way. To the vehement protestations of the ship's captain, he stamped his foot and tapped the handle of his sword. "Aha! I have unmasked you," he cried, triumphantly. "You are tearing your hair from despair at my acuteness. Am I a child to believe that a light in that brass box can show you where the harbour is? I am an old soldier, I am. I can smell a traitor a league off. You wanted that gleam to betray our approach to your friend the Englishman. A thing like that show you the way! What a miserable lie! Que picardia! You Sulaco people are all in the pay of those foreigners. You deserve to be run through the body with my sword." Other officers, crowding round, tried to calm his indignation, repeating persuasively, "No, no! This is an appliance of the mariners, major. This is no treachery." The captain of the transport flung himself face downwards on the bridge, and refused to rise. "Put an end to me at once," he repeated in a stifled voice. Sotillo had to interfere.

The uproar and confusion on the bridge became so great that the helmsman fled from the wheel. He took refuge in the engine-room, and alarmed the engineers, who, disregarding the threats of the soldiers set on guard over them, stopped the engines, protesting that they would rather be shot than run the risk of being drowned down below.

This was the first time Nostromo and Decoud heard the steamer stop. After order had been restored, and the binnacle lamp relighted, she went ahead again, passing wide of the lighter in her search for the Isabels. The group could not be made out, and,

at the pitiful entreaties of the captain, Sotillo allowed the engines to be stopped again to wait for one of those periodical lightnings of darkness caused by the shifting of the cloud canopy spread above the waters of the gulf.

Sotillo, on the bridge, muttered from time to time angrily to the captain. The other, in an apologetic and cringing tone, begged su merced the colonel to take into consideration the limitations put upon human faculties by the darkness of the night. Sotillo swelled with rage and impatience. It was the chance of a lifetime.

“If your eyes are of no more use to you than this, I shall have them put out,” he yelled.

The captain of the steamer made no answer, for just then the mass of the Great Isabel loomed up darkly after a passing shower, then vanished, as if swept away by a wave of greater obscurity preceding another downpour. This was enough for him. In the voice of a man come back to life again, he informed Sotillo that in an hour he would be alongside the Sulaco wharf. The ship was put then full speed on the course, and a great bustle of preparation for landing arose among the soldiers on her deck.

It was heard distinctly by Decoud and Nostromo. The Capataz understood its meaning. They had made out the Isabels, and were going on now in a straight line for Sulaco. He judged that they would pass close; but believed that lying still like this, with the sail lowered, the lighter could not be seen. “No, not even if they rubbed sides with us,” he muttered.

The rain began to fall again; first like a wet mist, then with a heavier touch, thickening into a smart, perpendicular downpour; and the hiss and thump of the approaching steamer was coming extremely near. Decoud, with his eyes full of water, and lowered head, asked himself how long it would be before she drew past, when unexpectedly he felt a lurch. An inrush of foam broke swishing over the stern, simultaneously with a crack of timbers and a staggering shock. He had the impression of an angry hand laying hold of the lighter and dragging it along to destruction. The shock, of course, had knocked him down, and he found himself rolling in a lot of water at the bottom of the lighter. A violent churning went on alongside; a strange and amazed voice cried out something above him in the night. He heard a piercing shriek for help from Senor Hirsch. He kept his teeth hard set all the time. It was a collision!

The steamer had struck the lighter obliquely, heeling her over till she was half swamped, starting some of her timbers, and swinging her head parallel to her own course with the force of the blow. The shock of it on board of her was hardly perceptible. All the violence of that collision was, as usual, felt only on board the smaller craft. Even Nostromo himself thought that this was perhaps the end of his desperate adventure. He, too, had been flung away from the long tiller, which took charge in the lurch. Next moment the steamer would have passed on, leaving the lighter to sink or swim after having shouldered her thus out of her way, and without even getting a glimpse of her form, had it not been that, being deeply laden with stores and the great number of people on board, her anchor was low enough to hook itself into one of the wire shrouds of the lighter’s mast. For the space of two or three gasping breaths that new

rope held against the sudden strain. It was this that gave Decoud the sensation of the snatching pull, dragging the lighter away to destruction. The cause of it, of course, was inexplicable to him. The whole thing was so sudden that he had no time to think. But all his sensations were perfectly clear; he had kept complete possession of himself; in fact, he was even pleasantly aware of that calmness at the very moment of being pitched head first over the transom, to struggle on his back in a lot of water. Senor Hirsch's shriek he had heard and recognized while he was regaining his feet, always with that mysterious sensation of being dragged headlong through the darkness. Not a word, not a cry escaped him; he had no time to see anything; and following upon the despairing screams for help, the dragging motion ceased so suddenly that he staggered forward with open arms and fell against the pile of the treasure boxes. He clung to them instinctively, in the vague apprehension of being flung about again; and immediately he heard another lot of shrieks for help, prolonged and despairing, not near him at all, but unaccountably in the distance, away from the lighter altogether, as if some spirit in the night were mocking at Senor Hirsch's terror and despair.

Then all was still — as still as when you wake up in your bed in a dark room from a bizarre and agitated dream. The lighter rocked slightly; the rain was still falling. Two groping hands took hold of his bruised sides from behind, and the Capataz's voice whispered, in his ear, "Silence, for your life! Silence! The steamer has stopped."

Decoud listened. The gulf was dumb. He felt the water nearly up to his knees. "Are we sinking?" he asked in a faint breath.

"I don't know," Nostromo breathed back to him. "Senor, make not the slightest sound."

Hirsch, when ordered forward by Nostromo, had not returned into his first hiding-place. He had fallen near the mast, and had no strength to rise; moreover, he feared to move. He had given himself up for dead, but not on any rational grounds. It was simply a cruel and terrifying feeling. Whenever he tried to think what would become of him his teeth would start chattering violently. He was too absorbed in the utter misery of his fear to take notice of anything.

Though he was stifling under the lighter's sail which Nostromo had unwittingly lowered on top of him, he did not even dare to put out his head till the very moment of the steamer striking. Then, indeed, he leaped right out, spurred on to new miracles of bodily vigour by this new shape of danger. The inrush of water when the lighter heeled over unsealed his lips. His shriek, "Save me!" was the first distinct warning of the collision for the people on board the steamer. Next moment the wire shroud parted, and the released anchor swept over the lighter's forecastle. It came against the breast of Senor Hirsch, who simply seized hold of it, without in the least knowing what it was, but curling his arms and legs upon the part above the fluke with an invincible, unreasonable tenacity. The lighter yawed off wide, and the steamer, moving on, carried him away, clinging hard, and shouting for help. It was some time, however, after the steamer had stopped that his position was discovered. His sustained yelping for help seemed to come from somebody swimming in the water. At last a couple of men went

over the bows and hauled him on board. He was carried straight off to Sotillo on the bridge. His examination confirmed the impression that some craft had been run over and sunk, but it was impracticable on such a dark night to look for the positive proof of floating wreckage. Sotillo was more anxious than ever now to enter the harbour without loss of time; the idea that he had destroyed the principal object of his expedition was too intolerable to be accepted. This feeling made the story he had heard appear the more incredible. Senor Hirsch, after being beaten a little for telling lies, was thrust into the chartroom. But he was beaten only a little. His tale had taken the heart out of Sotillo's Staff, though they all repeated round their chief, "Impossible! impossible!" with the exception of the old major, who triumphed gloomily.

"I told you; I told you," he mumbled. "I could smell some treachery, some diableria a league off."

Meantime, the steamer had kept on her way towards Sulaco, where only the truth of that matter could be ascertained. Decoud and Nostromo heard the loud churning of her propeller diminish and die out; and then, with no useless words, busied themselves in making for the Isabels. The last shower had brought with it a gentle but steady breeze. The danger was not over yet, and there was no time for talk. The lighter was leaking like a sieve. They splashed in the water at every step. The Capataz put into Decoud's hands the handle of the pump which was fitted at the side aft, and at once, without question or remark, Decoud began to pump in utter forgetfulness of every desire but that of keeping the treasure afloat. Nostromo hoisted the sail, flew back to the tiller, pulled at the sheet like mad. The short flare of a match (they had been kept dry in a tight tin box, though the man himself was completely wet), disclosed to the toiling Decoud the eagerness of his face, bent low over the box of the compass, and the attentive stare of his eyes. He knew now where he was, and he hoped to run the sinking lighter ashore in the shallow cove where the high, cliff-like end of the Great Isabel is divided in two equal parts by a deep and overgrown ravine.

Decoud pumped without intermission. Nostromo steered without relaxing for a second the intense, peering effort of his stare. Each of them was as if utterly alone with his task. It did not occur to them to speak. There was nothing in common between them but the knowledge that the damaged lighter must be slowly but surely sinking. In that knowledge, which was like the crucial test of their desires, they seemed to have become completely estranged, as if they had discovered in the very shock of the collision that the loss of the lighter would not mean the same thing to them both. This common danger brought their differences in aim, in view, in character, and in position, into absolute prominence in the private vision of each. There was no bond of conviction, of common idea; they were merely two adventurers pursuing each his own adventure, involved in the same imminence of deadly peril. Therefore they had nothing to say to each other. But this peril, this only incontrovertible truth in which they shared, seemed to act as an inspiration to their mental and bodily powers.

There was certainly something almost miraculous in the way the Capataz made the cove with nothing but the shadowy hint of the island's shape and the vague gleam of a

small sandy strip for a guide. Where the ravine opens between the cliffs, and a slender, shallow rivulet meanders out of the bushes to lose itself in the sea, the lighter was run ashore; and the two men, with a taciturn, undaunted energy, began to discharge her precious freight, carrying each ox-hide box up the bed of the rivulet beyond the bushes to a hollow place which the caving in of the soil had made below the roots of a large tree. Its big smooth trunk leaned like a falling column far over the trickle of water running amongst the loose stones.

A couple of years before Nostromo had spent a whole Sunday, all alone, exploring the island. He explained this to Decoud after their task was done, and they sat, weary in every limb, with their legs hanging down the low bank, and their backs against the tree, like a pair of blind men aware of each other and their surroundings by some indefinable sixth sense.

“Yes,” Nostromo repeated, “I never forget a place I have carefully looked at once.” He spoke slowly, almost lazily, as if there had been a whole leisurely life before him, instead of the scanty two hours before daylight. The existence of the treasure, barely concealed in this improbable spot, laid a burden of secrecy upon every contemplated step, upon every intention and plan of future conduct. He felt the partial failure of this desperate affair entrusted to the great reputation he had known how to make for himself. However, it was also a partial success. His vanity was half appeased. His nervous irritation had subsided.

“You never know what may be of use,” he pursued with his usual quietness of tone and manner. “I spent a whole miserable Sunday in exploring this crumb of land.”

“A misanthropic sort of occupation,” muttered Decoud, viciously. “You had no money, I suppose, to gamble with, and to fling about amongst the girls in your usual haunts, Capataz.”

“E vero!” exclaimed the Capataz, surprised into the use of his native tongue by so much perspicacity. “I had not! Therefore I did not want to go amongst those beggarly people accustomed to my generosity. It is looked for from the Capataz of the Car-gadores, who are the rich men, and, as it were, the Caballeros amongst the common people. I don’t care for cards but as a pastime; and as to those girls that boast of having opened their doors to my knock, you know I wouldn’t look at any one of them twice except for what the people would say. They are queer, the good people of Sulaco, and I have got much useful information simply by listening patiently to the talk of the women that everybody believed I was in love with. Poor Teresa could never understand that. On that particular Sunday, senor, she scolded so that I went out of the house swearing that I would never darken their door again unless to fetch away my hammock and my chest of clothes. Senor, there is nothing more exasperating than to hear a woman you respect rail against your good reputation when you have not a single brass coin in your pocket. I untied one of the small boats and pulled myself out of the harbour with nothing but three cigars in my pocket to help me spend the day on this island. But the water of this rivulet you hear under your feet is cool and sweet and good, senor, both before and after a smoke.” He was silent for a while, then added

reflectively, "That was the first Sunday after I brought down the white-whiskered English rico all the way down the mountains from the Paramo on the top of the Entrada Pass — and in the coach, too! No coach had gone up or down that mountain road within the memory of man, senior, till I brought this one down in charge of fifty peons working like one man with ropes, pickaxes, and poles under my direction. That was the rich Englishman who, as people say, pays for the making of this railway. He was very pleased with me. But my wages were not due till the end of the month."

He slid down the bank suddenly. Decoud heard the splash of his feet in the brook and followed his footsteps down the ravine. His form was lost among the bushes till he had reached the strip of sand under the cliff. As often happens in the gulf when the showers during the first part of the night had been frequent and heavy, the darkness had thinned considerably towards the morning though there were no signs of daylight as yet.

The cargo-lighter, relieved of its precious burden, rocked feebly, half-afloat, with her fore-foot on the sand. A long rope stretched away like a black cotton thread across the strip of white beach to the grapnel Nostromo had carried ashore and hooked to the stem of a tree-like shrub in the very opening of the ravine.

There was nothing for Decoud but to remain on the island. He received from Nostromo's hands whatever food the foresight of Captain Mitchell had put on board the lighter and deposited it temporarily in the little dinghy which on their arrival they had hauled up out of sight amongst the bushes. It was to be left with him. The island was to be a hiding-place, not a prison; he could pull out to a passing ship. The O.S.N. Company's mail boats passed close to the islands when going into Sulaco from the north. But the *Minerva*, carrying off the ex-president, had taken the news up north of the disturbances in Sulaco. It was possible that the next steamer down would get instructions to miss the port altogether since the town, as far as the *Minerva's* officers knew, was for the time being in the hands of the rabble. This would mean that there would be no steamer for a month, as far as the mail service went; but Decoud had to take his chance of that. The island was his only shelter from the proscription hanging over his head. The *Capataz* was, of course, going back. The unloaded lighter leaked much less, and he thought that she would keep afloat as far as the harbour.

He passed to Decoud, standing knee-deep alongside, one of the two spades which belonged to the equipment of each lighter for use when ballasting ships. By working with it carefully as soon as there was daylight enough to see, Decoud could loosen a mass of earth and stones overhanging the cavity in which they had deposited the treasure, so that it would look as if it had fallen naturally. It would cover up not only the cavity, but even all traces of their work, the footsteps, the displaced stones, and even the broken bushes.

"Besides, who would think of looking either for you or the treasure here?" Nostromo continued, as if he could not tear himself away from the spot. "Nobody is ever likely to come here. What could any man want with this piece of earth as long as there is room for his feet on the mainland! The people in this country are not curious. There are even

no fishermen here to intrude upon your worship. All the fishing that is done in the gulf goes on near Zapiga, over there. Senor, if you are forced to leave this island before anything can be arranged for you, do not try to make for Zapiga. It is a settlement of thieves and matrerros, where they would cut your throat promptly for the sake of your gold watch and chain. And, senor, think twice before confiding in any one whatever; even in the officers of the Company's steamers, if you ever get on board one. Honesty alone is not enough for security. You must look to discretion and prudence in a man. And always remember, senor, before you open your lips for a confidence, that this treasure may be left safely here for hundreds of years. Time is on its side, senor. And silver is an incorruptible metal that can be trusted to keep its value for ever. . . . An incorruptible metal," he repeated, as if the idea had given him a profound pleasure.

"As some men are said to be," Decoud pronounced, inscrutably, while the Capataz, who busied himself in baling out the lighter with a wooden bucket, went on throwing the water over the side with a regular splash. Decoud, incorrigible in his scepticism, reflected, not cynically, but with general satisfaction, that this man was made incorruptible by his enormous vanity, that finest form of egoism which can take on the aspect of every virtue.

Nostromo ceased baling, and, as if struck with a sudden thought, dropped the bucket with a clatter into the lighter.

"Have you any message?" he asked in a lowered voice. "Remember, I shall be asked questions."

"You must find the hopeful words that ought to be spoken to the people in town. I trust for that your intelligence and your experience, Capataz. You understand?"

"Si, senor. . . . For the ladies."

"Yes, yes," said Decoud, hastily. "Your wonderful reputation will make them attach great value to your words; therefore be careful what you say. I am looking forward," he continued, feeling the fatal touch of contempt for himself to which his complex nature was subject, "I am looking forward to a glorious and successful ending to my mission. Do you hear, Capataz? Use the words glorious and successful when you speak to the senorita. Your own mission is accomplished gloriously and successfully. You have indubitably saved the silver of the mine. Not only this silver, but probably all the silver that shall ever come out of it."

Nostromo detected the ironic tone. "I dare say, Senor Don Martin," he said, moodily. "There are very few things that I am not equal to. Ask the foreign signori. I, a man of the people, who cannot always understand what you mean. But as to this lot which I must leave here, let me tell you that I would believe it in greater safety if you had not been with me at all."

An exclamation escaped Decoud, and a short pause followed. "Shall I go back with you to Sulaco?" he asked in an angry tone.

"Shall I strike you dead with my knife where you stand?" retorted Nostromo, contemptuously. "It would be the same thing as taking you to Sulaco. Come, senor. Your reputation is in your politics, and mine is bound up with the fate of this silver. Do you

wonder I wish there had been no other man to share my knowledge? I wanted no one with me, señor.”

“You could not have kept the lighter afloat without me,” Decoud almost shouted. “You would have gone to the bottom with her.”

“Yes,” uttered Nostromo, slowly; “alone.”

Here was a man, Decoud reflected, that seemed as though he would have preferred to die rather than deface the perfect form of his egoism. Such a man was safe. In silence he helped the Capataz to get the grapnel on board. Nostromo cleared the shelving shore with one push of the heavy oar, and Decoud found himself solitary on the beach like a man in a dream. A sudden desire to hear a human voice once more seized upon his heart. The lighter was hardly distinguishable from the black water upon which she floated.

“What do you think has become of Hirsch?” he shouted.

“Knocked overboard and drowned,” cried Nostromo’s voice confidently out of the black wastes of sky and sea around the islet. “Keep close in the ravine, señor. I shall try to come out to you in a night or two.”

A slight swishing rustle showed that Nostromo was setting the sail. It filled all at once with a sound as of a single loud drum-tap. Decoud went back to the ravine. Nostromo, at the tiller, looked back from time to time at the vanishing mass of the Great Isabel, which, little by little, merged into the uniform texture of the night. At last, when he turned his head again, he saw nothing but a smooth darkness, like a solid wall.

Then he, too, experienced that feeling of solitude which had weighed heavily on Decoud after the lighter had slipped off the shore. But while the man on the island was oppressed by a bizarre sense of unreality affecting the very ground upon which he walked, the mind of the Capataz of the Cargadores turned alertly to the problem of future conduct. Nostromo’s faculties, working on parallel lines, enabled him to steer straight, to keep a look-out for Hermosa, near which he had to pass, and to try to imagine what would happen tomorrow in Sulaco. To-morrow, or, as a matter of fact, to-day, since the dawn was not very far, Sotillo would find out in what way the treasure had gone. A gang of Cargadores had been employed in loading it into a railway truck from the Custom House store-rooms, and running the truck on to the wharf. There would be arrests made, and certainly before noon Sotillo would know in what manner the silver had left Sulaco, and who it was that took it out.

Nostromo’s intention had been to sail right into the harbour; but at this thought by a sudden touch of the tiller he threw the lighter into the wind and checked her rapid way. His re-appearance with the very boat would raise suspicions, would cause surmises, would absolutely put Sotillo on the track. He himself would be arrested; and once in the Calabozo there was no saying what they would do to him to make him speak. He trusted himself, but he stood up to look round. Near by, Hermosa showed low its white surface as flat as a table, with the slight run of the sea raised by the breeze washing over its edges noisily. The lighter must be sunk at once.

He allowed her to drift with her sail aback. There was already a good deal of water in her. He allowed her to drift towards the harbour entrance, and, letting the tiller swing about, squatted down and busied himself in loosening the plug. With that out she would fill very quickly, and every lighter carried a little iron ballast — enough to make her go down when full of water. When he stood up again the noisy wash about the *Hermosa* sounded far away, almost inaudible; and already he could make out the shape of land about the harbour entrance. This was a desperate affair, and he was a good swimmer. A mile was nothing to him, and he knew of an easy place for landing just below the earthworks of the old abandoned fort. It occurred to him with a peculiar fascination that this fort was a good place in which to sleep the day through after so many sleepless nights.

With one blow of the tiller he unshipped for the purpose, he knocked the plug out, but did not take the trouble to lower the sail. He felt the water welling up heavily about his legs before he leaped on to the taffrail. There, upright and motionless, in his shirt and trousers only, he stood waiting. When he had felt her settle he sprang far away with a mighty splash.

At once he turned his head. The gloomy, clouded dawn from behind the mountains showed him on the smooth waters the upper corner of the sail, a dark wet triangle of canvas waving slightly to and fro. He saw it vanish, as if jerked under, and then struck out for the shore.

Part 3 — The Lighthouse

Chapter 1

Directly the cargo boat had slipped away from the wharf and got lost in the darkness of the harbour the Europeans of Sulaco separated, to prepare for the coming of the Monterist regime, which was approaching Sulaco from the mountains, as well as from the sea.

This bit of manual work in loading the silver was their last concerted action. It ended the three days of danger, during which, according to the newspaper press of Europe, their energy had preserved the town from the calamities of popular disorder. At the shore end of the jetty, Captain Mitchell said good-night and turned back. His intention was to walk the planks of the wharf till the steamer from Esmeralda turned up. The engineers of the railway staff, collecting their Basque and Italian workmen, marched them away to the railway yards, leaving the Custom House, so well defended on the first day of the riot, standing open to the four winds of heaven. Their men had conducted themselves bravely and faithfully during the famous “three days” of Sulaco. In a great part this faithfulness and that courage had been exercised in self-defence rather than in the cause of those material interests to which Charles Gould had pinned his faith. Amongst the cries of the mob not the least loud had been the cry of death to foreigners. It was, indeed, a lucky circumstance for Sulaco that the relations of those imported workmen with the people of the country had been uniformly bad from the first.

Doctor Monygham, going to the door of Viola’s kitchen, observed this retreat marking the end of the foreign interference, this withdrawal of the army of material progress from the field of Costaguana revolutions.

Algarrobe torches carried on the outskirts of the moving body sent their penetrating aroma into his nostrils. Their light, sweeping along the front of the house, made the letters of the inscription, “Albergo d’Italia Una,” leap out black from end to end of the long wall. His eyes blinked in the clear blaze. Several young men, mostly fair and tall, shepherding this mob of dark bronzed heads, surmounted by the glint of slanting rifle barrels, nodded to him familiarly as they went by. The doctor was a well-known character. Some of them wondered what he was doing there. Then, on the flank of their workmen they tramped on, following the line of rails.

“Withdrawing your people from the harbour?” said the doctor, addressing himself to the chief engineer of the railway, who had accompanied Charles Gould so far on his

way to the town, walking by the side of the horse, with his hand on the saddle-bow. They had stopped just outside the open door to let the workmen cross the road.

“As quick as I can. We are not a political faction,” answered the engineer, meaningly. “And we are not going to give our new rulers a handle against the railway. You approve me, Gould?”

“Absolutely,” said Charles Gould’s impassive voice, high up and outside the dim parallelogram of light falling on the road through the open door.

With Sotillo expected from one side, and Pedro Montero from the other, the engineer-in-chief’s only anxiety now was to avoid a collision with either. Sulaco, for him, was a railway station, a terminus, workshops, a great accumulation of stores. As against the mob the railway defended its property, but politically the railway was neutral. He was a brave man; and in that spirit of neutrality he had carried proposals of truce to the self-appointed chiefs of the popular party, the deputies Fuentes and Gamacho. Bullets were still flying about when he had crossed the Plaza on that mission, waving above his head a white napkin belonging to the table linen of the Amarilla Club.

He was rather proud of this exploit; and reflecting that the doctor, busy all day with the wounded in the patio of the Casa Gould, had not had time to hear the news, he began a succinct narrative. He had communicated to them the intelligence from the Construction Camp as to Pedro Montero. The brother of the victorious general, he had assured them, could be expected at Sulaco at any time now. This news (as he anticipated), when shouted out of the window by Senor Gamacho, induced a rush of the mob along the Campo Road towards Rincon. The two deputies also, after shaking hands with him effusively, mounted and galloped off to meet the great man. “I have misled them a little as to the time,” the chief engineer confessed. “However hard he rides, he can scarcely get here before the morning. But my object is attained. I’ve secured several hours’ peace for the losing party. But I did not tell them anything about Sotillo, for fear they would take it into their heads to try to get hold of the harbour again, either to oppose him or welcome him — there’s no saying which. There was Gould’s silver, on which rests the remnant of our hopes. Decoud’s retreat had to be thought of, too. I think the railway has done pretty well by its friends without compromising itself hopelessly. Now the parties must be left to themselves.”

“Costaguana for the Costaguaneros,” interjected the doctor, sardonically. “It is a fine country, and they have raised a fine crop of hates, vengeance, murder, and rapine — those sons of the country.”

“Well, I am one of them,” Charles Gould’s voice sounded, calmly, “and I must be going on to see to my own crop of trouble. My wife has driven straight on, doctor?”

“Yes. All was quiet on this side. Mrs. Gould has taken the two girls with her.”

Charles Gould rode on, and the engineer-in-chief followed the doctor indoors.

“That man is calmness personified,” he said, appreciatively, dropping on a bench, and stretching his well-shaped legs in cycling stockings nearly across the doorway. “He must be extremely sure of himself.”

“If that’s all he is sure of, then he is sure of nothing,” said the doctor. He had perched himself again on the end of the table. He nursed his cheek in the palm of one hand, while the other sustained the elbow. “It is the last thing a man ought to be sure of.” The candle, half-consumed and burning dimly with a long wick, lighted up from below his inclined face, whose expression affected by the drawn-in cicatrices in the cheeks, had something vaguely unnatural, an exaggerated remorseful bitterness. As he sat there he had the air of meditating upon sinister things. The engineer-in-chief gazed at him for a time before he protested.

“I really don’t see that. For me there seems to be nothing else. However — — ”

He was a wise man, but he could not quite conceal his contempt for that sort of paradox; in fact. Dr. Monygham was not liked by the Europeans of Sulaco. His outward aspect of an outcast, which he preserved even in Mrs. Gould’s drawing-room, provoked unfavourable criticism. There could be no doubt of his intelligence; and as he had lived for over twenty years in the country, the pessimism of his outlook could not be altogether ignored. But instinctively, in self-defence of their activities and hopes, his hearers put it to the account of some hidden imperfection in the man’s character. It was known that many years before, when quite young, he had been made by Guzman Bento chief medical officer of the army. Not one of the Europeans then in the service of Costaguana had been so much liked and trusted by the fierce old Dictator.

Afterwards his story was not so clear. It lost itself amongst the innumerable tales of conspiracies and plots against the tyrant as a stream is lost in an arid belt of sandy country before it emerges, diminished and troubled, perhaps, on the other side. The doctor made no secret of it that he had lived for years in the wildest parts of the Republic, wandering with almost unknown Indian tribes in the great forests of the far interior where the great rivers have their sources. But it was mere aimless wandering; he had written nothing, collected nothing, brought nothing for science out of the twilight of the forests, which seemed to cling to his battered personality limping about Sulaco, where it had drifted in casually, only to get stranded on the shores of the sea.

It was also known that he had lived in a state of destitution till the arrival of the Goulds from Europe. Don Carlos and Dona Emilia had taken up the mad English doctor, when it became apparent that for all his savage independence he could be tamed by kindness. Perhaps it was only hunger that had tamed him. In years gone by he had certainly been acquainted with Charles Gould’s father in Sta. Marta; and now, no matter what were the dark passages of his history, as the medical officer of the San Tome mine he became a recognized personality. He was recognized, but not unreservedly accepted. So much defiant eccentricity and such an outspoken scorn for mankind seemed to point to mere recklessness of judgment, the bravado of guilt. Besides, since he had become again of some account, vague whispers had been heard that years ago, when fallen into disgrace and thrown into prison by Guzman Bento at the time of the so-called Great Conspiracy, he had betrayed some of his best friends amongst the conspirators. Nobody pretended to believe that whisper; the whole story of the Great Conspiracy was hopelessly involved and obscure; it is admitted in Costaguana that there never had

been a conspiracy except in the diseased imagination of the Tyrant; and, therefore, nothing and no one to betray; though the most distinguished Costaguaneros had been imprisoned and executed upon that accusation. The procedure had dragged on for years, decimating the better class like a pestilence. The mere expression of sorrow for the fate of executed kinsmen had been punished with death. Don Jose Avellanos was perhaps the only one living who knew the whole story of those unspeakable cruelties. He had suffered from them himself, and he, with a shrug of the shoulders and a nervous, jerky gesture of the arm, was wont to put away from him, as it were, every allusion to it. But whatever the reason, Dr. Monygham, a personage in the administration of the Gould Concession, treated with reverent awe by the miners, and indulged in his peculiarities by Mrs. Gould, remained somehow outside the pale.

It was not from any liking for the doctor that the engineer-in-chief had lingered in the inn upon the plain. He liked old Viola much better. He had come to look upon the *Albergo d'Italia Una* as a dependence of the railway. Many of his subordinates had their quarters there. Mrs. Gould's interest in the family conferred upon it a sort of distinction. The engineer-in-chief, with an army of workers under his orders, appreciated the moral influence of the old Garibaldino upon his countrymen. His austere, old-world Republicanism had a severe, soldier-like standard of faithfulness and duty, as if the world were a battlefield where men had to fight for the sake of universal love and brotherhood, instead of a more or less large share of booty.

"Poor old chap!" he said, after he had heard the doctor's account of Teresa. "He'll never be able to keep the place going by himself. I shall be sorry."

"He's quite alone up there," grunted Doctor Monygham, with a toss of his heavy head towards the narrow staircase. "Every living soul has cleared out, and Mrs. Gould took the girls away just now. It might not be over-safe for them out here before very long. Of course, as a doctor I can do nothing more here; but she has asked me to stay with old Viola, and as I have no horse to get back to the mine, where I ought to be, I made no difficulty to stay. They can do without me in the town."

"I have a good mind to remain with you, doctor, till we see whether anything happens to-night at the harbour," declared the engineer-in-chief. "He must not be molested by Sotillo's soldiery, who may push on as far as this at once. Sotillo used to be very cordial to me at the Goulds' and at the club. How that man'll ever dare to look any of his friends here in the face I can't imagine."

"He'll no doubt begin by shooting some of them to get over the first awkwardness," said the doctor. "Nothing in this country serves better your military man who has changed sides than a few summary executions." He spoke with a gloomy positiveness that left no room for protest. The engineer-in-chief did not attempt any. He simply nodded several times regretfully, then said —

"I think we shall be able to mount you in the morning, doctor. Our peons have recovered some of our stampeded horses. By riding hard and taking a wide circuit by Los Hatos and along the edge of the forest, clear of Rincon altogether, you may hope to reach the San Tome bridge without being interfered with. The mine is just now, to

my mind, the safest place for anybody at all compromised. I only wish the railway was as difficult to touch.”

“Am I compromised?” Doctor Monygham brought out slowly after a short silence.

“The whole Gould Concession is compromised. It could not have remained for ever outside the political life of the country — if those convulsions may be called life. The thing is — can it be touched? The moment was bound to come when neutrality would become impossible, and Charles Gould understood this well. I believe he is prepared for every extremity. A man of his sort has never contemplated remaining indefinitely at the mercy of ignorance and corruption. It was like being a prisoner in a cavern of banditti with the price of your ransom in your pocket, and buying your life from day to day. Your mere safety, not your liberty, mind, doctor. I know what I am talking about. The image at which you shrug your shoulders is perfectly correct, especially if you conceive such a prisoner endowed with the power of replenishing his pocket by means as remote from the faculties of his captors as if they were magic. You must have understood that as well as I do, doctor. He was in the position of the goose with the golden eggs. I broached this matter to him as far back as Sir John’s visit here. The prisoner of stupid and greedy banditti is always at the mercy of the first imbecile ruffian, who may blow out his brains in a fit of temper or for some prospect of an immediate big haul. The tale of killing the goose with the golden eggs has not been evolved for nothing out of the wisdom of mankind. It is a story that will never grow old. That is why Charles Gould in his deep, dumb way has countenanced the Ribierist Mandate, the first public act that promised him safety on other than venal grounds. Ribierism has failed, as everything merely rational fails in this country. But Gould remains logical in wishing to save this big lot of silver. Decoud’s plan of a counter-revolution may be practicable or not, it may have a chance, or it may not have a chance. With all my experience of this revolutionary continent, I can hardly yet look at their methods seriously. Decoud has been reading to us his draft of a proclamation, and talking very well for two hours about his plan of action. He had arguments which should have appeared solid enough if we, members of old, stable political and national organizations, were not startled by the mere idea of a new State evolved like this out of the head of a scoffing young man fleeing for his life, with a proclamation in his pocket, to a rough, jeering, half-bred swashbuckler, who in this part of the world is called a general. It sounds like a comic fairy tale — and behold, it may come off; because it is true to the very spirit of the country.”

“Is the silver gone off, then?” asked the doctor, moodily.

The chief engineer pulled out his watch. “By Captain Mitchell’s reckoning — and he ought to know — it has been gone long enough now to be some three or four miles outside the harbour; and, as Mitchell says, Nostromo is the sort of seaman to make the best of his opportunities.” Here the doctor grunted so heavily that the other changed his tone.

“You have a poor opinion of that move, doctor? But why? Charles Gould has got to play his game out, though he is not the man to formulate his conduct even to himself,

perhaps, let alone to others. It may be that the game has been partly suggested to him by Holroyd; but it accords with his character, too; and that is why it has been so successful. Haven't they come to calling him 'El Rey de Sulaco' in Sta. Marta? A nickname may be the best record of a success. That's what I call putting the face of a joke upon the body of a truth. My dear sir, when I first arrived in Sta. Marta I was struck by the way all those journalists, demagogues, members of Congress, and all those generals and judges cringed before a sleepy-eyed advocate without practice simply because he was the plenipotentiary of the Gould Concession. Sir John when he came out was impressed, too."

"A new State, with that plump dandy, Decoud, for the first President," mused Dr. Monygham, nursing his cheek and swinging his legs all the time.

"Upon my word, and why not?" the chief engineer retorted in an unexpectedly earnest and confidential voice. It was as if something subtle in the air of Costaguana had inoculated him with the local faith in "pronunciamientos." All at once he began to talk, like an expert revolutionist, of the instrument ready to hand in the intact army at Cayta, which could be brought back in a few days to Sulaco if only Decoud managed to make his way at once down the coast. For the military chief there was Barrios, who had nothing but a bullet to expect from Montero, his former professional rival and bitter enemy. Barrios's concurrence was assured. As to his army, it had nothing to expect from Montero either; not even a month's pay. From that point of view the existence of the treasure was of enormous importance. The mere knowledge that it had been saved from the Monterists would be a strong inducement for the Cayta troops to embrace the cause of the new State.

The doctor turned round and contemplated his companion for some time.

"This Decoud, I see, is a persuasive young beggar," he remarked at last. "And pray is it for this, then, that Charles Gould has let the whole lot of ingots go out to sea in charge of that Nostromo?"

"Charles Gould," said the engineer-in-chief, "has said no more about his motive than usual. You know, he doesn't talk. But we all here know his motive, and he has only one — the safety of the San Tome mine with the preservation of the Gould Concession in the spirit of his compact with Holroyd. Holroyd is another uncommon man. They understand each other's imaginative side. One is thirty, the other nearly sixty, and they have been made for each other. To be a millionaire, and such a millionaire as Holroyd, is like being eternally young. The audacity of youth reckons upon what it fancies an unlimited time at its disposal; but a millionaire has unlimited means in his hand — which is better. One's time on earth is an uncertain quantity, but about the long reach of millions there is no doubt. The introduction of a pure form of Christianity into this continent is a dream for a youthful enthusiast, and I have been trying to explain to you why Holroyd at fifty-eight is like a man on the threshold of life, and better, too. He's not a missionary, but the San Tome mine holds just that for him. I assure you, in sober truth, that he could not manage to keep this out of a strictly business conference upon the finances of Costaguana he had with Sir John a couple of years ago. Sir John

mentioned it with amazement in a letter he wrote to me here, from San Francisco, when on his way home. Upon my word, doctor, things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity — — ”

“Bah!” interrupted the doctor, without stopping for an instant the idle swinging movement of his legs. “Self-flattery. Food for that vanity which makes the world go round. Meantime, what do you think is going to happen to the treasure floating about the gulf with the great Capataz and the great politician?”

“Why are you uneasy about it, doctor?”

“I uneasy! And what the devil is it to me? I put no spiritual value into my desires, or my opinions, or my actions. They have not enough vastness to give me room for self-flattery. Look, for instance, I should certainly have liked to ease the last moments of that poor woman. And I can’t. It’s impossible. Have you met the impossible face to face — or have you, the Napoleon of railways, no such word in your dictionary?”

“Is she bound to have a very bad time of it?” asked the chief engineer, with humane concern.

Slow, heavy footsteps moved across the planks above the heavy hard wood beams of the kitchen. Then down the narrow opening of the staircase made in the thickness of the wall, and narrow enough to be defended by one man against twenty enemies, came the murmur of two voices, one faint and broken, the other deep and gentle answering it, and in its graver tone covering the weaker sound.

The two men remained still and silent till the murmurs ceased, then the doctor shrugged his shoulders and muttered —

“Yes, she’s bound to. And I could do nothing if I went up now.”

A long period of silence above and below ensued.

“I fancy,” began the engineer, in a subdued voice, “that you mistrust Captain Mitchell’s Capataz.”

“Mistrust him!” muttered the doctor through his teeth. “I believe him capable of anything — even of the most absurd fidelity. I am the last person he spoke to before he left the wharf, you know. The poor woman up there wanted to see him, and I let him go up to her. The dying must not be contradicted, you know. She seemed then fairly calm and resigned, but the scoundrel in those ten minutes or so has done or said something which seems to have driven her into despair. You know,” went on the doctor, hesitatingly, “women are so very unaccountable in every position, and at all times of life, that I thought sometimes she was in a way, don’t you see? in love with him — the Capataz. The rascal has his own charm indubitably, or he would not have made the conquest of all the populace of the town. No, no, I am not absurd. I may have given a wrong name to some strong sentiment for him on her part, to an unreasonable and simple attitude a woman is apt to take up emotionally towards a man. She used to abuse him to me frequently, which, of course, is not inconsistent with my idea. Not at all. It looked to me as if she were always thinking of him. He was something important in her life. You know, I have seen a lot of those people. Whenever

I came down from the mine Mrs. Gould used to ask me to keep my eye on them. She likes Italians; she has lived a long time in Italy, I believe, and she took a special fancy to that old Garibaldino. A remarkable chap enough. A rugged and dreamy character, living in the republicanism of his young days as if in a cloud. He has encouraged much of the Capataz's confounded nonsense — the high-strung, exalted old beggar!"

"What sort of nonsense?" wondered the chief engineer. "I found the Capataz always a very shrewd and sensible fellow, absolutely fearless, and remarkably useful. A perfect handy man. Sir John was greatly impressed by his resourcefulness and attention when he made that overland journey from Sta. Marta. Later on, as you might have heard, he rendered us a service by disclosing to the then chief of police the presence in the town of some professional thieves, who came from a distance to wreck and rob our monthly pay train. He has certainly organized the lighterage service of the harbour for the O.S.N. Company with great ability. He knows how to make himself obeyed, foreigner though he is. It is true that the Cargadores are strangers here, too, for the most part — immigrants, Islenos."

"His prestige is his fortune," muttered the doctor, sourly.

"The man has proved his trustworthiness up to the hilt on innumerable occasions and in all sorts of ways," argued the engineer. "When this question of the silver arose, Captain Mitchell naturally was very warmly of the opinion that his Capataz was the only man fit for the trust. As a sailor, of course, I suppose so. But as a man, don't you know, Gould, Decoud, and myself judged that it didn't matter in the least who went. Any boatman would have done just as well. Pray, what could a thief do with such a lot of ingots? If he ran off with them he would have in the end to land somewhere, and how could he conceal his cargo from the knowledge of the people ashore? We dismissed that consideration from our minds. Moreover, Decoud was going. There have been occasions when the Capataz has been more implicitly trusted."

"He took a slightly different view," the doctor said. "I heard him declare in this very room that it would be the most desperate affair of his life. He made a sort of verbal will here in my hearing, appointing old Viola his executor; and, by Jove! do you know, he — he's not grown rich by his fidelity to you good people of the railway and the harbour. I suppose he obtains some — how do you say that? — some spiritual value for his labours, or else I don't know why the devil he should be faithful to you, Gould, Mitchell, or anybody else. He knows this country well. He knows, for instance, that Gamacho, the Deputy from Javira, has been nothing else but a 'tramposo' of the commonest sort, a petty pedlar of the Campo, till he managed to get enough goods on credit from Anzani to open a little store in the wilds, and got himself elected by the drunken mozos that hang about the Estancias and the poorest sort of rancheros who were in his debt. And Gamacho, who to-morrow will be probably one of our high officials, is a stranger, too — an Isleno. He might have been a Cargador on the O. S. N. wharf had he not (the posadero of Rincon is ready to swear it) murdered a pedlar in the woods and stolen his pack to begin life on. And do you think that Gamacho, then,

would have ever become a hero with the democracy of this place, like our Capataz? Of course not. He isn't half the man. No; decidedly, I think that Nostromo is a fool."

The doctor's talk was distasteful to the builder of railways. "It is impossible to argue that point," he said, philosophically. "Each man has his gifts. You should have heard Gamacho haranguing his friends in the street. He has a howling voice, and he shouted like mad, lifting his clenched fist right above his head, and throwing his body half out of the window. At every pause the rabble below yelled, 'Down with the Oligarchs! Viva la Libertad!' Fuentes inside looked extremely miserable. You know, he is the brother of Jorge Fuentes, who has been Minister of the Interior for six months or so, some few years back. Of course, he has no conscience; but he is a man of birth and education — at one time the director of the Customs of Cayta. That idiot-brute Gamacho fastened himself upon him with his following of the lowest rabble. His sickly fear of that ruffian was the most rejoicing sight imaginable."

He got up and went to the door to look out towards the harbour. "All quiet," he said; "I wonder if Sotillo really means to turn up here?"

Chapter 2

Captain Mitchell, pacing the wharf, was asking himself the same question. There was always the doubt whether the warning of the Esmeralda telegraphist — a fragmentary and interrupted message — had been properly understood. However, the good man had made up his mind not to go to bed till daylight, if even then. He imagined himself to have rendered an enormous service to Charles Gould. When he thought of the saved silver he rubbed his hands together with satisfaction. In his simple way he was proud at being a party to this extremely clever expedient. It was he who had given it a practical shape by suggesting the possibility of intercepting at sea the north-bound steamer. And it was advantageous to his Company, too, which would have lost a valuable freight if the treasure had been left ashore to be confiscated. The pleasure of disappointing the Monterists was also very great. Authoritative by temperament and the long habit of command, Captain Mitchell was no democrat. He even went so far as to profess a contempt for parliamentarism itself. "His Excellency Don Vincente Ribiera," he used to say, "whom I and that fellow of mine, Nostromo, had the honour, sir, and the pleasure of saving from a cruel death, deferred too much to his Congress. It was a mistake — a distinct mistake, sir."

The guileless old seaman superintending the O.S.N. service imagined that the last three days had exhausted every startling surprise the political life of Costaguana could offer. He used to confess afterwards that the events which followed surpassed his imagination. To begin with, Sulaco (because of the seizure of the cables and the disorganization of the steam service) remained for a whole fortnight cut off from the rest of the world like a besieged city.

"One would not have believed it possible; but so it was, sir. A full fortnight."

The account of the extraordinary things that happened during that time, and the powerful emotions he experienced, acquired a comic impressiveness from the pompous manner of his personal narrative. He opened it always by assuring his hearer that he was "in the thick of things from first to last." Then he would begin by describing the getting away of the silver, and his natural anxiety lest "his fellow" in charge of the lighter should make some mistake. Apart from the loss of so much precious metal, the life of Senor Martin Decoud, an agreeable, wealthy, and well-informed young gentleman, would have been jeopardized through his falling into the hands of his political enemies. Captain Mitchell also admitted that in his solitary vigil on the wharf he had felt a certain measure of concern for the future of the whole country.

"A feeling, sir," he explained, "perfectly comprehensible in a man properly grateful for the many kindnesses received from the best families of merchants and other native gentlemen of independent means, who, barely saved by us from the excesses of the mob, seemed, to my mind's eye, destined to become the prey in person and fortune of the native soldiery, which, as is well known, behave with regrettable barbarity to the inhabitants during their civil commotions. And then, sir, there were the Goulds, for both of whom, man and wife, I could not but entertain the warmest feelings deserved by their hospitality and kindness. I felt, too, the dangers of the gentlemen of the Amarilla Club, who had made me honorary member, and had treated me with uniform regard and civility, both in my capacity of Consular Agent and as Superintendent of an important Steam Service. Miss Antonia Avellanos, the most beautiful and accomplished young lady whom it had ever been my privilege to speak to, was not a little in my mind, I confess. How the interests of my Company would be affected by the impending change of officials claimed a large share of my attention, too. In short, sir, I was extremely anxious and very tired, as you may suppose, by the exciting and memorable events in which I had taken my little part. The Company's building containing my residence was within five minutes' walk, with the attraction of some supper and of my hammock (I always take my nightly rest in a hammock, as the most suitable to the climate); but somehow, sir, though evidently I could do nothing for any one by remaining about, I could not tear myself away from that wharf, where the fatigue made me stumble painfully at times. The night was excessively dark — the darkest I remember in my life; so that I began to think that the arrival of the transport from Esmeralda could not possibly take place before daylight, owing to the difficulty of navigating the gulf. The mosquitoes bit like fury. We have been infested here with mosquitoes before the late improvements; a peculiar harbour brand, sir, renowned for its ferocity. They were like a cloud about my head, and I shouldn't wonder that but for their attacks I would have dozed off as I walked up and down, and got a heavy fall. I kept on smoking cigar after cigar, more to protect myself from being eaten up alive than from any real relish for the weed. Then, sir, when perhaps for the twentieth time I was approaching my watch to the lighted end in order to see the time, and observing with surprise that it wanted yet ten minutes to midnight, I heard the splash of a ship's propeller — an unmistakable sound to a sailor's ear on such a calm night. It was faint indeed, because

they were advancing with precaution and dead slow, both on account of the darkness and from their desire of not revealing too soon their presence: a very unnecessary care, because, I verily believe, in all the enormous extent of this harbour I was the only living soul about. Even the usual staff of watchmen and others had been absent from their posts for several nights owing to the disturbances. I stood stock still, after dropping and stamping out my cigar — a circumstance highly agreeable, I should think, to the mosquitoes, if I may judge from the state of my face next morning. But that was a trifling inconvenience in comparison with the brutal proceedings I became victim of on the part of Sotillo. Something utterly inconceivable, sir; more like the proceedings of a maniac than the action of a sane man, however lost to all sense of honour and decency. But Sotillo was furious at the failure of his thievish scheme.”

In this Captain Mitchell was right. Sotillo was indeed infuriated. Captain Mitchell, however, had not been arrested at once; a vivid curiosity induced him to remain on the wharf (which is nearly four hundred feet long) to see, or rather hear, the whole process of disembarkation. Concealed by the railway truck used for the silver, which had been run back afterwards to the shore end of the jetty, Captain Mitchell saw the small detachment thrown forward, pass by, taking different directions upon the plain. Meantime, the troops were being landed and formed into a column, whose head crept up gradually so close to him that he made it out, barring nearly the whole width of the wharf, only a very few yards from him. Then the low, shuffling, murmuring, clinking sounds ceased, and the whole mass remained for about an hour motionless and silent, awaiting the return of the scouts. On land nothing was to be heard except the deep baying of the mastiffs at the railway yards, answered by the faint barking of the curs infesting the outer limits of the town. A detached knot of dark shapes stood in front of the head of the column.

Presently the picket at the end of the wharf began to challenge in undertones single figures approaching from the plain. Those messengers sent back from the scouting parties flung to their comrades brief sentences and passed on rapidly, becoming lost in the great motionless mass, to make their report to the Staff. It occurred to Captain Mitchell that his position could become disagreeable and perhaps dangerous, when suddenly, at the head of the jetty, there was a shout of command, a bugle call, followed by a stir and a rattling of arms, and a murmuring noise that ran right up the column. Near by a loud voice directed hurriedly, “Push that railway car out of the way!” At the rush of bare feet to execute the order Captain Mitchell skipped back a pace or two; the car, suddenly impelled by many hands, flew away from him along the rails, and before he knew what had happened he found himself surrounded and seized by his arms and the collar of his coat.

“We have caught a man hiding here, *mi teniente!*” cried one of his captors.

“Hold him on one side till the rearguard comes along,” answered the voice. The whole column streamed past Captain Mitchell at a run, the thundering noise of their feet dying away suddenly on the shore. His captors held him tightly, disregarding his declaration that he was an Englishman and his loud demands to be taken at once

before their commanding officer. Finally he lapsed into dignified silence. With a hollow rumble of wheels on the planks a couple of field guns, dragged by hand, rolled by. Then, after a small body of men had marched past escorting four or five figures which walked in advance, with a jingle of steel scabbards, he felt a tug at his arms, and was ordered to come along. During the passage from the wharf to the Custom House it is to be feared that Captain Mitchell was subjected to certain indignities at the hands of the soldiers — such as jerks, thumps on the neck, forcible application of the butt of a rifle to the small of his back. Their ideas of speed were not in accord with his notion of his dignity. He became flustered, flushed, and helpless. It was as if the world were coming to an end.

The long building was surrounded by troops, which were already piling arms by companies and preparing to pass the night lying on the ground in their ponchos with their sacks under their heads. Corporals moved with swinging lanterns posting sentries all round the walls wherever there was a door or an opening. Sotillo was taking his measures to protect his conquest as if it had indeed contained the treasure. His desire to make his fortune at one audacious stroke of genius had overmastered his reasoning faculties. He would not believe in the possibility of failure; the mere hint of such a thing made his brain reel with rage. Every circumstance pointing to it appeared incredible. The statement of Hirsch, which was so absolutely fatal to his hopes, could by no means be admitted. It is true, too, that Hirsch's story had been told so incoherently, with such excessive signs of distraction, that it really looked improbable. It was extremely difficult, as the saying is, to make head or tail of it. On the bridge of the steamer, directly after his rescue, Sotillo and his officers, in their impatience and excitement, would not give the wretched man time to collect such few wits as remained to him. He ought to have been quieted, soothed, and reassured, whereas he had been roughly handled, cuffed, shaken, and addressed in menacing tones. His struggles, his wriggles, his attempts to get down on his knees, followed by the most violent efforts to break away, as if he meant incontinently to jump overboard, his shrieks and shrinkings and cowering wild glances had filled them first with amazement, then with a doubt of his genuineness, as men are wont to suspect the sincerity of every great passion. His Spanish, too, became so mixed up with German that the better half of his statements remained incomprehensible. He tried to propitiate them by calling them *hochwohlgeboren herren*, which in itself sounded suspicious. When admonished sternly not to trifle he repeated his entreaties and protestations of loyalty and innocence again in German, obstinately, because he was not aware in what language he was speaking. His identity, of course, was perfectly known as an inhabitant of Esmeralda, but this made the matter no clearer. As he kept on forgetting Decoud's name, mixing him up with several other people he had seen in the Casa Gould, it looked as if they all had been in the lighter together; and for a moment Sotillo thought that he had drowned every prominent Ribierist of Sulaco. The improbability of such a thing threw a doubt upon the whole statement. Hirsch was either mad or playing a part — pretending fear and distraction on the spur of the moment to cover the truth. Sotillo's rapacity, excited

to the highest pitch by the prospect of an immense booty, could believe in nothing adverse. This Jew might have been very much frightened by the accident, but he knew where the silver was concealed, and had invented this story, with his Jewish cunning, to put him entirely off the track as to what had been done.

Sotillo had taken up his quarters on the upper floor in a vast apartment with heavy black beams. But there was no ceiling, and the eye lost itself in the darkness under the high pitch of the roof. The thick shutters stood open. On a long table could be seen a large inkstand, some stumpy, inky quill pens, and two square wooden boxes, each holding half a hundred-weight of sand. Sheets of grey coarse official paper bestrewed the floor. It must have been a room occupied by some higher official of the Customs, because a large leathern armchair stood behind the table, with other high-backed chairs scattered about. A net hammock was swung under one of the beams — for the official's afternoon siesta, no doubt. A couple of candles stuck into tall iron candlesticks gave a dim reddish light. The colonel's hat, sword, and revolver lay between them, and a couple of his more trusty officers lounged gloomily against the table. The colonel threw himself into the armchair, and a big negro with a sergeant's stripes on his ragged sleeve, kneeling down, pulled off his boots. Sotillo's ebony moustache contrasted violently with the livid colouring of his cheeks. His eyes were sombre and as if sunk very far into his head. He seemed exhausted by his perplexities, languid with disappointment; but when the sentry on the landing thrust his head in to announce the arrival of a prisoner, he revived at once.

“Let him be brought in,” he shouted, fiercely.

The door flew open, and Captain Mitchell, bareheaded, his waistcoat open, the bow of his tie under his ear, was hustled into the room.

Sotillo recognized him at once. He could not have hoped for a more precious capture; here was a man who could tell him, if he chose, everything he wished to know — and directly the problem of how best to make him talk to the point presented itself to his mind. The resentment of a foreign nation had no terrors for Sotillo. The might of the whole armed Europe would not have protected Captain Mitchell from insults and ill-usage, so well as the quick reflection of Sotillo that this was an Englishman who would most likely turn obstinate under bad treatment, and become quite unmanageable. At all events, the colonel smoothed the scowl on his brow.

“What! The excellent Senor Mitchell!” he cried, in affected dismay. The pretended anger of his swift advance and of his shout, “Release the caballero at once,” was so effective that the astounded soldiers positively sprang away from their prisoner. Thus suddenly deprived of forcible support, Captain Mitchell reeled as though about to fall. Sotillo took him familiarly under the arm, led him to a chair, waved his hand at the room. “Go out, all of you,” he commanded.

When they had been left alone he stood looking down, irresolute and silent, watching till Captain Mitchell had recovered his power of speech.

Here in his very grasp was one of the men concerned in the removal of the silver. Sotillo's temperament was of that sort that he experienced an ardent desire to beat

him; just as formerly when negotiating with difficulty a loan from the cautious Anzani, his fingers always itched to take the shopkeeper by the throat. As to Captain Mitchell, the suddenness, unexpectedness, and general inconceivableness of this experience had confused his thoughts. Moreover, he was physically out of breath.

"I've been knocked down three times between this and the wharf," he gasped out at last. "Somebody shall be made to pay for this." He had certainly stumbled more than once, and had been dragged along for some distance before he could regain his stride. With his recovered breath his indignation seemed to madden him. He jumped up, crimson, all his white hair bristling, his eyes glaring vengefully, and shook violently the flaps of his ruined waistcoat before the disconcerted Sotillo. "Look! Those uniformed thieves of yours downstairs have robbed me of my watch."

The old sailor's aspect was very threatening. Sotillo saw himself cut off from the table on which his sabre and revolver were lying.

"I demand restitution and apologies," Mitchell thundered at him, quite beside himself. "From you! Yes, from you!"

For the space of a second or so the colonel stood with a perfectly stony expression of face; then, as Captain Mitchell flung out an arm towards the table as if to snatch up the revolver, Sotillo, with a yell of alarm, bounded to the door and was gone in a flash, slamming it after him. Surprise calmed Captain Mitchell's fury. Behind the closed door Sotillo shouted on the landing, and there was a great tumult of feet on the wooden staircase.

"Disarm him! Bind him!" the colonel could be heard vociferating.

Captain Mitchell had just the time to glance once at the windows, with three perpendicular bars of iron each and some twenty feet from the ground, as he well knew, before the door flew open and the rush upon him took place. In an incredibly short time he found himself bound with many turns of a hide rope to a high-backed chair, so that his head alone remained free. Not till then did Sotillo, who had been leaning in the doorway trembling visibly, venture again within. The soldiers, picking up from the floor the rifles they had dropped to grapple with the prisoner, filed out of the room. The officers remained leaning on their swords and looking on.

"The watch! the watch!" raved the colonel, pacing to and fro like a tiger in a cage. "Give me that man's watch."

It was true, that when searched for arms in the hall downstairs, before being taken into Sotillo's presence, Captain Mitchell had been relieved of his watch and chain; but at the colonel's clamour it was produced quickly enough, a corporal bringing it up, carried carefully in the palms of his joined hands. Sotillo snatched it, and pushed the clenched fist from which it dangled close to Captain Mitchell's face.

"Now then! You arrogant Englishman! You dare to call the soldiers of the army thieves! Behold your watch."

He flourished his fist as if aiming blows at the prisoner's nose. Captain Mitchell, helpless as a swathed infant, looked anxiously at the sixty-guinea gold half-chronometer, presented to him years ago by a Committee of Underwriters for saving a ship from

total loss by fire. Sotillo, too, seemed to perceive its valuable appearance. He became silent suddenly, stepped aside to the table, and began a careful examination in the light of the candles. He had never seen anything so fine. His officers closed in and craned their necks behind his back.

He became so interested that for an instant he forgot his precious prisoner. There is always something childish in the rapacity of the passionate, clear-minded, Southern races, wanting in the misty idealism of the Northerners, who at the smallest encouragement dream of nothing less than the conquest of the earth. Sotillo was fond of jewels, gold trinkets, of personal adornment. After a moment he turned about, and with a commanding gesture made all his officers fall back. He laid down the watch on the table, then, negligently, pushed his hat over it.

“Ha!” he began, going up very close to the chair. “You dare call my valiant soldiers of the Esmeralda regiment, thieves. You dare! What impudence! You foreigners come here to rob our country of its wealth. You never have enough! Your audacity knows no bounds.”

He looked towards the officers, amongst whom there was an approving murmur. The older major was moved to declare —

“Si, mi colonel. They are all traitors.”

“I shall say nothing,” continued Sotillo, fixing the motionless and powerless Mitchell with an angry but uneasy stare. “I shall say nothing of your treacherous attempt to get possession of my revolver to shoot me while I was trying to treat you with consideration you did not deserve. You have forfeited your life. Your only hope is in my clemency.”

He watched for the effect of his words, but there was no obvious sign of fear on Captain Mitchell’s face. His white hair was full of dust, which covered also the rest of his helpless person. As if he had heard nothing, he twitched an eyebrow to get rid of a bit of straw which hung amongst the hairs.

Sotillo advanced one leg and put his arms akimbo. “It is you, Mitchell,” he said, emphatically, “who are the thief, not my soldiers!” He pointed at his prisoner a forefinger with a long, almond-shaped nail. “Where is the silver of the San Tome mine? I ask you, Mitchell, where is the silver that was deposited in this Custom House? Answer me that! You stole it. You were a party to stealing it. It was stolen from the Government. Aha! you think I do not know what I say; but I am up to your foreign tricks. It is gone, the silver! No? Gone in one of your lanchas, you miserable man! How dared you?”

This time he produced his effect. “How on earth could Sotillo know that?” thought Mitchell. His head, the only part of his body that could move, betrayed his surprise by a sudden jerk.

“Ha! you tremble,” Sotillo shouted, suddenly. “It is a conspiracy. It is a crime against the State. Did you not know that the silver belongs to the Republic till the Government claims are satisfied? Where is it? Where have you hidden it, you miserable thief?”

At this question Captain Mitchell’s sinking spirits revived. In whatever incomprehensible manner Sotillo had already got his information about the lighter, he had not captured it. That was clear. In his outraged heart, Captain Mitchell had resolved that

nothing would induce him to say a word while he remained so disgracefully bound, but his desire to help the escape of the silver made him depart from this resolution. His wits were very much at work. He detected in Sotillo a certain air of doubt, of irresolution.

“That man,” he said to himself, “is not certain of what he advances.” For all his pomposity in social intercourse, Captain Mitchell could meet the realities of life in a resolute and ready spirit. Now he had got over the first shock of the abominable treatment he was cool and collected enough. The immense contempt he felt for Sotillo steadied him, and he said oracularly, “No doubt it is well concealed by this time.”

Sotillo, too, had time to cool down. “Muy bien, Mitchell,” he said in a cold and threatening manner. “But can you produce the Government receipt for the royalty and the Custom House permit of embarkation, hey? Can you? No. Then the silver has been removed illegally, and the guilty shall be made to suffer, unless it is produced within five days from this.” He gave orders for the prisoner to be unbound and locked up in one of the smaller rooms downstairs. He walked about the room, moody and silent, till Captain Mitchell, with each of his arms held by a couple of men, stood up, shook himself, and stamped his feet.

“How did you like to be tied up, Mitchell?” he asked, derisively.

“It is the most incredible, abominable use of power!” Captain Mitchell declared in a loud voice. “And whatever your purpose, you shall gain nothing from it, I can promise you.”

The tall colonel, livid, with his coal-black ringlets and moustache, crouched, as it were, to look into the eyes of the short, thick-set, red-faced prisoner with rumpled white hair.

“That we shall see. You shall know my power a little better when I tie you up to a potalon outside in the sun for a whole day.” He drew himself up haughtily, and made a sign for Captain Mitchell to be led away.

“What about my watch?” cried Captain Mitchell, hanging back from the efforts of the men pulling him towards the door.

Sotillo turned to his officers. “No! But only listen to this picaro, caballeros,” he pronounced with affected scorn, and was answered by a chorus of derisive laughter. “He demands his watch!” . . . He ran up again to Captain Mitchell, for the desire to relieve his feelings by inflicting blows and pain upon this Englishman was very strong within him. “Your watch! You are a prisoner in war time, Mitchell! In war time! You have no rights and no property! Caramba! The very breath in your body belongs to me. Remember that.”

“Bosh!” said Captain Mitchell, concealing a disagreeable impression.

Down below, in a great hall, with the earthen floor and with a tall mound thrown up by white ants in a corner, the soldiers had kindled a small fire with broken chairs and tables near the arched gateway, through which the faint murmur of the harbour waters on the beach could be heard. While Captain Mitchell was being led down the staircase, an officer passed him, running up to report to Sotillo the capture of more

prisoners. A lot of smoke hung about in the vast gloomy place, the fire crackled, and, as if through a haze, Captain Mitchell made out, surrounded by short soldiers with fixed bayonets, the heads of three tall prisoners — the doctor, the engineer-in-chief, and the white leonine mane of old Viola, who stood half-turned away from the others with his chin on his breast and his arms crossed. Mitchell's astonishment knew no bounds. He cried out; the other two exclaimed also. But he hurried on, diagonally, across the big cavern-like hall. Lots of thoughts, surmises, hints of caution, and so on, crowded his head to distraction.

"Is he actually keeping you?" shouted the chief engineer, whose single eyeglass glittered in the firelight.

An officer from the top of the stairs was shouting urgently, "Bring them all up — all three."

In the clamour of voices and the rattle of arms, Captain Mitchell made himself heard imperfectly: "By heavens! the fellow has stolen my watch."

The engineer-in-chief on the staircase resisted the pressure long enough to shout, "What? What did you say?"

"My chronometer!" Captain Mitchell yelled violently at the very moment of being thrust head foremost through a small door into a sort of cell, perfectly black, and so narrow that he fetched up against the opposite wall. The door had been instantly slammed. He knew where they had put him. This was the strong room of the Custom House, whence the silver had been removed only a few hours earlier. It was almost as narrow as a corridor, with a small square aperture, barred by a heavy grating, at the distant end. Captain Mitchell staggered for a few steps, then sat down on the earthen floor with his back to the wall. Nothing, not even a gleam of light from anywhere, interfered with Captain Mitchell's meditation. He did some hard but not very extensive thinking. It was not of a gloomy cast. The old sailor, with all his small weaknesses and absurdities, was constitutionally incapable of entertaining for any length of time a fear of his personal safety. It was not so much firmness of soul as the lack of a certain kind of imagination — the kind whose undue development caused intense suffering to Senor Hirsch; that sort of imagination which adds the blind terror of bodily suffering and of death, envisaged as an accident to the body alone, strictly — to all the other apprehensions on which the sense of one's existence is based. Unfortunately, Captain Mitchell had not much penetration of any kind; characteristic, illuminating trifles of expression, action, or movement, escaped him completely. He was too pompously and innocently aware of his own existence to observe that of others. For instance, he could not believe that Sotillo had been really afraid of him, and this simply because it would never have entered into his head to shoot any one except in the most pressing case of self-defence. Anybody could see he was not a murdering kind of man, he reflected quite gravely. Then why this preposterous and insulting charge? he asked himself. But his thoughts mainly clung around the astounding and unanswerable question: How the devil the fellow got to know that the silver had gone off in the lighter? It was obvious that he had not captured it. And, obviously, he could not have captured it! In this last

conclusion Captain Mitchell was misled by the assumption drawn from his observation of the weather during his long vigil on the wharf. He thought that there had been much more wind than usual that night in the gulf; whereas, as a matter of fact, the reverse was the case.

“How in the name of all that’s marvellous did that confounded fellow get wind of the affair?” was the first question he asked directly after the bang, clatter, and flash of the open door (which was closed again almost before he could lift his dropped head) informed him that he had a companion of captivity. Dr. Monygham’s voice stopped muttering curses in English and Spanish.

“Is that you, Mitchell?” he made answer, surlily. “I struck my forehead against this confounded wall with enough force to fell an ox. Where are you?”

Captain Mitchell, accustomed to the darkness, could make out the doctor stretching out his hands blindly.

“I am sitting here on the floor. Don’t fall over my legs,” Captain Mitchell’s voice announced with great dignity of tone. The doctor, entreated not to walk about in the dark, sank down to the ground, too. The two prisoners of Sotillo, with their heads nearly touching, began to exchange confidences.

“Yes,” the doctor related in a low tone to Captain Mitchell’s vehement curiosity, “we have been nabbed in old Viola’s place. It seems that one of their pickets, commanded by an officer, pushed as far as the town gate. They had orders not to enter, but to bring along every soul they could find on the plain. We had been talking in there with the door open, and no doubt they saw the glimmer of our light. They must have been making their approaches for some time. The engineer laid himself on a bench in a recess by the fire-place, and I went upstairs to have a look. I hadn’t heard any sound from there for a long time. Old Viola, as soon as he saw me come up, lifted his arm for silence. I stole in on tiptoe. By Jove, his wife was lying down and had gone to sleep. The woman had actually dropped off to sleep! ‘Senor Doctor,’ Viola whispers to me, ‘it looks as if her oppression was going to get better.’ ‘Yes,’ I said, very much surprised; ‘your wife is a wonderful woman, Giorgio.’ Just then a shot was fired in the kitchen, which made us jump and cower as if at a thunder-clap. It seems that the party of soldiers had stolen quite close up, and one of them had crept up to the door. He looked in, thought there was no one there, and, holding his rifle ready, entered quietly. The chief told me that he had just closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, he saw the man already in the middle of the room peering into the dark corners. The chief was so startled that, without thinking, he made one leap from the recess right out in front of the fireplace. The soldier, no less startled, up with his rifle and pulls the trigger, deafening and singeing the engineer, but in his flurry missing him completely. But, look what happens! At the noise of the report the sleeping woman sat up, as if moved by a spring, with a shriek, ‘The children, Gian’ Battista! Save the children!’ I have it in my ears now. It was the truest cry of distress I ever heard. I stood as if paralyzed, but the old husband ran across to the bedside, stretching out his hands. She clung to them! I could see her eyes go glazed; the old fellow lowered her down on

the pillows and then looked round at me. She was dead! All this took less than five minutes, and then I ran down to see what was the matter. It was no use thinking of any resistance. Nothing we two could say availed with the officer, so I volunteered to go up with a couple of soldiers and fetch down old Viola. He was sitting at the foot of the bed, looking at his wife's face, and did not seem to hear what I said; but after I had pulled the sheet over her head, he got up and followed us downstairs quietly, in a sort of thoughtful way. They marched us off along the road, leaving the door open and the candle burning. The chief engineer strode on without a word, but I looked back once or twice at the feeble gleam. After we had gone some considerable distance, the Garibaldino, who was walking by my side, suddenly said, 'I have buried many men on battlefields on this continent. The priests talk of consecrated ground! Bah! All the earth made by God is holy; but the sea, which knows nothing of kings and priests and tyrants, is the holiest of all. Doctor! I should like to bury her in the sea. No mummeries, candles, incense, no holy water mumbled over by priests. The spirit of liberty is upon the waters.' . . . Amazing old man. He was saying all this in an undertone as if talking to himself."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Captain Mitchell, impatiently. "Poor old chap! But have you any idea how that ruffian Sotillo obtained his information? He did not get hold of any of our Cargadores who helped with the truck, did he? But no, it is impossible! These were picked men we've had in our boats for these five years, and I paid them myself specially for the job, with instructions to keep out of the way for twenty-four hours at least. I saw them with my own eyes march on with the Italians to the railway yards. The chief promised to give them rations as long as they wanted to remain there."

"Well," said the doctor, slowly, "I can tell you that you may say good-bye for ever to your best lighter, and to the Capataz of Cargadores."

At this, Captain Mitchell scrambled up to his feet in the excess of his excitement. The doctor, without giving him time to exclaim, stated briefly the part played by Hirsch during the night.

Captain Mitchell was overcome. "Drowned!" he muttered, in a bewildered and appalled whisper. "Drowned!" Afterwards he kept still, apparently listening, but too absorbed in the news of the catastrophe to follow the doctor's narrative with attention.

The doctor had taken up an attitude of perfect ignorance, till at last Sotillo was induced to have Hirsch brought in to repeat the whole story, which was got out of him again with the greatest difficulty, because every moment he would break out into lamentations. At last, Hirsch was led away, looking more dead than alive, and shut up in one of the upstairs rooms to be close at hand. Then the doctor, keeping up his character of a man not admitted to the inner councils of the San Tome Administration, remarked that the story sounded incredible. Of course, he said, he couldn't tell what had been the action of the Europeans, as he had been exclusively occupied with his own work in looking after the wounded, and also in attending Don Jose Avellanos. He had succeeded in assuming so well a tone of impartial indifference, that Sotillo seemed to be completely deceived. Till then a show of regular inquiry had been kept up; one of

the officers sitting at the table wrote down the questions and the answers, the others, lounging about the room, listened attentively, puffing at their long cigars and keeping their eyes on the doctor. But at that point Sotillo ordered everybody out.

Chapter 3

Directly they were alone, the colonel's severe official manner changed. He rose and approached the doctor. His eyes shone with rapacity and hope; he became confidential. "The silver might have been indeed put on board the lighter, but it was not conceivable that it should have been taken out to sea." The doctor, watching every word, nodded slightly, smoking with apparent relish the cigar which Sotillo had offered him as a sign of his friendly intentions. The doctor's manner of cold detachment from the rest of the Europeans led Sotillo on, till, from conjecture to conjecture, he arrived at hinting that in his opinion this was a putup job on the part of Charles Gould, in order to get hold of that immense treasure all to himself. The doctor, observant and self-possessed, muttered, "He is very capable of that."

Here Captain Mitchell exclaimed with amazement, amusement, and indignation, "You said that of Charles Gould!" Disgust, and even some suspicion, crept into his tone, for to him, too, as to other Europeans, there appeared to be something dubious about the doctor's personality.

"What on earth made you say that to this watch-stealing scoundrel?" he asked. "What's the object of an infernal lie of that sort? That confounded pick-pocket was quite capable of believing you."

He snorted. For a time the doctor remained silent in the dark.

"Yes, that is exactly what I did say," he uttered at last, in a tone which would have made it clear enough to a third party that the pause was not of a reluctant but of a reflective character. Captain Mitchell thought that he had never heard anything so brazenly impudent in his life.

"Well, well!" he muttered to himself, but he had not the heart to voice his thoughts. They were swept away by others full of astonishment and regret. A heavy sense of discomfiture crushed him: the loss of the silver, the death of Nostromo, which was really quite a blow to his sensibilities, because he had become attached to his Capataz as people get attached to their inferiors from love of ease and almost unconscious gratitude. And when he thought of Decoud being drowned, too, his sensibility was almost overcome by this miserable end. What a heavy blow for that poor young woman! Captain Mitchell did not belong to the species of crabbed old bachelors; on the contrary, he liked to see young men paying attentions to young women. It seemed to him a natural and proper thing. Proper especially. As to sailors, it was different; it was not their place to marry, he maintained, but it was on moral grounds as a matter of self-denial, for, he explained, life on board ship is not fit for a woman even at best, and if you leave her on shore, first of all it is not fair, and next she either suffers from it or

doesn't care a bit, which, in both cases, is bad. He couldn't have told what upset him most — Charles Gould's immense material loss, the death of Nostromo, which was a heavy loss to himself, or the idea of that beautiful and accomplished young woman being plunged into mourning.

"Yes," the doctor, who had been apparently reflecting, began again, "he believed me right enough. I thought he would have hugged me. 'Si, si,' he said, 'he will write to that partner of his, the rich Americano in San Francisco, that it is all lost. Why not? There is enough to share with many people.'"

"But this is perfectly imbecile!" cried Captain Mitchell.

The doctor remarked that Sotillo was imbecile, and that his imbecility was ingenious enough to lead him completely astray. He had helped him only but a little way.

"I mentioned," the doctor said, "in a sort of casual way, that treasure is generally buried in the earth rather than set afloat upon the sea. At this my Sotillo slapped his forehead. 'Por Dios, yes,' he said; 'they must have buried it on the shores of this harbour somewhere before they sailed out.'"

"Heavens and earth!" muttered Captain Mitchell, "I should not have believed that anybody could be ass enough — " He paused, then went on mournfully: "But what's the good of all this? It would have been a clever enough lie if the lighter had been still afloat. It would have kept that inconceivable idiot perhaps from sending out the steamer to cruise in the gulf. That was the danger that worried me no end." Captain Mitchell sighed profoundly.

"I had an object," the doctor pronounced, slowly.

"Had you?" muttered Captain Mitchell. "Well, that's lucky, or else I would have thought that you went on fooling him for the fun of the thing. And perhaps that was your object. Well, I must say I personally wouldn't condescend to that sort of thing. It is not to my taste. No, no. Blackening a friend's character is not my idea of fun, if it were to fool the greatest blackguard on earth."

Had it not been for Captain Mitchell's depression, caused by the fatal news, his disgust of Dr. Monygham would have taken a more outspoken shape; but he thought to himself that now it really did not matter what that man, whom he had never liked, would say and do.

"I wonder," he grumbled, "why they have shut us up together, or why Sotillo should have shut you up at all, since it seems to me you have been fairly chummy up there?"

"Yes, I wonder," said the doctor grimly.

Captain Mitchell's heart was so heavy that he would have preferred for the time being a complete solitude to the best of company. But any company would have been preferable to the doctor's, at whom he had always looked askance as a sort of beach-comber of superior intelligence partly reclaimed from his abased state. That feeling led him to ask —

"What has that ruffian done with the other two?"

"The chief engineer he would have let go in any case," said the doctor. "He wouldn't like to have a quarrel with the railway upon his hands. Not just yet, at any rate. I

don't think, Captain Mitchell, that you understand exactly what Sotillo's position is — ”

“I don't see why I should bother my head about it,” snarled Captain Mitchell.

“No,” assented the doctor, with the same grim composure. “I don't see why you should. It wouldn't help a single human being in the world if you thought ever so hard upon any subject whatever.”

“No,” said Captain Mitchell, simply, and with evident depression. “A man locked up in a confounded dark hole is not much use to anybody.”

“As to old Viola,” the doctor continued, as though he had not heard, “Sotillo released him for the same reason he is presently going to release you.”

“Eh? What?” exclaimed Captain Mitchell, staring like an owl in the darkness. “What is there in common between me and old Viola? More likely because the old chap has no watch and chain for the pickpocket to steal. And I tell you what, Dr. Monygham,” he went on with rising choler, “he will find it more difficult than he thinks to get rid of me. He will burn his fingers over that job yet, I can tell you. To begin with, I won't go without my watch, and as to the rest — we shall see. I dare say it is no great matter for you to be locked up. But Joe Mitchell is a different kind of man, sir. I don't mean to submit tamely to insult and robbery. I am a public character, sir.”

And then Captain Mitchell became aware that the bars of the opening had become visible, a black grating upon a square of grey. The coming of the day silenced Captain Mitchell as if by the reflection that now in all the future days he would be deprived of the invaluable services of his Capataz. He leaned against the wall with his arms folded on his breast, and the doctor walked up and down the whole length of the place with his peculiar hobbling gait, as if slinking about on damaged feet. At the end furthest from the grating he would be lost altogether in the darkness. Only the slight limping shuffle could be heard. There was an air of moody detachment in that painful prowling kept up without a pause. When the door of the prison was suddenly flung open and his name shouted out he showed no surprise. He swerved sharply in his walk, and passed out at once, as though much depended upon his speed; but Captain Mitchell remained for some time with his shoulders against the wall, quite undecided in the bitterness of his spirit whether it wouldn't be better to refuse to stir a limb in the way of protest. He had half a mind to get himself carried out, but after the officer at the door had shouted three or four times in tones of remonstrance and surprise he condescended to walk out.

Sotillo's manner had changed. The colonel's off-hand civility was slightly irresolute, as though he were in doubt if civility were the proper course in this case. He observed Captain Mitchell attentively before he spoke from the big armchair behind the table in a condescending voice —

“I have concluded not to detain you, Senor Mitchell. I am of a forgiving disposition. I make allowances. Let this be a lesson to you, however.”

The peculiar dawn of Sulaco, which seems to break far away to the westward and creep back into the shade of the mountains, mingled with the reddish light of the

candles. Captain Mitchell, in sign of contempt and indifference, let his eyes roam all over the room, and he gave a hard stare to the doctor, perched already on the casement of one of the windows, with his eyelids lowered, careless and thoughtful — or perhaps ashamed.

Sotillo, ensconced in the vast armchair, remarked, "I should have thought that the feelings of a caballero would have dictated to you an appropriate reply."

He waited for it, but Captain Mitchell remaining mute, more from extreme resentment than from reasoned intention, Sotillo hesitated, glanced towards the doctor, who looked up and nodded, then went on with a slight effort —

"Here, Senor Mitchell, is your watch. Learn how hasty and unjust has been your judgment of my patriotic soldiers."

Lying back in his seat, he extended his arm over the table and pushed the watch away slightly. Captain Mitchell walked up with undisguised eagerness, put it to his ear, then slipped it into his pocket coolly.

Sotillo seemed to overcome an immense reluctance. Again he looked aside at the doctor, who stared at him unwinkingly.

But as Captain Mitchell was turning away, without as much as a nod or a glance, he hastened to say —

"You may go and wait downstairs for the senor doctor, whom I am going to liberate, too. You foreigners are insignificant, to my mind."

He forced a slight, discordant laugh out of himself, while Captain Mitchell, for the first time, looked at him with some interest.

"The law shall take note later on of your transgressions," Sotillo hurried on. "But as for me, you can live free, unguarded, unobserved. Do you hear, Senor Mitchell? You may depart to your affairs. You are beneath my notice. My attention is claimed by matters of the very highest importance."

Captain Mitchell was very nearly provoked to an answer. It displeased him to be liberated insultingly; but want of sleep, prolonged anxieties, a profound disappointment with the fatal ending of the silver-saving business weighed upon his spirits. It was as much as he could do to conceal his uneasiness, not about himself perhaps, but about things in general. It occurred to him distinctly that something underhand was going on. As he went out he ignored the doctor pointedly.

"A brute!" said Sotillo, as the door shut.

Dr. Monygham slipped off the window-sill, and, thrusting his hands into the pockets of the long, grey dust coat he was wearing, made a few steps into the room.

Sotillo got up, too, and, putting himself in the way, examined him from head to foot.

"So your countrymen do not confide in you very much, senor doctor. They do not love you, eh? Why is that, I wonder?"

The doctor, lifting his head, answered by a long, lifeless stare and the words, "Perhaps because I have lived too long in Costaguana."

Sotillo had a gleam of white teeth under the black moustache.

“Aha! But you love yourself,” he said, encouragingly.

“If you leave them alone,” the doctor said, looking with the same lifeless stare at Sotillo’s handsome face, “they will betray themselves very soon. Meantime, I may try to make Don Carlos speak?”

“Ah! senor doctor,” said Sotillo, wagging his head, “you are a man of quick intelligence. We were made to understand each other.” He turned away. He could bear no longer that expressionless and motionless stare, which seemed to have a sort of impenetrable emptiness like the black depth of an abyss.

Even in a man utterly devoid of moral sense there remains an appreciation of rascality which, being conventional, is perfectly clear. Sotillo thought that Dr. Monygham, so different from all Europeans, was ready to sell his countrymen and Charles Gould, his employer, for some share of the San Tome silver. Sotillo did not despise him for that. The colonel’s want of moral sense was of a profound and innocent character. It bordered upon stupidity, moral stupidity. Nothing that served his ends could appear to him really reprehensible. Nevertheless, he despised Dr. Monygham. He had for him an immense and satisfactory contempt. He despised him with all his heart because he did not mean to let the doctor have any reward at all. He despised him, not as a man without faith and honour, but as a fool. Dr. Monygham’s insight into his character had deceived Sotillo completely. Therefore he thought the doctor a fool.

Since his arrival in Sulaco the colonel’s ideas had undergone some modification.

He no longer wished for a political career in Montero’s administration. He had always doubted the safety of that course. Since he had learned from the chief engineer that at daylight most likely he would be confronted by Pedro Montero his misgivings on that point had considerably increased. The guerrillero brother of the general — the Pedrito of popular speech — had a reputation of his own. He wasn’t safe to deal with. Sotillo had vaguely planned seizing not only the treasure but the town itself, and then negotiating at leisure. But in the face of facts learned from the chief engineer (who had frankly disclosed to him the whole situation) his audacity, never of a very dashing kind, had been replaced by a most cautious hesitation.

“An army — an army crossed the mountains under Pedrito already,” he had repeated, unable to hide his consternation. “If it had not been that I am given the news by a man of your position I would never have believed it. Astonishing!”

“An armed force,” corrected the engineer, suavely. His aim was attained. It was to keep Sulaco clear of any armed occupation for a few hours longer, to let those whom fear impelled leave the town. In the general dismay there were families hopeful enough to fly upon the road towards Los Hatos, which was left open by the withdrawal of the armed rabble under Senores Fuentes and Gamacho, to Rincon, with their enthusiastic welcome for Pedro Montero. It was a hasty and risky exodus, and it was said that Hernandez, occupying with his band the woods about Los Hatos, was receiving the fugitives. That a good many people he knew were contemplating such a flight had been well known to the chief engineer.

Father Corbelan's efforts in the cause of that most pious robber had not been altogether fruitless. The political chief of Sulaco had yielded at the last moment to the urgent entreaties of the priest, had signed a provisional nomination appointing Hernandez a general, and calling upon him officially in this new capacity to preserve order in the town. The fact is that the political chief, seeing the situation desperate, did not care what he signed. It was the last official document he signed before he left the palace of the Intendencia for the refuge of the O.S.N. Company's office. But even had he meant his act to be effective it was already too late. The riot which he feared and expected broke out in less than an hour after Father Corbelan had left him. Indeed, Father Corbelan, who had appointed a meeting with Nostromo in the Dominican Convent, where he had his residence in one of the cells, never managed to reach the place. From the Intendencia he had gone straight on to the Avellanos's house to tell his brother-in-law, and though he stayed there no more than half an hour he had found himself cut off from his ascetic abode. Nostromo, after waiting there for some time, watching uneasily the increasing uproar in the street, had made his way to the offices of the Porvenir, and stayed there till daylight, as Decoud had mentioned in the letter to his sister. Thus the Capataz, instead of riding towards the Los Hatos woods as bearer of Hernandez's nomination, had remained in town to save the life of the President Dictator, to assist in repressing the outbreak of the mob, and at last to sail out with the silver of the mine.

But Father Corbelan, escaping to Hernandez, had the document in his pocket, a piece of official writing turning a bandit into a general in a memorable last official act of the Ribierist party, whose watchwords were honesty, peace, and progress. Probably neither the priest nor the bandit saw the irony of it. Father Corbelan must have found messengers to send into the town, for early on the second day of the disturbances there were rumours of Hernandez being on the road to Los Hatos ready to receive those who would put themselves under his protection. A strange-looking horseman, elderly and audacious, had appeared in the town, riding slowly while his eyes examined the fronts of the houses, as though he had never seen such high buildings before. Before the cathedral he had dismounted, and, kneeling in the middle of the Plaza, his bridle over his arm and his hat lying in front of him on the ground, had bowed his head, crossing himself and beating his breast for some little time. Remounting his horse, with a fearless but not unfriendly look round the little gathering formed about his public devotions, he had asked for the Casa Avellanos. A score of hands were extended in answer, with fingers pointing up the Calle de la Constitucion.

The horseman had gone on with only a glance of casual curiosity upwards to the windows of the Amarilla Club at the corner. His stentorian voice shouted periodically in the empty street, "Which is the Casa Avellanos?" till an answer came from the scared porter, and he disappeared under the gate. The letter he was bringing, written by Father Corbelan with a pencil by the camp-fire of Hernandez, was addressed to Don Jose, of whose critical state the priest was not aware. Antonia read it, and, after consulting Charles Gould, sent it on for the information of the gentlemen garrisoning

the Amarilla Club. For herself, her mind was made up; she would rejoin her uncle; she would entrust the last day — the last hours perhaps — of her father's life to the keeping of the bandit, whose existence was a protest against the irresponsible tyranny of all parties alike, against the moral darkness of the land. The gloom of Los Hatos woods was preferable; a life of hardships in the train of a robber band less debasing. Antonia embraced with all her soul her uncle's obstinate defiance of misfortune. It was grounded in the belief in the man whom she loved.

In his message the Vicar-General answered upon his head for Hernandez's fidelity. As to his power, he pointed out that he had remained unsubdued for so many years. In that letter Decoud's idea of the new Occidental State (whose flourishing and stable condition is a matter of common knowledge now) was for the first time made public and used as an argument. Hernandez, ex-bandit and the last general of Ribierist creation, was confident of being able to hold the tract of country between the woods of Los Hatos and the coast range till that devoted patriot, Don Martin Decoud, could bring General Barrios back to Sulaco for the reconquest of the town.

"Heaven itself wills it. Providence is on our side," wrote Father Corbelan; there was no time to reflect upon or to controvert his statement; and if the discussion started upon the reading of that letter in the Amarilla Club was violent, it was also shortlived. In the general bewilderment of the collapse some jumped at the idea with joyful astonishment as upon the amazing discovery of a new hope. Others became fascinated by the prospect of immediate personal safety for their women and children. The majority caught at it as a drowning man catches at a straw. Father Corbelan was unexpectedly offering them a refuge from Pedrito Montero with his llaneros allied to Senores Fuentes and Gamacho with their armed rabble.

All the latter part of the afternoon an animated discussion went on in the big rooms of the Amarilla Club. Even those members posted at the windows with rifles and carbines to guard the end of the street in case of an offensive return of the populace shouted their opinions and arguments over their shoulders. As dusk fell Don Juste Lopez, inviting those caballeros who were of his way of thinking to follow him, withdrew into the corredor, where at a little table in the light of two candles he busied himself in composing an address, or rather a solemn declaration to be presented to Pedrito Montero by a deputation of such members of Assembly as had elected to remain in town. His idea was to propitiate him in order to save the form at least of parliamentary institutions. Seated before a blank sheet of paper, a goose-quill pen in his hand and surged upon from all sides, he turned to the right and to the left, repeating with solemn insistence —

"Caballeros, a moment of silence! A moment of silence! We ought to make it clear that we bow in all good faith to the accomplished facts."

The utterance of that phrase seemed to give him a melancholy satisfaction. The hubbub of voices round him was growing strained and hoarse. In the sudden pauses the excited grimacing of the faces would sink all at once into the stillness of profound dejection.

Meantime, the exodus had begun. Carretas full of ladies and children rolled swaying across the Plaza, with men walking or riding by their side; mounted parties followed on mules and horses; the poorest were setting out on foot, men and women carrying bundles, clasping babies in their arms, leading old people, dragging along the bigger children. When Charles Gould, after leaving the doctor and the engineer at the Casa Viola, entered the town by the harbour gate, all those that had meant to go were gone, and the others had barricaded themselves in their houses. In the whole dark street there was only one spot of flickering lights and moving figures, where the Senor Administrador recognized his wife's carriage waiting at the door of the Avellanos's house. He rode up, almost unnoticed, and looked on without a word while some of his own servants came out of the gate carrying Don Jose Avellanos, who, with closed eyes and motionless features, appeared perfectly lifeless. His wife and Antonia walked on each side of the improvised stretcher, which was put at once into the carriage. The two women embraced; while from the other side of the landau Father Corbelan's emissary, with his ragged beard all streaked with grey, and high, bronzed cheek-bones, stared, sitting upright in the saddle. Then Antonia, dry-eyed, got in by the side of the stretcher, and, after making the sign of the cross rapidly, lowered a thick veil upon her face. The servants and the three or four neighbours who had come to assist, stood back, uncovering their heads. On the box, Ignacio, resigned now to driving all night (and to having perhaps his throat cut before daylight) looked back surlily over his shoulder.

"Drive carefully," cried Mrs. Gould in a tremulous voice.

"Si, carefully; si nina," he mumbled, chewing his lips, his round leathery cheeks quivering. And the landau rolled slowly out of the light.

"I will see them as far as the ford," said Charles Gould to his wife. She stood on the edge of the sidewalk with her hands clasped lightly, and nodded to him as he followed after the carriage. And now the windows of the Amarilla Club were dark. The last spark of resistance had died out. Turning his head at the corner, Charles Gould saw his wife crossing over to their own gate in the lighted patch of the street. One of their neighbours, a well-known merchant and landowner of the province, followed at her elbow, talking with great gestures. As she passed in all the lights went out in the street, which remained dark and empty from end to end.

The houses of the vast Plaza were lost in the night. High up, like a star, there was a small gleam in one of the towers of the cathedral; and the equestrian statue gleamed pale against the black trees of the Alameda, like a ghost of royalty haunting the scenes of revolution. The rare prowlers they met ranged themselves against the wall. Beyond the last houses the carriage rolled noiselessly on the soft cushion of dust, and with a greater obscurity a feeling of freshness seemed to fall from the foliage of the trees bordering the country road. The emissary from Hernandez's camp pushed his horse close to Charles Gould.

"Caballero," he said in an interested voice, "you are he whom they call the King of Sulaco, the master of the mine? Is it not so?"

"Yes, I am the master of the mine," answered Charles Gould.

The man cantered for a time in silence, then said, "I have a brother, a sereno in your service in the San Tome valley. You have proved yourself a just man. There has been no wrong done to any one since you called upon the people to work in the mountains. My brother says that no official of the Government, no oppressor of the Campo, has been seen on your side of the stream. Your own officials do not oppress the people in the gorge. Doubtless they are afraid of your severity. You are a just man and a powerful one," he added.

He spoke in an abrupt, independent tone, but evidently he was communicative with a purpose. He told Charles Gould that he had been a *ranchero* in one of the lower valleys, far south, a neighbour of Hernandez in the old days, and godfather to his eldest boy; one of those who joined him in his resistance to the recruiting raid which was the beginning of all their misfortunes. It was he that, when his *compadre* had been carried off, had buried his wife and children, murdered by the soldiers.

"Si, *senor*," he muttered, hoarsely, "I and two or three others, the lucky ones left at liberty, buried them all in one grave near the ashes of their ranch, under the tree that had shaded its roof."

It was to him, too, that Hernandez came after he had deserted, three years afterwards. He had still his uniform on with the sergeant's stripes on the sleeve, and the blood of his colonel upon his hands and breast. Three troopers followed him, of those who had started in pursuit but had ridden on for liberty. And he told Charles Gould how he and a few friends, seeing those soldiers, lay in ambush behind some rocks ready to pull the trigger on them, when he recognized his *compadre* and jumped up from cover, shouting his name, because he knew that Hernandez could not have been coming back on an errand of injustice and oppression. Those three soldiers, together with the party who lay behind the rocks, had formed the nucleus of the famous band, and he, the narrator, had been the favourite lieutenant of Hernandez for many, many years. He mentioned proudly that the officials had put a price upon his head, too; but it did not prevent it getting sprinkled with grey upon his shoulders. And now he had lived long enough to see his *compadre* made a general.

He had a burst of muffled laughter. "And now from robbers we have become soldiers. But look, *Caballero*, at those who made us soldiers and him a general! Look at these people!"

Ignacio shouted. The light of the carriage lamps, running along the nopal hedges that crowned the bank on each side, flashed upon the scared faces of people standing aside in the road, sunk deep, like an English country lane, into the soft soil of the Campo. They cowered; their eyes glistened very big for a second; and then the light, running on, fell upon the half-denuded roots of a big tree, on another stretch of nopal hedge, caught up another bunch of faces glaring back apprehensively. Three women — of whom one was carrying a child — and a couple of men in civilian dress — one armed with a sabre and another with a gun — were grouped about a donkey carrying two bundles tied up in blankets. Further on Ignacio shouted again to pass a *carreta*, a long wooden box on two high wheels, with the door at the back swinging open. Some

ladies in it must have recognized the white mules, because they screamed out, "Is it you, Dona Emilia?"

At the turn of the road the glare of a big fire filled the short stretch vaulted over by the branches meeting overhead. Near the ford of a shallow stream a roadside rancho of woven rushes and a roof of grass had been set on fire by accident, and the flames, roaring viciously, lit up an open space blocked with horses, mules, and a distracted, shouting crowd of people. When Ignacio pulled up, several ladies on foot assailed the carriage, begging Antonia for a seat. To their clamour she answered by pointing silently to her father.

"I must leave you here," said Charles Gould, in the uproar. The flames leaped up sky-high, and in the recoil from the scorching heat across the road the stream of fugitives pressed against the carriage. A middle-aged lady dressed in black silk, but with a coarse manta over her head and a rough branch for a stick in her hand, staggered against the front wheel. Two young girls, frightened and silent, were clinging to her arms. Charles Gould knew her very well.

"Misericordia! We are getting terribly bruised in this crowd!" she exclaimed, smiling up courageously to him. "We have started on foot. All our servants ran away yesterday to join the democrats. We are going to put ourselves under the protection of Father Corbelan, of your sainted uncle, Antonia. He has wrought a miracle in the heart of a most merciless robber. A miracle!"

She raised her voice gradually up to a scream as she was borne along by the pressure of people getting out of the way of some carts coming up out of the ford at a gallop, with loud yells and cracking of whips. Great masses of sparks mingled with black smoke flew over the road; the bamboos of the walls detonated in the fire with the sound of an irregular fusillade. And then the bright blaze sank suddenly, leaving only a red dusk crowded with aimless dark shadows drifting in contrary directions; the noise of voices seemed to die away with the flame; and the tumult of heads, arms, quarrelling, and imprecations passed on fleeing into the darkness.

"I must leave you now," repeated Charles Gould to Antonia. She turned her head slowly and uncovered her face. The emissary and compadre of Hernandez spurred his horse close up.

"Has not the master of the mine any message to send to Hernandez, the master of the Campo?"

The truth of the comparison struck Charles Gould heavily. In his determined purpose he held the mine, and the indomitable bandit held the Campo by the same precarious tenure. They were equals before the lawlessness of the land. It was impossible to disentangle one's activity from its debasing contacts. A close-meshed net of crime and corruption lay upon the whole country. An immense and weary discouragement sealed his lips for a time.

"You are a just man," urged the emissary of Hernandez. "Look at those people who made my compadre a general and have turned us all into soldiers. Look at those oligarchs fleeing for life, with only the clothes on their backs. My compadre does not

think of that, but our followers may be wondering greatly, and I would speak for them to you. Listen, señor! For many months now the Campo has been our own. We need ask no man for anything; but soldiers must have their pay to live honestly when the wars are over. It is believed that your soul is so just that a prayer from you would cure the sickness of every beast, like the orison of the upright judge. Let me have some words from your lips that would act like a charm upon the doubts of our partida, where all are men."

"Do you hear what he says?" Charles Gould said in English to Antonia.

"Forgive us our misery!" she exclaimed, hurriedly. "It is your character that is the inexhaustible treasure which may save us all yet; your character, Carlos, not your wealth. I entreat you to give this man your word that you will accept any arrangement my uncle may make with their chief. One word. He will want no more."

On the site of the roadside hut there remained nothing but an enormous heap of embers, throwing afar a darkening red glow, in which Antonia's face appeared deeply flushed with excitement. Charles Gould, with only a short hesitation, pronounced the required pledge. He was like a man who had ventured on a precipitous path with no room to turn, where the only chance of safety is to press forward. At that moment he understood it thoroughly as he looked down at Don Jose stretched out, hardly breathing, by the side of the erect Antonia, vanquished in a lifelong struggle with the powers of moral darkness, whose stagnant depths breed monstrous crimes and monstrous illusions. In a few words the emissary from Hernandez expressed his complete satisfaction. Stoically Antonia lowered her veil, resisting the longing to inquire about Decoud's escape. But Ignacio leered morosely over his shoulder.

"Take a good look at the mules, mi amo," he grumbled. "You shall never see them again!"

Chapter 4

Charles Gould turned towards the town. Before him the jagged peaks of the Sierra came out all black in the clear dawn. Here and there a muffled lepero whisked round the corner of a grass-grown street before the ringing hoofs of his horse. Dogs barked behind the walls of the gardens; and with the colourless light the chill of the snows seemed to fall from the mountains upon the disjointed pavements and the shuttered houses with broken cornices and the plaster peeling in patches between the flat pilasters of the fronts. The daybreak struggled with the gloom under the arcades on the Plaza, with no signs of country people disposing their goods for the day's market, piles of fruit, bundles of vegetables ornamented with flowers, on low benches under enormous mat umbrellas; with no cheery early morning bustle of villagers, women, children, and loaded donkeys. Only a few scattered knots of revolutionists stood in the vast space, all looking one way from under their slouched hats for some sign of news from Rincon.

The largest of those groups turned about like one man as Charles Gould passed, and shouted, "Viva la libertad!" after him in a menacing tone.

Charles Gould rode on, and turned into the archway of his house. In the patio littered with straw, a practicante, one of Dr. Monygham's native assistants, sat on the ground with his back against the rim of the fountain, fingering a guitar discreetly, while two girls of the lower class, standing up before him, shuffled their feet a little and waved their arms, humming a popular dance tune.

Most of the wounded during the two days of rioting had been taken away already by their friends and relations, but several figures could be seen sitting up balancing their bandaged heads in time to the music. Charles Gould dismounted. A sleepy mozo coming out of the bakery door took hold of the horse's bridle; the practicante endeavoured to conceal his guitar hastily; the girls, unabashed, stepped back smiling; and Charles Gould, on his way to the staircase, glanced into a dark corner of the patio at another group, a mortally wounded Cargador with a woman kneeling by his side; she mumbled prayers rapidly, trying at the same time to force a piece of orange between the stiffening lips of the dying man.

The cruel futility of things stood unveiled in the levity and sufferings of that incorrigible people; the cruel futility of lives and of deaths thrown away in the vain endeavour to attain an enduring solution of the problem. Unlike Decoud, Charles Gould could not play lightly a part in a tragic farce. It was tragic enough for him in all conscience, but he could see no farcical element. He suffered too much under a conviction of irremediable folly. He was too severely practical and too idealistic to look upon its terrible humours with amusement, as Martin Decoud, the imaginative materialist, was able to do in the dry light of his scepticism. To him, as to all of us, the compromises with his conscience appeared uglier than ever in the light of failure. His taciturnity, assumed with a purpose, had prevented him from tampering openly with his thoughts; but the Gould Concession had insidiously corrupted his judgment. He might have known, he said to himself, leaning over the balustrade of the corredor, that Ribierism could never come to anything. The mine had corrupted his judgment by making him sick of bribing and intriguing merely to have his work left alone from day to day. Like his father, he did not like to be robbed. It exasperated him. He had persuaded himself that, apart from higher considerations, the backing up of Don Jose's hopes of reform was good business. He had gone forth into the senseless fray as his poor uncle, whose sword hung on the wall of his study, had gone forth — in the defence of the commonest decencies of organized society. Only his weapon was the wealth of the mine, more far-reaching and subtle than an honest blade of steel fitted into a simple brass guard.

More dangerous to the wielder, too, this weapon of wealth, double-edged with the cupidity and misery of mankind, steeped in all the vices of self-indulgence as in a concoction of poisonous roots, tainting the very cause for which it is drawn, always ready to turn awkwardly in the hand. There was nothing for it now but to go on using it. But he promised himself to see it shattered into small bits before he let it be wrenched from his grasp.

After all, with his English parentage and English upbringing, he perceived that he was an adventurer in Costaguana, the descendant of adventurers enlisted in a foreign legion, of men who had sought fortune in a revolutionary war, who had planned revolutions, who had believed in revolutions. For all the uprightness of his character, he had something of an adventurer's easy morality which takes count of personal risk in the ethical appraising of his action. He was prepared, if need be, to blow up the whole San Tome mountain sky high out of the territory of the Republic. This resolution expressed the tenacity of his character, the remorse of that subtle conjugal infidelity through which his wife was no longer the sole mistress of his thoughts, something of his father's imaginative weakness, and something, too, of the spirit of a buccaneer throwing a lighted match into the magazine rather than surrender his ship.

Down below in the patio the wounded Cargador had breathed his last. The woman cried out once, and her cry, unexpected and shrill, made all the wounded sit up. The practicante scrambled to his feet, and, guitar in hand, gazed steadily in her direction with elevated eyebrows. The two girls — sitting now one on each side of their wounded relative, with their knees drawn up and long cigars between their lips — nodded at each other significantly.

Charles Gould, looking down over the balustrade, saw three men dressed ceremoniously in black frock-coats with white shirts, and wearing European round hats, enter the patio from the street. One of them, head and shoulders taller than the two others, advanced with marked gravity, leading the way. This was Don Juste Lopez, accompanied by two of his friends, members of Assembly, coming to call upon the Administrador of the San Tome mine at this early hour. They saw him, too, waved their hands to him urgently, walking up the stairs as if in procession.

Don Juste, astonishingly changed by having shaved off altogether his damaged beard, had lost with it nine-tenths of his outward dignity. Even at that time of serious pre-occupation Charles Gould could not help noting the revealed ineptitude in the aspect of the man. His companions looked crestfallen and sleepy. One kept on passing the tip of his tongue over his parched lips; the other's eyes strayed dully over the tiled floor of the corredor, while Don Juste, standing a little in advance, harangued the Senor Administrador of the San Tome mine. It was his firm opinion that forms had to be observed. A new governor is always visited by deputations from the Cabildo, which is the Municipal Council, from the Consulado, the commercial Board, and it was proper that the Provincial Assembly should send a deputation, too, if only to assert the existence of parliamentary institutions. Don Juste proposed that Don Carlos Gould, as the most prominent citizen of the province, should join the Assembly's deputation. His position was exceptional, his personality known through the length and breadth of the whole Republic. Official courtesies must not be neglected, if they are gone through with a bleeding heart. The acceptance of accomplished facts may save yet the precious vestiges of parliamentary institutions. Don Juste's eyes glowed dully; he believed in parliamentary institutions — and the convinced drone of his voice lost itself in the stillness of the house like the deep buzzing of some ponderous insect.

Charles Gould had turned round to listen patiently, leaning his elbow on the balustrade. He shook his head a little, refusing, almost touched by the anxious gaze of the President of the Provincial Assembly. It was not Charles Gould's policy to make the San Tome mine a party to any formal proceedings.

"My advice, senores, is that you should wait for your fate in your houses. There is no necessity for you to give yourselves up formally into Montero's hands. Submission to the inevitable, as Don Juste calls it, is all very well, but when the inevitable is called Pedrito Montero there is no need to exhibit pointedly the whole extent of your surrender. The fault of this country is the want of measure in political life. Flat acquiescence in illegality, followed by sanguinary reaction — that, senores, is not the way to a stable and prosperous future."

Charles Gould stopped before the sad bewilderment of the faces, the wondering, anxious glances of the eyes. The feeling of pity for those men, putting all their trust into words of some sort, while murder and rapine stalked over the land, had betrayed him into what seemed empty loquacity. Don Juste murmured —

"You are abandoning us, Don Carlos. . . . And yet, parliamentary institutions — "

He could not finish from grief. For a moment he put his hand over his eyes. Charles Gould, in his fear of empty loquacity, made no answer to the charge. He returned in silence their ceremonious bows. His taciturnity was his refuge. He understood that what they sought was to get the influence of the San Tome mine on their side. They wanted to go on a conciliating errand to the victor under the wing of the Gould Concession. Other public bodies — the Cabildo, the Consulado — would be coming, too, presently, seeking the support of the most stable, the most effective force they had ever known to exist in their province.

The doctor, arriving with his sharp, jerky walk, found that the master had retired into his own room with orders not to be disturbed on any account. But Dr. Monygham was not anxious to see Charles Gould at once. He spent some time in a rapid examination of his wounded. He gazed down upon each in turn, rubbing his chin between his thumb and forefinger; his steady stare met without expression their silently inquisitive look. All these cases were doing well; but when he came to the dead Cargador he stopped a little longer, surveying not the man who had ceased to suffer, but the woman kneeling in silent contemplation of the rigid face, with its pinched nostrils and a white gleam in the imperfectly closed eyes. She lifted her head slowly, and said in a dull voice —

"It is not long since he had become a Cargador — only a few weeks. His worship the Capataz had accepted him after many entreaties."

"I am not responsible for the great Capataz," muttered the doctor, moving off.

Directing his course upstairs towards the door of Charles Gould's room, the doctor at the last moment hesitated; then, turning away from the handle with a shrug of his uneven shoulders, slunk off hastily along the corredor in search of Mrs. Gould's camerista.

Leonardo told him that the senora had not risen yet. The senora had given into her charge the girls belonging to that Italian posadero. She, Leonarda, had put them to bed in her own room. The fair girl had cried herself to sleep, but the dark one — the bigger — had not closed her eyes yet. She sat up in bed clutching the sheets right up under her chin and staring before her like a little witch. Leonarda did not approve of the Viola children being admitted to the house. She made this feeling clear by the indifferent tone in which she inquired whether their mother was dead yet. As to the senora, she must be asleep. Ever since she had gone into her room after seeing the departure of Dona Antonia with her dying father, there had been no sound behind her door.

The doctor, rousing himself out of profound reflection, told her abruptly to call her mistress at once. He hobbled off to wait for Mrs. Gould in the sala. He was very tired, but too excited to sit down. In this great drawing-room, now empty, in which his withered soul had been refreshed after many arid years and his outcast spirit had accepted silently the toleration of many side-glances, he wandered haphazard amongst the chairs and tables till Mrs. Gould, enveloped in a morning wrapper, came in rapidly.

“You know that I never approved of the silver being sent away,” the doctor began at once, as a preliminary to the narrative of his night’s adventures in association with Captain Mitchell, the engineer-in-chief, and old Viola, at Sotillo’s headquarters. To the doctor, with his special conception of this political crisis, the removal of the silver had seemed an irrational and ill-omened measure. It was as if a general were sending the best part of his troops away on the eve of battle upon some recondite pretext. The whole lot of ingots might have been concealed somewhere where they could have been got at for the purpose of staving off the dangers which were menacing the security of the Gould Concession. The Administrador had acted as if the immense and powerful prosperity of the mine had been founded on methods of probity, on the sense of usefulness. And it was nothing of the kind. The method followed had been the only one possible. The Gould Concession had ransomed its way through all those years. It was a nauseous process. He quite understood that Charles Gould had got sick of it and had left the old path to back up that hopeless attempt at reform. The doctor did not believe in the reform of Costaguana. And now the mine was back again in its old path, with the disadvantage that henceforth it had to deal not only with the greed provoked by its wealth, but with the resentment awakened by the attempt to free itself from its bondage to moral corruption. That was the penalty of failure. What made him uneasy was that Charles Gould seemed to him to have weakened at the decisive moment when a frank return to the old methods was the only chance. Listening to Decoud’s wild scheme had been a weakness.

The doctor flung up his arms, exclaiming, “Decoud! Decoud!” He hobbled about the room with slight, angry laughs. Many years ago both his ankles had been seriously damaged in the course of a certain investigation conducted in the castle of Sta. Marta by a commission composed of military men. Their nomination had been signified to them unexpectedly at the dead of night, with scowling brow, flashing eyes, and in a

tempestuous voice, by Guzman Bento. The old tyrant, maddened by one of his sudden accesses of suspicion, mingled spluttering appeals to their fidelity with imprecations and horrible menaces. The cells and casements of the castle on the hill had been already filled with prisoners. The commission was charged now with the task of discovering the iniquitous conspiracy against the Citizen-Saviour of his country.

Their dread of the raving tyrant translated itself into a hasty ferocity of procedure. The Citizen-Saviour was not accustomed to wait. A conspiracy had to be discovered. The courtyards of the castle resounded with the clanking of leg-irons, sounds of blows, yells of pain; and the commission of high officers laboured feverishly, concealing their distress and apprehensions from each other, and especially from their secretary, Father Beron, an army chaplain, at that time very much in the confidence of the Citizen-Saviour. That priest was a big round-shouldered man, with an unclean-looking, overgrown tonsure on the top of his flat head, of a dingy, yellow complexion, softly fat, with greasy stains all down the front of his lieutenant's uniform, and a small cross embroidered in white cotton on his left breast. He had a heavy nose and a pendant lip. Dr. Monygham remembered him still. He remembered him against all the force of his will striving its utmost to forget. Father Beron had been adjoined to the commission by Guzman Bento expressly for the purpose that his enlightened zeal should assist them in their labours. Dr. Monygham could by no manner of means forget the zeal of Father Beron, or his face, or the pitiless, monotonous voice in which he pronounced the words, "Will you confess now?"

This memory did not make him shudder, but it had made of him what he was in the eyes of respectable people, a man careless of common decencies, something between a clever vagabond and a disreputable doctor. But not all respectable people would have had the necessary delicacy of sentiment to understand with what trouble of mind and accuracy of vision Dr. Monygham, medical officer of the San Tome mine, remembered Father Beron, army chaplain, and once a secretary of a military commission. After all these years Dr. Monygham, in his rooms at the end of the hospital building in the San Tome gorge, remembered Father Beron as distinctly as ever. He remembered that priest at night, sometimes, in his sleep. On such nights the doctor waited for daylight with a candle lighted, and walking the whole length of his rooms to and fro, staring down at his bare feet, his arms hugging his sides tightly. He would dream of Father Beron sitting at the end of a long black table, behind which, in a row, appeared the heads, shoulders, and epaulettes of the military members, nibbling the feather of a quill pen, and listening with weary and impatient scorn to the protestations of some prisoner calling heaven to witness of his innocence, till he burst out, "What's the use of wasting time over that miserable nonsense! Let me take him outside for a while." And Father Beron would go outside after the clanking prisoner, led away between two soldiers. Such interludes happened on many days, many times, with many prisoners. When the prisoner returned he was ready to make a full confession, Father Beron would declare, leaning forward with that dull, surfeited look which can be seen in the eyes of gluttonous persons after a heavy meal.

The priest's inquisitorial instincts suffered but little from the want of classical apparatus of the Inquisition. At no time of the world's history have men been at a loss how to inflict mental and bodily anguish upon their fellow-creatures. This aptitude came to them in the growing complexity of their passions and the early refinement of their ingenuity. But it may safely be said that primeval man did not go to the trouble of inventing tortures. He was indolent and pure of heart. He brained his neighbour ferociously with a stone axe from necessity and without malice. The stupidest mind may invent a rankling phrase or brand the innocent with a cruel aspersion. A piece of string and a ramrod; a few muskets in combination with a length of hide rope; or even a simple mallet of heavy, hard wood applied with a swing to human fingers or to the joints of a human body is enough for the infliction of the most exquisite torture. The doctor had been a very stubborn prisoner, and, as a natural consequence of that "bad disposition" (so Father Beron called it), his subjugation had been very crushing and very complete. That is why the limp in his walk, the twist of his shoulders, the scars on his cheeks were so pronounced. His confessions, when they came at last, were very complete, too. Sometimes on the nights when he walked the floor, he wondered, grinding his teeth with shame and rage, at the fertility of his imagination when stimulated by a sort of pain which makes truth, honour, selfrespect, and life itself matters of little moment.

And he could not forget Father Beron with his monotonous phrase, "Will you confess now?" reaching him in an awful iteration and lucidity of meaning through the delirious incoherence of unbearable pain. He could not forget. But that was not the worst. Had he met Father Beron in the street after all these years Dr. Monygham was sure he would have quailed before him. This contingency was not to be feared now. Father Beron was dead; but the sickening certitude prevented Dr. Monygham from looking anybody in the face.

Dr. Monygham had become, in a manner, the slave of a ghost. It was obviously impossible to take his knowledge of Father Beron home to Europe. When making his extorted confessions to the Military Board, Dr. Monygham was not seeking to avoid death. He longed for it. Sitting half-naked for hours on the wet earth of his prison, and so motionless that the spiders, his companions, attached their webs to his matted hair, he consoled the misery of his soul with acute reasonings that he had confessed to crimes enough for a sentence of death — that they had gone too far with him to let him live to tell the tale.

But, as if by a refinement of cruelty, Dr. Monygham was left for months to decay slowly in the darkness of his grave-like prison. It was no doubt hoped that it would finish him off without the trouble of an execution; but Dr. Monygham had an iron constitution. It was Guzman Bento who died, not by the knife thrust of a conspirator, but from a stroke of apoplexy, and Dr. Monygham was liberated hastily. His fetters were struck off by the light of a candle, which, after months of gloom, hurt his eyes so much that he had to cover his face with his hands. He was raised up. His heart was beating violently with the fear of this liberty. When he tried to walk the extraordinary

lightness of his feet made him giddy, and he fell down. Two sticks were thrust into his hands, and he was pushed out of the passage. It was dusk; candles glimmered already in the windows of the officers' quarters round the courtyard; but the twilight sky dazed him by its enormous and overwhelming brilliance. A thin poncho hung over his naked, bony shoulders; the rags of his trousers came down no lower than his knees; an eighteen months' growth of hair fell in dirty grey locks on each side of his sharp cheek-bones. As he dragged himself past the guard-room door, one of the soldiers, lolling outside, moved by some obscure impulse, leaped forward with a strange laugh and rammed a broken old straw hat on his head. And Dr. Monygham, after having tottered, continued on his way. He advanced one stick, then one maimed foot, then the other stick; the other foot followed only a very short distance along the ground, toilfully, as though it were almost too heavy to be moved at all; and yet his legs under the hanging angles of the poncho appeared no thicker than the two sticks in his hands. A ceaseless trembling agitated his bent body, all his wasted limbs, his bony head, the conical, ragged crown of the sombrero, whose ample flat rim rested on his shoulders.

In such conditions of manner and attire did Dr. Monygham go forth to take possession of his liberty. And these conditions seemed to bind him indissolubly to the land of Costaguana like an awful procedure of naturalization, involving him deep in the national life, far deeper than any amount of success and honour could have done. They did away with his Europeanism; for Dr. Monygham had made himself an ideal conception of his disgrace. It was a conception eminently fit and proper for an officer and a gentleman. Dr. Monygham, before he went out to Costaguana, had been surgeon in one of Her Majesty's regiments of foot. It was a conception which took no account of physiological facts or reasonable arguments; but it was not stupid for all that. It was simple. A rule of conduct resting mainly on severe rejections is necessarily simple. Dr. Monygham's view of what it behoved him to do was severe; it was an ideal view, in so much that it was the imaginative exaggeration of a correct feeling. It was also, in its force, influence, and persistency, the view of an eminently loyal nature.

There was a great fund of loyalty in Dr. Monygham's nature. He had settled it all on Mrs. Gould's head. He believed her worthy of every devotion. At the bottom of his heart he felt an angry uneasiness before the prosperity of the San Tome mine, because its growth was robbing her of all peace of mind. Costaguana was no place for a woman of that kind. What could Charles Gould have been thinking of when he brought her out there! It was outrageous! And the doctor had watched the course of events with a grim and distant reserve which, he imagined, his lamentable history imposed upon him.

Loyalty to Mrs. Gould could not, however, leave out of account the safety of her husband. The doctor had contrived to be in town at the critical time because he mistrusted Charles Gould. He considered him hopelessly infected with the madness of revolutions. That is why he hobbled in distress in the drawing-room of the Casa Gould on that morning, exclaiming, "Decoud, Decoud!" in a tone of mournful irritation.

Mrs. Gould, her colour heightened, and with glistening eyes, looked straight before her at the sudden enormity of that disaster. The finger-tips on one hand rested lightly on a low little table by her side, and the arm trembled right up to the shoulder. The sun, which looks late upon Sulaco, issuing in all the fulness of its power high up on the sky from behind the dazzling snow-edge of Higueroa, had precipitated the delicate, smooth, pearly greyness of light, in which the town lies steeped during the early hours, into sharp-cut masses of black shade and spaces of hot, blinding glare. Three long rectangles of sunshine fell through the windows of the sala; while just across the street the front of the Avellanos's house appeared very sombre in its own shadow seen through the flood of light.

A voice said at the door, "What of Decoud?"

It was Charles Gould. They had not heard him coming along the corredor. His glance just glided over his wife and struck full at the doctor.

"You have brought some news, doctor?"

Dr. Monygham blurted it all out at once, in the rough. For some time after he had done, the Administrador of the San Tome mine remained looking at him without a word. Mrs. Gould sank into a low chair with her hands lying on her lap. A silence reigned between those three motionless persons. Then Charles Gould spoke —

"You must want some breakfast."

He stood aside to let his wife pass first. She caught up her husband's hand and pressed it as she went out, raising her handkerchief to her eyes. The sight of her husband had brought Antonia's position to her mind, and she could not contain her tears at the thought of the poor girl. When she rejoined the two men in the diningroom after having bathed her face, Charles Gould was saying to the doctor across the table —

"No, there does not seem any room for doubt."

And the doctor assented.

"No, I don't see myself how we could question that wretched Hirsch's tale. It's only too true, I fear."

She sat down desolately at the head of the table and looked from one to the other. The two men, without absolutely turning their heads away, tried to avoid her glance. The doctor even made a show of being hungry; he seized his knife and fork, and began to eat with emphasis, as if on the stage. Charles Gould made no pretence of the sort; with his elbows raised squarely, he twisted both ends of his flaming moustaches — they were so long that his hands were quite away from his face.

"I am not surprised," he muttered, abandoning his moustaches and throwing one arm over the back of his chair. His face was calm with that immobility of expression which betrays the intensity of a mental struggle. He felt that this accident had brought to a point all the consequences involved in his line of conduct, with its conscious and subconscious intentions. There must be an end now of this silent reserve, of that air of impenetrability behind which he had been safeguarding his dignity. It was the least ignoble form of dissembling forced upon him by that parody of civilized institutions

which offended his intelligence, his uprightness, and his sense of right. He was like his father. He had no ironic eye. He was not amused at the absurdities that prevail in this world. They hurt him in his innate gravity. He felt that the miserable death of that poor Decoud took from him his inaccessible position of a force in the background. It committed him openly unless he wished to throw up the game — and that was impossible. The material interests required from him the sacrifice of his aloofness — perhaps his own safety too. And he reflected that Decoud's separationist plan had not gone to the bottom with the lost silver.

The only thing that was not changed was his position towards Mr. Holroyd. The head of silver and steel interests had entered into Costaguana affairs with a sort of passion. Costaguana had become necessary to his existence; in the San Tome mine he had found the imaginative satisfaction which other minds would get from drama, from art, or from a risky and fascinating sport. It was a special form of the great man's extravagance, sanctioned by a moral intention, big enough to flatter his vanity. Even in this aberration of his genius he served the progress of the world. Charles Gould felt sure of being understood with precision and judged with the indulgence of their common passion. Nothing now could surprise or startle this great man. And Charles Gould imagined himself writing a letter to San Francisco in some such words: “. . . The men at the head of the movement are dead or have fled; the civil organization of the province is at an end for the present; the Blanco party in Sulaco has collapsed inexcusably, but in the characteristic manner of this country. But Barrios, untouched in Cayta, remains still available. I am forced to take up openly the plan of a provincial revolution as the only way of placing the enormous material interests involved in the prosperity and peace of Sulaco in a position of permanent safety. . . .” That was clear. He saw these words as if written in letters of fire upon the wall at which he was gazing abstractedly.

Mrs Gould watched his abstraction with dread. It was a domestic and frightful phenomenon that darkened and chilled the house for her like a thundercloud passing over the sun. Charles Gould's fits of abstraction depicted the energetic concentration of a will haunted by a fixed idea. A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane. He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice; for may he not bring the heaven down pitilessly upon a loved head? The eyes of Mrs. Gould, watching her husband's profile, filled with tears again. And again she seemed to see the despair of the unfortunate Antonia.

“What would I have done if Charley had been drowned while we were engaged?” she exclaimed, mentally, with horror. Her heart turned to ice, while her cheeks flamed up as if scorched by the blaze of a funeral pyre consuming all her earthly affections. The tears burst out of her eyes.

“Antonia will kill herself!” she cried out.

This cry fell into the silence of the room with strangely little effect. Only the doctor, crumbling up a piece of bread, with his head inclined on one side, raised his face, and the few long hairs sticking out of his shaggy eyebrows stirred in a slight frown. Dr.

Monygham thought quite sincerely that Decoud was a singularly unworthy object for any woman's affection. Then he lowered his head again, with a curl of his lip, and his heart full of tender admiration for Mrs. Gould.

"She thinks of that girl," he said to himself; "she thinks of the Viola children; she thinks of me; of the wounded; of the miners; she always thinks of everybody who is poor and miserable! But what will she do if Charles gets the worst of it in this infernal scrimmage those confounded Avellanos have drawn him into? No one seems to be thinking of her."

Charles Gould, staring at the wall, pursued his reflections subtly.

"I shall write to Holroyd that the San Tome mine is big enough to take in hand the making of a new State. It'll please him. It'll reconcile him to the risk."

But was Barrios really available? Perhaps. But he was inaccessible. To send off a boat to Cayta was no longer possible, since Sotillo was master of the harbour, and had a steamer at his disposal. And now, with all the democrats in the province up, and every Campo township in a state of disturbance, where could he find a man who would make his way successfully overland to Cayta with a message, a ten days' ride at least; a man of courage and resolution, who would avoid arrest or murder, and if arrested would faithfully eat the paper? The Capataz de Cargadores would have been just such a man. But the Capataz of the Cargadores was no more.

And Charles Gould, withdrawing his eyes from the wall, said gently, "That Hirsch! What an extraordinary thing! Saved himself by clinging to the anchor, did he? I had no idea that he was still in Sulaco. I thought he had gone back overland to Esmeralda more than a week ago. He came here once to talk to me about his hide business and some other things. I made it clear to him that nothing could be done."

"He was afraid to start back on account of Hernandez being about," remarked the doctor.

"And but for him we might not have known anything of what has happened," marvelled Charles Gould.

Mrs. Gould cried out —

"Antonia must not know! She must not be told. Not now."

"Nobody's likely to carry the news," remarked the doctor. "It's no one's interest. Moreover, the people here are afraid of Hernandez as if he were the devil." He turned to Charles Gould. "It's even awkward, because if you wanted to communicate with the refugees you could find no messenger. When Hernandez was ranging hundreds of miles away from here the Sulaco populace used to shudder at the tales of him roasting his prisoners alive."

"Yes," murmured Charles Gould; "Captain Mitchell's Capataz was the only man in the town who had seen Hernandez eye to eye. Father Corbelan employed him. He opened the communications first. It is a pity that —"

His voice was covered by the booming of the great bell of the cathedral. Three single strokes, one after another, burst out explosively, dying away in deep and mellow vibrations. And then all the bells in the tower of every church, convent, or chapel in

town, even those that had remained shut up for years, pealed out together with a crash. In this furious flood of metallic uproar there was a power of suggesting images of strife and violence which blanched Mrs. Gould's cheek. Basilio, who had been waiting at table, shrinking within himself, clung to the sideboard with chattering teeth. It was impossible to hear yourself speak.

"Shut these windows!" Charles Gould yelled at him, angrily. All the other servants, terrified at what they took for the signal of a general massacre, had rushed upstairs, tumbling over each other, men and women, the obscure and generally invisible population of the ground floor on the four sides of the patio. The women, screaming "Misericordia!" ran right into the room, and, falling on their knees against the walls, began to cross themselves convulsively. The staring heads of men blocked the doorway in an instant — mozos from the stable, gardeners, nondescript helpers living on the crumbs of the munificent house — and Charles Gould beheld all the extent of his domestic establishment, even to the gatekeeper. This was a half-paralyzed old man, whose long white locks fell down to his shoulders: an heirloom taken up by Charles Gould's familial piety. He could remember Henry Gould, an Englishman and a Costaguanero of the second generation, chief of the Sulaco province; he had been his personal mozo years and years ago in peace and war; had been allowed to attend his master in prison; had, on the fatal morning, followed the firing squad; and, peeping from behind one of the cypresses growing along the wall of the Franciscan Convent, had seen, with his eyes starting out of his head, Don Enrique throw up his hands and fall with his face in the dust. Charles Gould noted particularly the big patriarchal head of that witness in the rear of the other servants. But he was surprised to see a shrivelled old hag or two, of whose existence within the walls of his house he had not been aware. They must have been the mothers, or even the grandmothers of some of his people. There were a few children, too, more or less naked, crying and clinging to the legs of their elders. He had never before noticed any sign of a child in his patio. Even Leonarda, the camerista, came in a fright, pushing through, with her spoiled, pouting face of a favourite maid, leading the Viola girls by the hand. The crockery rattled on table and sideboard, and the whole house seemed to sway in the deafening wave of sound.

Chapter 5

During the night the expectant populace had taken possession of all the belfries in the town in order to welcome Pedrito Montero, who was making his entry after having slept the night in Rincon. And first came straggling in through the land gate the armed mob of all colours, complexions, types, and states of raggedness, calling themselves the Sulaco National Guard, and commanded by Senor Gamacho. Through the middle of the street streamed, like a torrent of rubbish, a mass of straw hats, ponchos, gun-barrels, with an enormous green and yellow flag flapping in their midst, in a cloud of dust, to the furious beating of drums. The spectators recoiled against the walls of the

houses shouting their Vivas! Behind the rabble could be seen the lances of the cavalry, the "army" of Pedro Montero. He advanced between Senores Fuentes and Gamacho at the head of his llaneros, who had accomplished the feat of crossing the Paramos of the Higuerota in a snow-storm. They rode four abreast, mounted on confiscated Campo horses, clad in the heterogeneous stock of roadside stores they had looted hurriedly in their rapid ride through the northern part of the province; for Pedro Montero had been in a great hurry to occupy Sulaco. The handkerchiefs knotted loosely around their bare throats were glaringly new, and all the right sleeves of their cotton shirts had been cut off close to the shoulder for greater freedom in throwing the lazo. Emaciated greybeards rode by the side of lean dark youths, marked by all the hardships of campaigning, with strips of raw beef twined round the crowns of their hats, and huge iron spurs fastened to their naked heels. Those that in the passes of the mountain had lost their lances had provided themselves with the goads used by the Campo cattlemen: slender shafts of palm fully ten feet long, with a lot of loose rings jingling under the ironshod point. They were armed with knives and revolvers. A haggard fearlessness characterized the expression of all these sun-blackened countenances; they glared down haughtily with their scorched eyes at the crowd, or, blinking upwards insolently, pointed out to each other some particular head amongst the women at the windows. When they had ridden into the Plaza and caught sight of the equestrian statue of the King dazzlingly white in the sunshine, towering enormous and motionless above the surges of the crowd, with its eternal gesture of saluting, a murmur of surprise ran through their ranks. "What is that saint in the big hat?" they asked each other.

They were a good sample of the cavalry of the plains with which Pedro Montero had helped so much the victorious career of his brother the general. The influence which that man, brought up in coast towns, acquired in a short time over the plainsmen of the Republic can be ascribed only to a genius for treachery of so effective a kind that it must have appeared to those violent men but little removed from a state of utter savagery, as the perfection of sagacity and virtue. The popular lore of all nations testifies that duplicity and cunning, together with bodily strength, were looked upon, even more than courage, as heroic virtues by primitive mankind. To overcome your adversary was the great affair of life. Courage was taken for granted. But the use of intelligence awakened wonder and respect. Stratagems, providing they did not fail, were honourable; the easy massacre of an unsuspecting enemy evoked no feelings but those of gladness, pride, and admiration. Not perhaps that primitive men were more faithless than their descendants of to-day, but that they went straighter to their aim, and were more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality.

We have changed since. The use of intelligence awakens little wonder and less respect. But the ignorant and barbarous plainsmen engaging in civil strife followed willingly a leader who often managed to deliver their enemies bound, as it were, into their hands. Pedro Montero had a talent for lulling his adversaries into a sense of security. And as men learn wisdom with extreme slowness, and are always ready to believe promises that flatter their secret hopes, Pedro Montero was successful time after time. Whether only

a servant or some inferior official in the Costaguana Legation in Paris, he had rushed back to his country directly he heard that his brother had emerged from the obscurity of his frontier commandancia. He had managed to deceive by his gift of plausibility the chiefs of the Ribierist movement in the capital, and even the acute agent of the San Tome mine had failed to understand him thoroughly. At once he had obtained an enormous influence over his brother. They were very much alike in appearance, both bald, with bunches of crisp hair above their ears, arguing the presence of some negro blood. Only Pedro was smaller than the general, more delicate altogether, with an ape-like faculty for imitating all the outward signs of refinement and distinction, and with a parrot-like talent for languages. Both brothers had received some elementary instruction by the munificence of a great European traveller, to whom their father had been a body-servant during his journeys in the interior of the country. In General Montero's case it enabled him to rise from the ranks. Pedrito, the younger, incorrigibly lazy and slovenly, had drifted aimlessly from one coast town to another, hanging about counting-houses, attaching himself to strangers as a sort of valet-de-place, picking up an easy and disreputable living. His ability to read did nothing for him but fill his head with absurd visions. His actions were usually determined by motives so improbable in themselves as to escape the penetration of a rational person.

Thus at first sight the agent of the Gould Concession in Sta. Marta had credited him with the possession of sane views, and even with a restraining power over the general's everlastingly discontented vanity. It could never have entered his head that Pedrito Montero, lackey or inferior scribe, lodged in the garrets of the various Parisian hotels where the Costaguana Legation used to shelter its diplomatic dignity, had been devouring the lighter sort of historical works in the French language, such, for instance as the books of Imbert de Saint Amand upon the Second Empire. But Pedrito had been struck by the splendour of a brilliant court, and had conceived the idea of an existence for himself where, like the Duc de Morny, he would associate the command of every pleasure with the conduct of political affairs and enjoy power supremely in every way. Nobody could have guessed that. And yet this was one of the immediate causes of the Monterist Revolution. This will appear less incredible by the reflection that the fundamental causes were the same as ever, rooted in the political immaturity of the people, in the indolence of the upper classes and the mental darkness of the lower.

Pedrito Montero saw in the elevation of his brother the road wide open to his wildest imaginings. This was what made the Monterist pronunciamiento so unpreventable. The general himself probably could have been bought off, pacified with flatteries, despatched on a diplomatic mission to Europe. It was his brother who had egged him on from first to last. He wanted to become the most brilliant statesman of South America. He did not desire supreme power. He would have been afraid of its labour and risk, in fact. Before all, Pedrito Montero, taught by his European experience, meant to acquire a serious fortune for himself. With this object in view he obtained from his brother, on the very morrow of the successful battle, the permission to push on over

the mountains and take possession of Sulaco. Sulaco was the land of future prosperity, the chosen land of material progress, the only province in the Republic of interest to European capitalists. Pedrito Montero, following the example of the Duc de Morny, meant to have his share of this prosperity. This is what he meant literally. Now his brother was master of the country, whether as President, Dictator, or even as Emperor — why not as an Emperor? — he meant to demand a share in every enterprise — in railways, in mines, in sugar estates, in cotton mills, in land companies, in each and every undertaking — as the price of his protection. The desire to be on the spot early was the real cause of the celebrated ride over the mountains with some two hundred llaneros, an enterprise of which the dangers had not appeared at first clearly to his impatience. Coming from a series of victories, it seemed to him that a Montero had only to appear to be master of the situation. This illusion had betrayed him into a rashness of which he was becoming aware. As he rode at the head of his llaneros he regretted that there were so few of them. The enthusiasm of the populace reassured him. They yelled “Viva Montero! Viva Pedrito!” In order to make them still more enthusiastic, and from the natural pleasure he had in dissembling, he dropped the reins on his horse’s neck, and with a tremendous effect of familiarity and confidence slipped his hands under the arms of Senores Fuentes and Gamacho. In that posture, with a ragged town mozo holding his horse by the bridle, he rode triumphantly across the Plaza to the door of the Intendencia. Its old gloomy walls seemed to shake in the acclamations that rent the air and covered the crashing peals of the cathedral bells.

Pedro Montero, the brother of the general, dismounted into a shouting and perspiring throng of enthusiasts whom the ragged Nationals were pushing back fiercely. Ascending a few steps he surveyed the large crowd gaping at him and the bullet-speckled walls of the houses opposite lightly veiled by a sunny haze of dust. The word “Pourvenir” in immense black capitals, alternating with broken windows, stared at him across the vast space; and he thought with delight of the hour of vengeance, because he was very sure of laying his hands upon Decoud. On his left hand, Gamacho, big and hot, wiping his hairy wet face, uncovered a set of yellow fangs in a grin of stupid hilarity. On his right, Senor Fuentes, small and lean, looked on with compressed lips. The crowd stared literally open-mouthed, lost in eager stillness, as though they had expected the great guerrillero, the famous Pedrito, to begin scattering at once some sort of visible largesse. What he began was a speech. He began it with the shouted word “Citizens!” which reached even those in the middle of the Plaza. Afterwards the greater part of the citizens remained fascinated by the orator’s action alone, his tip-toeing, the arms flung above his head with the fists clenched, a hand laid flat upon the heart, the silver gleam of rolling eyes, the sweeping, pointing, embracing gestures, a hand laid familiarly on Gamacho’s shoulder; a hand waved formally towards the little black-coated person of Senor Fuentes, advocate and politician and a true friend of the people. The vivas of those nearest to the orator bursting out suddenly propagated themselves irregularly to the confines of the crowd, like flames running over dry grass, and expired in the opening of the streets. In the intervals, over the swarming Plaza

brooded a heavy silence, in which the mouth of the orator went on opening and shutting, and detached phrases — "The happiness of the people," "Sons of the country," "The entire world, el mundo entero" — reached even the packed steps of the cathedral with a feeble clear ring, thin as the buzzing of a mosquito. But the orator struck his breast; he seemed to prance between his two supporters. It was the supreme effort of his peroration. Then the two smaller figures disappeared from the public gaze and the enormous Gamacho, left alone, advanced, raising his hat high above his head. Then he covered himself proudly and yelled out, "Ciudadanos!" A dull roar greeted Senor Gamacho, ex-pedlar of the Campo, Commandante of the National Guards.

Upstairs Pedrito Montero walked about rapidly from one wrecked room of the Intendencia to another, snarling incessantly —

"What stupidity! What destruction!"

Senor Fuentes, following, would relax his taciturn disposition to murmur —

"It is all the work of Gamacho and his Nationals;" and then, inclining his head on his left shoulder, would press together his lips so firmly that a little hollow would appear at each corner. He had his nomination for Political Chief of the town in his pocket, and was all impatience to enter upon his functions.

In the long audience room, with its tall mirrors all starred by stones, the hangings torn down and the canopy over the platform at the upper end pulled to pieces, the vast, deep muttering of the crowd and the howling voice of Gamacho speaking just below reached them through the shutters as they stood idly in dimness and desolation.

"The brute!" observed his Excellency Don Pedro Montero through clenched teeth. "We must contrive as quickly as possible to send him and his Nationals out there to fight Hernandez."

The new Gefe Politico only jerked his head sideways, and took a puff at his cigarette in sign of his agreement with this method for ridding the town of Gamacho and his inconvenient rabble.

Pedrito Montero looked with disgust at the absolutely bare floor, and at the belt of heavy gilt picture-frames running round the room, out of which the remnants of torn and slashed canvases fluttered like dingy rags.

"We are not barbarians," he said.

This was what said his Excellency, the popular Pedrito, the guerrillero skilled in the art of laying ambushes, charged by his brother at his own demand with the organization of Sulaco on democratic principles. The night before, during the consultation with his partisans, who had come out to meet him in Rincon, he had opened his intentions to Senor Fuentes —

"We shall organize a popular vote, by yes or no, confiding the destinies of our beloved country to the wisdom and valiance of my heroic brother, the invincible general. A plebiscite. Do you understand?"

And Senor Fuentes, puffing out his leathery cheeks, had inclined his head slightly to the left, letting a thin, bluish jet of smoke escape through his pursed lips. He had understood.

His Excellency was exasperated at the devastation. Not a single chair, table, sofa, etagere or console had been left in the state rooms of the Intendencia. His Excellency, though twitching all over with rage, was restrained from bursting into violence by a sense of his remoteness and isolation. His heroic brother was very far away. Meantime, how was he going to take his siesta? He had expected to find comfort and luxury in the Intendencia after a year of hard camp life, ending with the hardships and privations of the daring dash upon Sulaco — upon the province which was worth more in wealth and influence than all the rest of the Republic's territory. He would get even with Gamacho by-and-by. And Senor Gamacho's oration, delectable to popular ears, went on in the heat and glare of the Plaza like the uncouth howlings of an inferior sort of devil cast into a white-hot furnace. Every moment he had to wipe his streaming face with his bare fore-arm; he had flung off his coat, and had turned up the sleeves of his shirt high above the elbows; but he kept on his head the large cocked hat with white plumes. His ingenuousness cherished this sign of his rank as Commandante of the National Guards. Approving and grave murmurs greeted his periods. His opinion was that war should be declared at once against France, England, Germany, and the United States, who, by introducing railways, mining enterprises, colonization, and under such other shallow pretences, aimed at robbing poor people of their lands, and with the help of these Goths and paralytics, the aristocrats would convert them into toiling and miserable slaves. And the leperos, flinging about the corners of their dirty white mantas, yelled their approbation. General Montero, Gamacho howled with conviction, was the only man equal to the patriotic task. They assented to that, too.

The morning was wearing on; there were already signs of disruption, currents and eddies in the crowd. Some were seeking the shade of the walls and under the trees of the Alameda. Horsemen spurred through, shouting; groups of sombreros set level on heads against the vertical sun were drifting away into the streets, where the open doors of pulperias revealed an enticing gloom resounding with the gentle tinkling of guitars. The National Guards were thinking of siesta, and the eloquence of Gamacho, their chief, was exhausted. Later on, when, in the cooler hours of the afternoon, they tried to assemble again for further consideration of public affairs, detachments of Montero's cavalry camped on the Alameda charged them without parley, at speed, with long lances levelled at their flying backs as far as the ends of the streets. The National Guards of Sulaco were surprised by this proceeding. But they were not indignant. No Costaguanero had ever learned to question the eccentricities of a military force. They were part of the natural order of things. This must be, they concluded, some kind of administrative measure, no doubt. But the motive of it escaped their unaided intelligence, and their chief and orator, Gamacho, Commandante of the National Guard, was lying drunk and asleep in the bosom of his family. His bare feet were upturned in the shadows repulsively, in the manner of a corpse. His eloquent mouth had dropped open. His youngest daughter, scratching her head with one hand, with the other waved a green bough over his scorched and peeling face.

Chapter 6

The declining sun had shifted the shadows from west to east amongst the houses of the town. It had shifted them upon the whole extent of the immense Campo, with the white walls of its haciendas on the knolls dominating the green distances; with its grass-thatched ranches crouching in the folds of ground by the banks of streams; with the dark islands of clustered trees on a clear sea of grass, and the precipitous range of the Cordillera, immense and motionless, emerging from the billows of the lower forests like the barren coast of a land of giants. The sunset rays striking the snow-slope of Higuerota from afar gave it an air of rosy youth, while the serrated mass of distant peaks remained black, as if calcined in the fiery radiance. The undulating surface of the forests seemed powdered with pale gold dust; and away there, beyond Rincon, hidden from the town by two wooded spurs, the rocks of the San Tome gorge, with the flat wall of the mountain itself crowned by gigantic ferns, took on warm tones of brown and yellow, with red rusty streaks, and the dark green clumps of bushes rooted in crevices. From the plain the stamp sheds and the houses of the mine appeared dark and small, high up, like the nests of birds clustered on the ledges of a cliff. The zigzag paths resembled faint tracings scratched on the wall of a cyclopean blockhouse. To the two serenos of the mine on patrol duty, strolling, carbine in hand, and watchful eyes, in the shade of the trees lining the stream near the bridge, Don Pepe, descending the path from the upper plateau, appeared no bigger than a large beetle.

With his air of aimless, insect-like going to and fro upon the face of the rock, Don Pepe's figure kept on descending steadily, and, when near the bottom, sank at last behind the roofs of store-houses, forges, and workshops. For a time the pair of serenos strolled back and forth before the bridge, on which they had stopped a horseman holding a large white envelope in his hand. Then Don Pepe, emerging in the village street from amongst the houses, not a stone's throw from the frontier bridge, approached, striding in wide dark trousers tucked into boots, a white linen jacket, sabre at his side, and revolver at his belt. In this disturbed time nothing could find the Senor Gobernador with his boots off, as the saying is.

At a slight nod from one of the serenos, the man, a messenger from the town, dismounted, and crossed the bridge, leading his horse by the bridle.

Don Pepe received the letter from his other hand, slapped his left side and his hips in succession, feeling for his spectacle case. After settling the heavy silvermounted affair astride his nose, and adjusting it carefully behind his ears, he opened the envelope, holding it up at about a foot in front of his eyes. The paper he pulled out contained some three lines of writing. He looked at them for a long time. His grey moustache moved slightly up and down, and the wrinkles, radiating at the corners of his eyes, ran together. He nodded serenely. "Bueno," he said. "There is no answer."

Then, in his quiet, kindly way, he engaged in a cautious conversation with the man, who was willing to talk cheerily, as if something lucky had happened to him recently. He had seen from a distance Sotillo's infantry camped along the shore of the harbour

on each side of the Custom House. They had done no damage to the buildings. The foreigners of the railway remained shut up within the yards. They were no longer anxious to shoot poor people. He cursed the foreigners; then he reported Montero's entry and the rumours of the town. The poor were going to be made rich now. That was very good. More he did not know, and, breaking into propitiatory smiles, he intimated that he was hungry and thirsty. The old major directed him to go to the alcalde of the first village. The man rode off, and Don Pepe, striding slowly in the direction of a little wooden belfry, looked over a hedge into a little garden, and saw Father Roman sitting in a white hammock slung between two orange trees in front of the presbytery.

An enormous tamarind shaded with its dark foliage the whole white framehouse. A young Indian girl with long hair, big eyes, and small hands and feet, carried out a wooden chair, while a thin old woman, crabbed and vigilant, watched her all the time from the verandah.

Don Pepe sat down in the chair and lighted a cigar; the priest drew in an immense quantity of snuff out of the hollow of his palm. On his reddish-brown face, worn, hollowed as if crumbled, the eyes, fresh and candid, sparkled like two black diamonds.

Don Pepe, in a mild and humorous voice, informed Father Roman that Pedrito Montero, by the hand of Senor Fuentes, had asked him on what terms he would surrender the mine in proper working order to a legally constituted commission of patriotic citizens, escorted by a small military force. The priest cast his eyes up to heaven. However, Don Pepe continued, the mozo who brought the letter said that Don Carlos Gould was alive, and so far unmolested.

Father Roman expressed in a few words his thankfulness at hearing of the Senor Administrador's safety.

The hour of oration had gone by in the silvery ringing of a bell in the little belfry. The belt of forest closing the entrance of the valley stood like a screen between the low sun and the street of the village. At the other end of the rocky gorge, between the walls of basalt and granite, a forest-clad mountain, hiding all the range from the San Tome dwellers, rose steeply, lighted up and leafy to the very top. Three small rosy clouds hung motionless overhead in the great depth of blue. Knots of people sat in the street between the wattled huts. Before the casa of the alcalde, the foremen of the night-shift, already assembled to lead their men, squatted on the ground in a circle of leather skull-caps, and, bowing their bronze backs, were passing round the gourd of mate. The mozo from the town, having fastened his horse to a wooden post before the door, was telling them the news of Sulaco as the blackened gourd of the decoction passed from hand to hand. The grave alcalde himself, in a white waistcloth and a flowered chintz gown with sleeves, open wide upon his naked stout person with an effect of a gaudy bathing robe, stood by, wearing a rough beaver hat at the back of his head, and grasping a tall staff with a silver knob in his hand. These insignia of his dignity had been conferred upon him by the Administration of the mine, the fountain of honour, of prosperity, and peace. He had been one of the first immigrants into this valley; his sons and sons-in-law worked within the mountain which seemed

with its treasures to pour down the thundering ore shoots of the upper mesa, the gifts of well-being, security, and justice upon the toilers. He listened to the news from the town with curiosity and indifference, as if concerning another world than his own. And it was true that they appeared to him so. In a very few years the sense of belonging to a powerful organization had been developed in these harassed, half-wild Indians. They were proud of, and attached to, the mine. It had secured their confidence and belief. They invested it with a protecting and invincible virtue as though it were a fetish made by their own hands, for they were ignorant, and in other respects did not differ appreciably from the rest of mankind which puts infinite trust in its own creations. It never entered the alcalde's head that the mine could fail in its protection and force. Politics were good enough for the people of the town and the Campo. His yellow, round face, with wide nostrils, and motionless in expression, resembled a fierce full moon. He listened to the excited vapourings of the mozo without misgivings, without surprise, without any active sentiment whatever.

Padre Roman sat dejectedly balancing himself, his feet just touching the ground, his hands gripping the edge of the hammock. With less confidence, but as ignorant as his flock, he asked the major what did he think was going to happen now.

Don Pepe, bolt upright in the chair, folded his hands peacefully on the hilt of his sword, standing perpendicular between his thighs, and answered that he did not know. The mine could be defended against any force likely to be sent to take possession. On the other hand, from the arid character of the valley, when the regular supplies from the Campo had been cut off, the population of the three villages could be starved into submission. Don Pepe exposed these contingencies with serenity to Father Roman, who, as an old campaigner, was able to understand the reasoning of a military man. They talked with simplicity and directness. Father Roman was saddened at the idea of his flock being scattered or else enslaved. He had no illusions as to their fate, not from penetration, but from long experience of political atrocities, which seemed to him fatal and unavoidable in the life of a State. The working of the usual public institutions presented itself to him most distinctly as a series of calamities overtaking private individuals and flowing logically from each other through hate, revenge, folly, and rapacity, as though they had been part of a divine dispensation. Father Roman's clear-sightedness was served by an uninformed intelligence; but his heart, preserving its tenderness amongst scenes of carnage, spoliation, and violence, abhorred these calamities the more as his association with the victims was closer. He entertained towards the Indians of the valley feelings of paternal scorn. He had been marrying, baptizing, confessing, absolving, and burying the workers of the San Tome mine with dignity and unction for five years or more; and he believed in the sacredness of these ministrations, which made them his own in a spiritual sense. They were dear to his sacerdotal supremacy. Mrs. Gould's earnest interest in the concerns of these people enhanced their importance in the priest's eyes, because it really augmented his own. When talking over with her the innumerable Marias and Brigidas of the villages, he felt his own humanity expand. Padre Roman was incapable of fanaticism to an almost

reprehensible degree. The English senora was evidently a heretic; but at the same time she seemed to him wonderful and angelic. Whenever that confused state of his feelings occurred to him, while strolling, for instance, his breviary under his arm, in the wide shade of the tamarind, he would stop short to inhale with a strong snuffling noise a large quantity of snuff, and shake his head profoundly. At the thought of what might befall the illustrious senora presently, he became gradually overcome with dismay. He voiced it in an agitated murmur. Even Don Pepe lost his serenity for a moment. He leaned forward stiffly.

“Listen, Padre. The very fact that those thieving macaques in Sulaco are trying to find out the price of my honour proves that Senor Don Carlos and all in the Casa Gould are safe. As to my honour, that also is safe, as every man, woman, and child knows. But the negro Liberals who have snatched the town by surprise do not know that. Bueno. Let them sit and wait. While they wait they can do no harm.”

And he regained his composure. He regained it easily, because whatever happened his honour of an old officer of Paez was safe. He had promised Charles Gould that at the approach of an armed force he would defend the gorge just long enough to give himself time to destroy scientifically the whole plant, buildings, and workshops of the mine with heavy charges of dynamite; block with ruins the main tunnel, break down the pathways, blow up the dam of the water-power, shatter the famous Gould Concession into fragments, flying sky high out of a horrified world. The mine had got hold of Charles Gould with a grip as deadly as ever it had laid upon his father. But this extreme resolution had seemed to Don Pepe the most natural thing in the world. His measures had been taken with judgment. Everything was prepared with a careful completeness. And Don Pepe folded his hands pacifically on his sword hilt, and nodded at the priest. In his excitement, Father Roman had flung snuff in handfuls at his face, and, all besmeared with tobacco, round-eyed, and beside himself, had got out of the hammock to walk about, uttering exclamations.

Don Pepe stroked his grey and pendant moustache, whose fine ends hung far below the clean-cut line of his jaw, and spoke with a conscious pride in his reputation.

“So, Padre, I don’t know what will happen. But I know that as long as I am here Don Carlos can speak to that macaque, Pedrito Montero, and threaten the destruction of the mine with perfect assurance that he will be taken seriously. For people know me.”

He began to turn the cigar in his lips a little nervously, and went on —

“But that is talk — good for the politicians. I am a military man. I do not know what may happen. But I know what ought to be done — the mine should march upon the town with guns, axes, knives tied up to sticks — por Dios. That is what should be done. Only — ”

His folded hands twitched on the hilt. The cigar turned faster in the corner of his lips.

“And who should lead but I? Unfortunately — observe — I have given my word of honour to Don Carlos not to let the mine fall into the hands of these thieves. In war

— you know this, Padre — the fate of battles is uncertain, and whom could I leave here to act for me in case of defeat? The explosives are ready. But it would require a man of high honour, of intelligence, of judgment, of courage, to carry out the prepared destruction. Somebody I can trust with my honour as I can trust myself. Another old officer of Paez, for instance. Or — or — perhaps one of Paez's old chaplains would do.”

He got up, long, lank, upright, hard, with his martial moustache and the bony structure of his face, from which the glance of the sunken eyes seemed to transfix the priest, who stood still, an empty wooden snuff-box held upside down in his hand, and glared back, speechless, at the governor of the mine.

Chapter 7

At about that time, in the Intendencia of Sulaco, Charles Gould was assuring Pedrito Montero, who had sent a request for his presence there, that he would never let the mine pass out of his hands for the profit of a Government who had robbed him of it. The Gould Concession could not be resumed. His father had not desired it. The son would never surrender it. He would never surrender it alive. And once dead, where was the power capable of resuscitating such an enterprise in all its vigour and wealth out of the ashes and ruin of destruction? There was no such power in the country. And where was the skill and capital abroad that would condescend to touch such an ill-omened corpse? Charles Gould talked in the impassive tone which had for many years served to conceal his anger and contempt. He suffered. He was disgusted with what he had to say. It was too much like heroics. In him the strictly practical instinct was in profound discord with the almost mystic view he took of his right. The Gould Concession was symbolic of abstract justice. Let the heavens fall. But since the San Tome mine had developed into world-wide fame his threat had enough force and effectiveness to reach the rudimentary intelligence of Pedro Montero, wrapped up as it was in the futilities of historical anecdotes. The Gould Concession was a serious asset in the country's finance, and, what was more, in the private budgets of many officials as well. It was traditional. It was known. It was said. It was credible. Every Minister of Interior drew a salary from the San Tome mine. It was natural. And Pedrito intended to be Minister of the Interior and President of the Council in his brother's Government. The Duc de Morny had occupied those high posts during the Second French Empire with conspicuous advantage to himself.

A table, a chair, a wooden bedstead had been procured for His Excellency, who, after a short siesta, rendered absolutely necessary by the labours and the pomps of his entry into Sulaco, had been getting hold of the administrative machine by making appointments, giving orders, and signing proclamations. Alone with Charles Gould in the audience room, His Excellency managed with his well-known skill to conceal his annoyance and consternation. He had begun at first to talk loftily of confiscation, but the want of all proper feeling and mobility in the Senor Administrador's features ended

by affecting adversely his power of masterful expression. Charles Gould had repeated: "The Government can certainly bring about the destruction of the San Tome mine if it likes; but without me it can do nothing else." It was an alarming pronouncement, and well calculated to hurt the sensibilities of a politician whose mind is bent upon the spoils of victory. And Charles Gould said also that the destruction of the San Tome mine would cause the ruin of other undertakings, the withdrawal of European capital, the withholding, most probably, of the last instalment of the foreign loan. That stony fiend of a man said all these things (which were accessible to His Excellency's intelligence) in a coldblooded manner which made one shudder.

A long course of reading historical works, light and gossipy in tone, carried out in garrets of Parisian hotels, sprawling on an untidy bed, to the neglect of his duties, menial or otherwise, had affected the manners of Pedro Montero. Had he seen around him the splendour of the old Intendencia, the magnificent hangings, the gilt furniture ranged along the walls; had he stood upon a dais on a noble square of red carpet, he would have probably been very dangerous from a sense of success and elevation. But in this sacked and devastated residence, with the three pieces of common furniture huddled up in the middle of the vast apartment, Pedrito's imagination was subdued by a feeling of insecurity and impermanence. That feeling and the firm attitude of Charles Gould who had not once, so far, pronounced the word "Excellency," diminished him in his own eyes. He assumed the tone of an enlightened man of the world, and begged Charles Gould to dismiss from his mind every cause for alarm. He was now conversing, he reminded him, with the brother of the master of the country, charged with a reorganizing mission. The trusted brother of the master of the country, he repeated. Nothing was further from the thoughts of that wise and patriotic hero than ideas of destruction. "I entreat you, Don Carlos, not to give way to your anti-democratic prejudices," he cried, in a burst of condescending effusion.

Pedrito Montero surprised one at first sight by the vast development of his bald forehead, a shiny yellow expanse between the crinkly coal-black tufts of hair without any lustre, the engaging form of his mouth, and an unexpectedly cultivated voice. But his eyes, very glistening as if freshly painted on each side of his hooked nose, had a round, hopeless, birdlike stare when opened fully. Now, however, he narrowed them agreeably, throwing his square chin up and speaking with closed teeth slightly through the nose, with what he imagined to be the manner of a grand seigneur.

In that attitude, he declared suddenly that the highest expression of democracy was Caesarism: the imperial rule based upon the direct popular vote. Caesarism was conservative. It was strong. It recognized the legitimate needs of democracy which requires orders, titles, and distinctions. They would be showered upon deserving men. Caesarism was peace. It was progressive. It secured the prosperity of a country. Pedrito Montero was carried away. Look at what the Second Empire had done for France. It was a regime which delighted to honour men of Don Carlos's stamp. The Second Empire fell, but that was because its chief was devoid of that military genius which had raised General Montero to the pinnacle of fame and glory. Pedrito elevated his

hand jerkily to help the idea of pinnacle, of fame. "We shall have many talks yet. We shall understand each other thoroughly, Don Carlos!" he cried in a tone of fellowship. Republicanism had done its work. Imperial democracy was the power of the future. Pedrito, the guerrillero, showing his hand, lowered his voice forcibly. A man singled out by his fellow-citizens for the honourable nickname of El Rey de Sulaco could not but receive a full recognition from an imperial democracy as a great captain of industry and a person of weighty counsel, whose popular designation would be soon replaced by a more solid title. "Eh, Don Carlos? No! What do you say? Conde de Sulaco — Eh? — or marquis . . ."

He ceased. The air was cool on the Plaza, where a patrol of cavalry rode round and round without penetrating into the streets, which resounded with shouts and the strumming of guitars issuing from the open doors of pulperias. The orders were not to interfere with the enjoyments of the people. And above the roofs, next to the perpendicular lines of the cathedral towers the snowy curve of Higueroa blocked a large space of darkening blue sky before the windows of the Intendencia. After a time Pedrito Montero, thrusting his hand in the bosom of his coat, bowed his head with slow dignity. The audience was over.

Charles Gould on going out passed his hand over his forehead as if to disperse the mists of an oppressive dream, whose grotesque extravagance leaves behind a subtle sense of bodily danger and intellectual decay. In the passages and on the staircases of the old palace Montero's troopers lounged about insolently, smoking and making way for no one; the clanking of sabres and spurs resounded all over the building. Three silent groups of civilians in severe black waited in the main gallery, formal and helpless, a little huddled up, each keeping apart from the others, as if in the exercise of a public duty they had been overcome by a desire to shun the notice of every eye. These were the deputations waiting for their audience. The one from the Provincial Assembly, more restless and uneasy in its corporate expression, was overtopped by the big face of Don Juste Lopez, soft and white, with prominent eyelids and wreathed in impenetrable solemnity as if in a dense cloud. The President of the Provincial Assembly, coming bravely to save the last shred of parliamentary institutions (on the English model), averted his eyes from the Administrador of the San Tome mine as a dignified rebuke of his little faith in that only saving principle.

The mournful severity of that reproof did not affect Charles Gould, but he was sensible to the glances of the others directed upon him without reproach, as if only to read their own fate upon his face. All of them had talked, shouted, and declaimed in the great sala of the Casa Gould. The feeling of compassion for those men, struck with a strange impotence in the toils of moral degradation, did not induce him to make a sign. He suffered from his fellowship in evil with them too much. He crossed the Plaza unmolested. The Amarilla Club was full of festive ragamuffins. Their frowsy heads protruded from every window, and from within came drunken shouts, the thumping of feet, and the twanging of harps. Broken bottles strewed the pavement below. Charles Gould found the doctor still in his house.

Dr. Monygham came away from the crack in the shutter through which he had been watching the street.

“Ah! You are back at last!” he said in a tone of relief. “I have been telling Mrs. Gould that you were perfectly safe, but I was not by any means certain that the fellow would have let you go.”

“Neither was I,” confessed Charles Gould, laying his hat on the table.

“You will have to take action.”

The silence of Charles Gould seemed to admit that this was the only course. This was as far as Charles Gould was accustomed to go towards expressing his intentions.

“I hope you did not warn Montero of what you mean to do,” the doctor said, anxiously.

“I tried to make him see that the existence of the mine was bound up with my personal safety,” continued Charles Gould, looking away from the doctor, and fixing his eyes upon the water-colour sketch upon the wall.

“He believed you?” the doctor asked, eagerly.

“God knows!” said Charles Gould. “I owed it to my wife to say that much. He is well enough informed. He knows that I have Don Pepe there. Fuentes must have told him. They know that the old major is perfectly capable of blowing up the San Tome mine without hesitation or compunction. Had it not been for that I don’t think I’d have left the Intendencia a free man. He would blow everything up from loyalty and from hate — from hate of these Liberals, as they call themselves. Liberals! The words one knows so well have a nightmarish meaning in this country. Liberty, democracy, patriotism, government — all of them have a flavour of folly and murder. Haven’t they, doctor? . . . I alone can restrain Don Pepe. If they were to — to do away with me, nothing could prevent him.”

“They will try to tamper with him,” the doctor suggested, thoughtfully.

“It is very possible,” Charles Gould said very low, as if speaking to himself, and still gazing at the sketch of the San Tome gorge upon the wall. “Yes, I expect they will try that.” Charles Gould looked for the first time at the doctor. “It would give me time,” he added.

“Exactly,” said Dr. Monygham, suppressing his excitement. “Especially if Don Pepe behaves diplomatically. Why shouldn’t he give them some hope of success? Eh? Otherwise you wouldn’t gain so much time. Couldn’t he be instructed to — ”

Charles Gould, looking at the doctor steadily, shook his head, but the doctor continued with a certain amount of fire —

“Yes, to enter into negotiations for the surrender of the mine. It is a good notion. You would mature your plan. Of course, I don’t ask what it is. I don’t want to know. I would refuse to listen to you if you tried to tell me. I am not fit for confidences.”

“What nonsense!” muttered Charles Gould, with displeasure.

He disapproved of the doctor’s sensitiveness about that far-off episode of his life. So much memory shocked Charles Gould. It was like morbidity. And again he shook his head. He refused to tamper with the open rectitude of Don Pepe’s conduct, both

from taste and from policy. Instructions would have to be either verbal or in writing. In either case they ran the risk of being intercepted. It was by no means certain that a messenger could reach the mine; and, besides, there was no one to send. It was on the tip of Charles's tongue to say that only the late Capataz de Cargadores could have been employed with some chance of success and the certitude of discretion. But he did not say that. He pointed out to the doctor that it would have been bad policy. Directly Don Pepe let it be supposed that he could be bought over, the Administrador's personal safety and the safety of his friends would become endangered. For there would be then no reason for moderation. The incorruptibility of Don Pepe was the essential and restraining fact. The doctor hung his head and admitted that in a way it was so.

He couldn't deny to himself that the reasoning was sound enough. Don Pepe's usefulness consisted in his unstained character. As to his own usefulness, he reflected bitterly it was also his own character. He declared to Charles Gould that he had the means of keeping Sotillo from joining his forces with Montero, at least for the present.

"If you had had all this silver here," the doctor said, "or even if it had been known to be at the mine, you could have bribed Sotillo to throw off his recent Monterism. You could have induced him either to go away in his steamer or even to join you."

"Certainly not that last," Charles Gould declared, firmly. "What could one do with a man like that, afterwards — tell me, doctor? The silver is gone, and I am glad of it. It would have been an immediate and strong temptation. The scramble for that visible plunder would have precipitated a disastrous ending. I would have had to defend it, too. I am glad we've removed it — even if it is lost. It would have been a danger and a curse."

"Perhaps he is right," the doctor, an hour later, said hurriedly to Mrs. Gould, whom he met in the corridor. "The thing is done, and the shadow of the treasure may do just as well as the substance. Let me try to serve you to the whole extent of my evil reputation. I am off now to play my game of betrayal with Sotillo, and keep him off the town."

She put out both her hands impulsively. "Dr. Monygham, you are running a terrible risk," she whispered, averting from his face her eyes, full of tears, for a short glance at the door of her husband's room. She pressed both his hands, and the doctor stood as if rooted to the spot, looking down at her, and trying to twist his lips into a smile.

"Oh, I know you will defend my memory," he uttered at last, and ran tottering down the stairs across the patio, and out of the house. In the street he kept up a great pace with his smart hobbling walk, a case of instruments under his arm. He was known for being loco. Nobody interfered with him. From under the seaward gate, across the dusty, arid plain, interspersed with low bushes, he saw, more than a mile away, the ugly enormity of the Custom House, and the two or three other buildings which at that time constituted the seaport of Sulaco. Far away to the south groves of palm trees edged the curve of the harbour shore. The distant peaks of the Cordillera had lost their identity of clearcut shapes in the steadily deepening blue of the eastern sky. The doctor walked briskly. A darkling shadow seemed to fall upon him from the zenith. The sun

had set. For a time the snows of Higueroa continued to glow with the reflected glory of the west. The doctor, holding a straight course for the Custom House, appeared lonely, hopping amongst the dark bushes like a tall bird with a broken wing.

Tints of purple, gold, and crimson were mirrored in the clear water of the harbour. A long tongue of land, straight as a wall, with the grass-grown ruins of the fort making a sort of rounded green mound, plainly visible from the inner shore, closed its circuit; while beyond the Placid Gulf repeated those splendours of colouring on a greater scale and with a more sombre magnificence. The great mass of cloud filling the head of the gulf had long red smears amongst its convoluted folds of grey and black, as of a floating mantle stained with blood. The three Isabels, overshadowed and clear cut in a great smoothness confounding the sea and sky, appeared suspended, purple-black, in the air. The little wavelets seemed to be tossing tiny red sparks upon the sandy beaches. The glassy bands of water along the horizon gave out a fiery red glow, as if fire and water had been mingled together in the vast bed of the ocean.

At last the conflagration of sea and sky, lying embraced and still in a flaming contact upon the edge of the world, went out. The red sparks in the water vanished together with the stains of blood in the black mantle draping the sombre head of the Placid Gulf; a sudden breeze sprang up and died out after rustling heavily the growth of bushes on the ruined earthwork of the fort. Nostromo woke up from a fourteen hours' sleep, and arose full length from his lair in the long grass. He stood knee deep amongst the whispering undulations of the green blades with the lost air of a man just born into the world. Handsome, robust, and supple, he threw back his head, flung his arms open, and stretched himself with a slow twist of the waist and a leisurely growling yawn of white teeth, as natural and free from evil in the moment of waking as a magnificent and unconscious wild beast. Then, in the suddenly steadied glance fixed upon nothing from under a thoughtful frown, appeared the man.

Chapter 8

After landing from his swim Nostromo had scrambled up, all dripping, into the main quadrangle of the old fort; and there, amongst ruined bits of walls and rotting remnants of roofs and sheds, he had slept the day through. He had slept in the shadow of the mountains, in the white blaze of noon, in the stillness and solitude of that overgrown piece of land between the oval of the harbour and the spacious semi-circle of the gulf. He lay as if dead. A rey-zamuro, appearing like a tiny black speck in the blue, stooped, circling prudently with a stealthiness of flight startling in a bird of that great size. The shadow of his pearly-white body, of his black-tipped wings, fell on the grass no more silently than he alighted himself on a hillock of rubbish within three yards of that man, lying as still as a corpse. The bird stretched his bare neck, craned his bald head, loathsome in the brilliance of varied colouring, with an air of voracious anxiety towards the promising stillness of that prostrate body. Then, sinking his head deeply into his

soft plumage, he settled himself to wait. The first thing upon which Nostromo's eyes fell on waking was this patient watcher for the signs of death and corruption. When the man got up the vulture hopped away in great, side-long, fluttering jumps. He lingered for a while, morose and reluctant, before he rose, circling noiselessly with a sinister droop of beak and claws.

Long after he had vanished, Nostromo, lifting his eyes up to the sky, muttered, "I am not dead yet."

The Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores had lived in splendour and publicity up to the very moment, as it were, when he took charge of the lighter containing the treasure of silver ingots.

The last act he had performed in Sulaco was in complete harmony with his vanity, and as such perfectly genuine. He had given his last dollar to an old woman moaning with the grief and fatigue of a dismal search under the arch of the ancient gate. Performed in obscurity and without witnesses, it had still the characteristics of splendour and publicity, and was in strict keeping with his reputation. But this awakening in solitude, except for the watchful vulture, amongst the ruins of the fort, had no such characteristics. His first confused feeling was exactly this — that it was not in keeping. It was more like the end of things. The necessity of living concealed somehow, for God knows how long, which assailed him on his return to consciousness, made everything that had gone before for years appear vain and foolish, like a flattering dream come suddenly to an end.

He climbed the crumbling slope of the rampart, and, putting aside the bushes, looked upon the harbour. He saw a couple of ships at anchor upon the sheet of water reflecting the last gleams of light, and Sotillo's steamer moored to the jetty. And behind the pale long front of the Custom House, there appeared the extent of the town like a grove of thick timber on the plain with a gateway in front, and the cupolas, towers, and miradors rising above the trees, all dark, as if surrendered already to the night. The thought that it was no longer open to him to ride through the streets, recognized by everyone, great and little, as he used to do every evening on his way to play monte in the posada of the Mexican Domingo; or to sit in the place of honour, listening to songs and looking at dances, made it appear to him as a town that had no existence.

For a long time he gazed on, then let the parted bushes spring back, and, crossing over to the other side of the fort, surveyed the vaster emptiness of the great gulf. The Isabels stood out heavily upon the narrowing long band of red in the west, which gleamed low between their black shapes, and the Capataz thought of Decoud alone there with the treasure. That man was the only one who cared whether he fell into the hands of the Monterists or not, the Capataz reflected bitterly. And that merely would be an anxiety for his own sake. As to the rest, they neither knew nor cared. What he had heard Giorgio Viola say once was very true. Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general, kept the people in poverty and subjection; they kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service.

The darkness of the sky had descended to the line of the horizon, enveloping the whole gulf, the islets, and the lover of Antonia alone with the treasure on the Great Isabel. The Capataz, turning his back on these things invisible and existing, sat down and took his face between his fists. He felt the pinch of poverty for the first time in his life. To find himself without money after a run of bad luck at monte in the low, smoky room of Domingo's posada, where the fraternity of Cargadores gambled, sang, and danced of an evening; to remain with empty pockets after a burst of public generosity to some peyne d'oro girl or other (for whom he did not care), had none of the humiliation of destitution. He remained rich in glory and reputation. But since it was no longer possible for him to parade the streets of the town, and be hailed with respect in the usual haunts of his leisure, this sailor felt himself destitute indeed.

His mouth was dry. It was dry with heavy sleep and extremely anxious thinking, as it had never been dry before. It may be said that Nostromo tasted the dust and ashes of the fruit of life into which he had bitten deeply in his hunger for praise. Without removing his head from between his fists, he tried to spit before him — "Tfui" — and muttered a curse upon the selfishness of all the rich people.

Since everything seemed lost in Sulaco (and that was the feeling of his waking), the idea of leaving the country altogether had presented itself to Nostromo. At that thought he had seen, like the beginning of another dream, a vision of steep and tideless shores, with dark pines on the heights and white houses low down near a very blue sea. He saw the quays of a big port, where the coasting feluccas, with their lateen sails outspread like motionless wings, enter gliding silently between the end of long moles of squared blocks that project angularly towards each other, hugging a cluster of shipping to the superb bosom of a hill covered with palaces. He remembered these sights not without some filial emotion, though he had been habitually and severely beaten as a boy on one of these feluccas by a short-necked, shaven Genoese, with a deliberate and distrustful manner, who (he firmly believed) had cheated him out of his orphan's inheritance. But it is mercifully decreed that the evils of the past should appear but faintly in retrospect. Under the sense of loneliness, abandonment, and failure, the idea of return to these things appeared tolerable. But, what? Return? With bare feet and head, with one check shirt and a pair of cotton calzoneros for all worldly possessions?

The renowned Capataz, his elbows on his knees and a fist dug into each cheek, laughed with self-derision, as he had spat with disgust, straight out before him into the night. The confused and intimate impressions of universal dissolution which beset a subjective nature at any strong check to its ruling passion had a bitterness approaching that of death itself. He was simple. He was as ready to become the prey of any belief, superstition, or desire as a child.

The facts of his situation he could appreciate like a man with a distinct experience of the country. He saw them clearly. He was as if sobered after a long bout of intoxication. His fidelity had been taken advantage of. He had persuaded the body of Cargadores to side with the Blancos against the rest of the people; he had had interviews with Don Jose; he had been made use of by Father Corbelan for negotiating with Hernandez; it

was known that Don Martin Decoud had admitted him to a sort of intimacy, so that he had been free of the offices of the Porvenir. All these things had flattered him in the usual way. What did he care about their politics? Nothing at all. And at the end of it all — Nostromo here and Nostromo there — where is Nostromo? Nostromo can do this and that — work all day and ride all night — behold! he found himself a marked Ribierist for any sort of vengeance Gamacho, for instance, would choose to take, now the Montero party, had, after all, mastered the town. The Europeans had given up; the Caballeros had given up. Don Martin had indeed explained it was only temporary — that he was going to bring Barrios to the rescue. Where was that now — with Don Martin (whose ironic manner of talk had always made the Capataz feel vaguely uneasy) stranded on the Great Isabel? Everybody had given up. Even Don Carlos had given up. The hurried removal of the treasure out to sea meant nothing else than that. The Capataz de Cargadores, on a revulsion of subjectiveness, exasperated almost to insanity, beheld all his world without faith and courage. He had been betrayed!

With the boundless shadows of the sea behind him, out of his silence and immobility, facing the lofty shapes of the lower peaks crowded around the white, misty sheen of Higuerota, Nostromo laughed aloud again, sprang abruptly to his feet, and stood still. He must go. But where?

“There is no mistake. They keep us and encourage us as if we were dogs born to fight and hunt for them. The vecchio is right,” he said, slowly and scathingly. He remembered old Giorgio taking his pipe out of his mouth to throw these words over his shoulder at the cafe, full of engine-drivers and fitters from the railway workshops. This image fixed his wavering purpose. He would try to find old Giorgio if he could. God knows what might have happened to him! He made a few steps, then stopped again and shook his head. To the left and right, in front and behind him, the scrubby bush rustled mysteriously in the darkness.

“Teresa was right, too,” he added in a low tone touched with awe. He wondered whether she was dead in her anger with him or still alive. As if in answer to this thought, half of remorse and half of hope, with a soft flutter and oblique flight, a big owl, whose appalling cry: “Ya-acabo! Ya-acabo! — it is finished; it is finished” — announces calamity and death in the popular belief, drifted vaguely like a large dark ball across his path. In the downfall of all the realities that made his force, he was affected by the superstition, and shuddered slightly. Signora Teresa must have died, then. It could mean nothing else. The cry of the ill-omened bird, the first sound he was to hear on his return, was a fitting welcome for his betrayed individuality. The unseen powers which he had offended by refusing to bring a priest to a dying woman were lifting up their voice against him. She was dead. With admirable and human consistency he referred everything to himself. She had been a woman of good counsel always. And the bereaved old Giorgio remained stunned by his loss just as he was likely to require the advice of his sagacity. The blow would render the dreamy old man quite stupid for a time.

As to Captain Mitchell, Nostromo, after the manner of trusted subordinates, considered him as a person fitted by education perhaps to sign papers in an office and to give orders, but otherwise of no use whatever, and something of a fool. The necessity of winding round his little finger, almost daily, the pompous and testy self-importance of the old seaman had grown irksome with use to Nostromo. At first it had given him an inward satisfaction. But the necessity of overcoming small obstacles becomes wearisome to a self-confident personality as much by the certitude of success as by the monotony of effort. He mistrusted his superior's proneness to fussy action. That old Englishman had no judgment, he said to himself. It was useless to suppose that, acquainted with the true state of the case, he would keep it to himself. He would talk of doing impracticable things. Nostromo feared him as one would fear saddling one's self with some persistent worry. He had no discretion. He would betray the treasure. And Nostromo had made up his mind that the treasure should not be betrayed.

The word had fixed itself tenaciously in his intelligence. His imagination had seized upon the clear and simple notion of betrayal to account for the dazed feeling of enlightenment as to being done for, of having inadvertently gone out of his existence on an issue in which his personality had not been taken into account. A man betrayed is a man destroyed. Signora Teresa (may God have her soul!) had been right. He had never been taken into account. Destroyed! Her white form sitting up bowed in bed, the falling black hair, the wide-browed suffering face raised to him, the anger of her denunciations appeared to him now majestic with the awfulness of inspiration and of death. For it was not for nothing that the evil bird had uttered its lamentable shriek over his head. She was dead — may God have her soul!

Sharing in the anti-priestly freethought of the masses, his mind used the pious formula from the superficial force of habit, but with a deep-seated sincerity. The popular mind is incapable of scepticism; and that incapacity delivers their helpless strength to the wiles of swindlers and to the pitiless enthusiasms of leaders inspired by visions of a high destiny. She was dead. But would God consent to receive her soul? She had died without confession or absolution, because he had not been willing to spare her another moment of his time. His scorn of priests as priests remained; but after all, it was impossible to know whether what they affirmed was not true. Power, punishment, pardon, are simple and credible notions. The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, deprived of certain simple realities, such as the admiration of women, the adulation of men, the admired publicity of his life, was ready to feel the burden of sacrilegious guilt descend upon his shoulders.

Bareheaded, in a thin shirt and drawers, he felt the lingering warmth of the fine sand under the soles of his feet. The narrow strand gleamed far ahead in a long curve, defining the outline of this wild side of the harbour. He flitted along the shore like a pursued shadow between the sombre palm-groves and the sheet of water lying as still as death on his right hand. He strode with headlong haste in the silence and solitude as though he had forgotten all prudence and caution. But he knew that on this side of the water he ran no risk of discovery. The only inhabitant was a lonely, silent, apathetic

Indian in charge of the palmarias, who brought sometimes a load of cocoanuts to the town for sale. He lived without a woman in an open shed, with a perpetual fire of dry sticks smouldering near an old canoe lying bottom up on the beach. He could be easily avoided.

The barking of the dogs about that man's ranche was the first thing that checked his speed. He had forgotten the dogs. He swerved sharply, and plunged into the palm-grove, as into a wilderness of columns in an immense hall, whose dense obscurity seemed to whisper and rustle faintly high above his head. He traversed it, entered a ravine, and climbed to the top of a steep ridge free of trees and bushes.

From there, open and vague in the starlight, he saw the plain between the town and the harbour. In the woods above some night-bird made a strange drumming noise. Below beyond the palmaria on the beach, the Indian's dogs continued to bark uproariously. He wondered what had upset them so much, and, peering down from his elevation, was surprised to detect unaccountable movements of the ground below, as if several oblong pieces of the plain had been in motion. Those dark, shifting patches, alternately catching and eluding the eye, altered their place always away from the harbour, with a suggestion of consecutive order and purpose. A light dawned upon him. It was a column of infantry on a night march towards the higher broken country at the foot of the hills. But he was too much in the dark about everything for wonder and speculation.

The plain had resumed its shadowy immobility. He descended the ridge and found himself in the open solitude, between the harbour and the town. Its spaciousness, extended indefinitely by an effect of obscurity, rendered more sensible his profound isolation. His pace became slower. No one waited for him; no one thought of him; no one expected or wished his return. "Betrayed! Betrayed!" he muttered to himself. No one cared. He might have been drowned by this time. No one would have cared — unless, perhaps, the children, he thought to himself. But they were with the English signora, and not thinking of him at all.

He wavered in his purpose of making straight for the Casa Viola. To what end? What could he expect there? His life seemed to fail him in all its details, even to the scornful reproaches of Teresa. He was aware painfully of his reluctance. Was it that remorse which she had prophesied with, what he saw now, was her last breath?

Meantime, he had deviated from the straight course, inclining by a sort of instinct to the right, towards the jetty and the harbour, the scene of his daily labours. The great length of the Custom House loomed up all at once like the wall of a factory. Not a soul challenged his approach, and his curiosity became excited as he passed cautiously towards the front by the unexpected sight of two lighted windows.

They had the fascination of a lonely vigil kept by some mysterious watcher up there, those two windows shining dimly upon the harbour in the whole vast extent of the abandoned building. The solitude could almost be felt. A strong smell of wood smoke hung about in a thin haze, which was faintly perceptible to his raised eyes against the glitter of the stars. As he advanced in the profound silence, the shrilling of innumerable

cicalas in the dry grass seemed positively deafening to his strained ears. Slowly, step by step, he found himself in the great hall, sombre and full of acrid smoke.

A fire built against the staircase had burnt down impotently to a low heap of embers. The hard wood had failed to catch; only a few steps at the bottom smouldered, with a creeping glow of sparks defining their charred edges. At the top he saw a streak of light from an open door. It fell upon the vast landing, all foggy with a slow drift of smoke. That was the room. He climbed the stairs, then checked himself, because he had seen within the shadow of a man cast upon one of the walls. It was a shapeless, high-shouldered shadow of somebody standing still, with lowered head, out of his line of sight. The Capataz, remembering that he was totally unarmed, stepped aside, and, effacing himself upright in a dark corner, waited with his eyes fixed on the door.

The whole enormous ruined barrack of a place, unfinished, without ceilings under its lofty roof, was pervaded by the smoke swaying to and fro in the faint cross draughts playing in the obscurity of many lofty rooms and barnlike passages. Once one of the swinging shutters came against the wall with a single sharp crack, as if pushed by an impatient hand. A piece of paper scurried out from somewhere, rustling along the landing. The man, whoever he was, did not darken the lighted doorway. Twice the Capataz, advancing a couple of steps out of his corner, craned his neck in the hope of catching sight of what he could be at, so quietly, in there. But every time he saw only the distorted shadow of broad shoulders and bowed head. He was doing apparently nothing, and stirred not from the spot, as though he were meditating — or, perhaps, reading a paper. And not a sound issued from the room.

Once more the Capataz stepped back. He wondered who it was — some Monterist? But he dreaded to show himself. To discover his presence on shore, unless after many days, would, he believed, endanger the treasure. With his own knowledge possessing his whole soul, it seemed impossible that anybody in Sulaco should fail to jump at the right surmise. After a couple of weeks or so it would be different. Who could tell he had not returned overland from some port beyond the limits of the Republic? The existence of the treasure confused his thoughts with a peculiar sort of anxiety, as though his life had become bound up with it. It rendered him timorous for a moment before that enigmatic, lighted door. Devil take the fellow! He did not want to see him. There would be nothing to learn from his face, known or unknown. He was a fool to waste his time there in waiting.

Less than five minutes after entering the place the Capataz began his retreat. He got away down the stairs with perfect success, gave one upward look over his shoulder at the light on the landing, and ran stealthily across the hall. But at the very moment he was turning out of the great door, with his mind fixed upon escaping the notice of the man upstairs, somebody he had not heard coming briskly along the front ran full into him. Both muttered a stifled exclamation of surprise, and leaped back and stood still, each indistinct to the other. Nostromo was silent. The other man spoke first, in an amazed and deadened tone.

“Who are you?”

Already Nostromo had seemed to recognize Dr. Monygham. He had no doubt now. He hesitated the space of a second. The idea of bolting without a word presented itself to his mind. No use! An inexplicable repugnance to pronounce the name by which he was known kept him silent a little longer. At last he said in a low voice —

“A Cargador.”

He walked up to the other. Dr. Monygham had received a shock. He flung his arms up and cried out his wonder aloud, forgetting himself before the marvel of this meeting. Nostromo angrily warned him to moderate his voice. The Custom House was not so deserted as it looked. There was somebody in the lighted room above.

There is no more evanescent quality in an accomplished fact than its wonderfulness. Solicited incessantly by the considerations affecting its fears and desires, the human mind turns naturally away from the marvellous side of events. And it was in the most natural way possible that the doctor asked this man whom only two minutes before he believed to have been drowned in the gulf —

“You have seen somebody up there? Have you?”

“No, I have not seen him.”

“Then how do you know?”

“I was running away from his shadow when we met.”

“His shadow?”

“Yes. His shadow in the lighted room,” said Nostromo, in a contemptuous tone. Leaning back with folded arms at the foot of the immense building, he dropped his head, biting his lips slightly, and not looking at the doctor. “Now,” he thought to himself, “he will begin asking me about the treasure.”

But the doctor’s thoughts were concerned with an event not as marvellous as Nostromo’s appearance, but in itself much less clear. Why had Sotillo taken himself off with his whole command with this suddenness and secrecy? What did this move portend? However, it dawned upon the doctor that the man upstairs was one of the officers left behind by the disappointed colonel to communicate with him.

“I believe he is waiting for me,” he said.

“It is possible.”

“I must see. Do not go away yet, Capataz.”

“Go away where?” muttered Nostromo.

Already the doctor had left him. He remained leaning against the wall, staring at the dark water of the harbour; the shrilling of cicadas filled his ears. An invincible vagueness coming over his thoughts took from them all power to determine his will.

“Capataz! Capataz!” the doctor’s voice called urgently from above.

The sense of betrayal and ruin floated upon his sombre indifference as upon a sluggish sea of pitch. But he stepped out from under the wall, and, looking up, saw Dr. Monygham leaning out of a lighted window.

“Come up and see what Sotillo has done. You need not fear the man up here.”

He answered by a slight, bitter laugh. Fear a man! The Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores fear a man! It angered him that anybody should suggest such a thing.

It angered him to be disarmed and skulking and in danger because of the accursed treasure, which was of so little account to the people who had tied it round his neck. He could not shake off the worry of it. To Nostromo the doctor represented all these people. . . . And he had never even asked after it. Not a word of inquiry about the most desperate undertaking of his life.

Thinking these thoughts, Nostromo passed again through the cavernous hall, where the smoke was considerably thinned, and went up the stairs, not so warm to his feet now, towards the streak of light at the top. The doctor appeared in it for a moment, agitated and impatient.

“Come up! Come up!”

At the moment of crossing the doorway the Capataz experienced a shock of surprise. The man had not moved. He saw his shadow in the same place. He started, then stepped in with a feeling of being about to solve a mystery.

It was very simple. For an infinitesimal fraction of a second, against the light of two flaring and guttering candles, through a blue, pungent, thin haze which made his eyes smart, he saw the man standing, as he had imagined him, with his back to the door, casting an enormous and distorted shadow upon the wall. Swifter than a flash of lightning followed the impression of his constrained, toppling attitude — the shoulders projecting forward, the head sunk low upon the breast. Then he distinguished the arms behind his back, and wrenched so terribly that the two clenched fists, lashed together, had been forced up higher than the shoulder-blades. From there his eyes traced in one instantaneous glance the hide rope going upwards from the tied wrists over a heavy beam and down to a staple in the wall. He did not want to look at the rigid legs, at the feet hanging down nervelessly, with their bare toes some six inches above the floor, to know that the man had been given the estrapade till he had swooned. His first impulse was to dash forward and sever the rope at one blow. He felt for his knife. He had no knife — not even a knife. He stood quivering, and the doctor, perched on the edge of the table, facing thoughtfully the cruel and lamentable sight, his chin in his hand, uttered, without stirring —

“Tortured — and shot dead through the breast — getting cold.”

This information calmed the Capataz. One of the candles flickering in the socket went out. “Who did this?” he asked.

“Sotillo, I tell you. Who else? Tortured — of course. But why shot?” The doctor looked fixedly at Nostromo, who shrugged his shoulders slightly. “And mark, shot suddenly, on impulse. It is evident. I wish I had his secret.”

Nostromo had advanced, and stooped slightly to look. “I seem to have seen that face somewhere,” he muttered. “Who is he?”

The doctor turned his eyes upon him again. “I may yet come to envying his fate. What do you think of that, Capataz, eh?”

But Nostromo did not even hear these words. Seizing the remaining light, he thrust it under the drooping head. The doctor sat oblivious, with a lost gaze. Then the heavy iron candlestick, as if struck out of Nostromo’s hand, clattered on the floor.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the doctor, looking up with a start. He could hear the Capataz stagger against the table and gasp. In the sudden extinction of the light within, the dead blackness sealing the window-frames became alive with stars to his sight.

"Of course, of course," the doctor muttered to himself in English. "Enough to make him jump out of his skin."

Nostromo's heart seemed to force itself into his throat. His head swam. Hirsch! The man was Hirsch! He held on tight to the edge of the table.

"But he was hiding in the lighter," he almost shouted. His voice fell. "In the lighter, and — and —"

"And Sotillo brought him in," said the doctor. "He is no more startling to you than you were to me. What I want to know is how he induced some compassionate soul to shoot him."

"So Sotillo knows —" began Nostromo, in a more equable voice.

"Everything!" interrupted the doctor.

The Capataz was heard striking the table with his fist. "Everything? What are you saying, there? Everything? Know everything? It is impossible! Everything?"

"Of course. What do you mean by impossible? I tell you I have heard this Hirsch questioned last night, here, in this very room. He knew your name, Decoud's name, and all about the loading of the silver. . . . The lighter was cut in two. He was grovelling in abject terror before Sotillo, but he remembered that much. What do you want more? He knew least about himself. They found him clinging to their anchor. He must have caught at it just as the lighter went to the bottom."

"Went to the bottom?" repeated Nostromo, slowly. "Sotillo believes that? Bueno!"

The doctor, a little impatiently, was unable to imagine what else could anybody believe. Yes, Sotillo believed that the lighter was sunk, and the Capataz de Cargadores, together with Martin Decoud and perhaps one or two other political fugitives, had been drowned.

"I told you well, senor doctor," remarked Nostromo at that point, "that Sotillo did not know everything."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"He did not know I was not dead."

"Neither did we."

"And you did not care — none of you caballeros on the wharf — once you got off a man of flesh and blood like yourselves on a fool's business that could not end well."

"You forget, Capataz, I was not on the wharf. And I did not think well of the business. So you need not taunt me. I tell you what, man, we had but little leisure to think of the dead. Death stands near behind us all. You were gone."

"I went, indeed!" broke in Nostromo. "And for the sake of what — tell me?"

"Ah! that is your own affair," the doctor said, roughly. "Do not ask me."

Their flowing murmurs paused in the dark. Perched on the edge of the table with slightly averted faces, they felt their shoulders touch, and their eyes remained directed towards an upright shape nearly lost in the obscurity of the inner part of the room, that

with projecting head and shoulders, in ghastly immobility, seemed intent on catching every word.

“Muy bien!” Nostromo muttered at last. “So be it. Teresa was right. It is my own affair.”

“Teresa is dead,” remarked the doctor, absently, while his mind followed a new line of thought suggested by what might have been called Nostromo’s return to life. “She died, the poor woman.”

“Without a priest?” the Capataz asked, anxiously.

“What a question! Who could have got a priest for her last night?”

“May God keep her soul!” ejaculated Nostromo, with a gloomy and hopeless fervour which had no time to surprise Dr. Monygham, before, reverting to their previous conversation, he continued in a sinister tone, “Si, senior doctor. As you were saying, it is my own affair. A very desperate affair.”

“There are no two men in this part of the world that could have saved themselves by swimming as you have done,” the doctor said, admiringly.

And again there was silence between those two men. They were both reflecting, and the diversity of their natures made their thoughts born from their meeting swing afar from each other. The doctor, impelled to risky action by his loyalty to the Goulds, wondered with thankfulness at the chain of accident which had brought that man back where he would be of the greatest use in the work of saving the San Tome mine. The doctor was loyal to the mine. It presented itself to his fifty-years’ old eyes in the shape of a little woman in a soft dress with a long train, with a head attractively overweighted by a great mass of fair hair and the delicate preciousness of her inner worth, partaking of a gem and a flower, revealed in every attitude of her person. As the dangers thickened round the San Tome mine this illusion acquired force, permanency, and authority. It claimed him at last! This claim, exalted by a spiritual detachment from the usual sanctions of hope and reward, made Dr. Monygham’s thinking, acting, individuality extremely dangerous to himself and to others, all his scruples vanishing in the proud feeling that his devotion was the only thing that stood between an admirable woman and a frightful disaster.

It was a sort of intoxication which made him utterly indifferent to Decoud’s fate, but left his wits perfectly clear for the appreciation of Decoud’s political idea. It was a good idea — and Barrios was the only instrument of its realization. The doctor’s soul, withered and shrunk by the shame of a moral disgrace, became implacable in the expansion of its tenderness. Nostromo’s return was providential. He did not think of him humanely, as of a fellow-creature just escaped from the jaws of death. The Capataz for him was the only possible messenger to Cayta. The very man. The doctor’s misanthropic mistrust of mankind (the bitterer because based on personal failure) did not lift him sufficiently above common weaknesses. He was under the spell of an established reputation. Trumpeted by Captain Mitchell, grown in repetition, and fixed in general assent, Nostromo’s faithfulness had never been questioned by Dr. Monygham as a fact. It was not likely to be questioned now he stood in desperate need of it himself.

Dr. Monygham was human; he accepted the popular conception of the Capataz's incorruptibility simply because no word or fact had ever contradicted a mere affirmation. It seemed to be a part of the man, like his whiskers or his teeth. It was impossible to conceive him otherwise. The question was whether he would consent to go on such a dangerous and desperate errand. The doctor was observant enough to have become aware from the first of something peculiar in the man's temper. He was no doubt sore about the loss of the silver.

"It will be necessary to take him into my fullest confidence," he said to himself, with a certain acuteness of insight into the nature he had to deal with.

On Nostromo's side the silence had been full of black irresolution, anger, and mistrust. He was the first to break it, however.

"The swimming was no great matter," he said. "It is what went before — and what comes after that —"

He did not quite finish what he meant to say, breaking off short, as though his thought had butted against a solid obstacle. The doctor's mind pursued its own schemes with Machiavellian subtlety. He said as sympathetically as he was able —

"It is unfortunate, Capataz. But no one would think of blaming you. Very unfortunate. To begin with, the treasure ought never to have left the mountain. But it was Decoud who — however, he is dead. There is no need to talk of him."

"No," assented Nostromo, as the doctor paused, "there is no need to talk of dead men. But I am not dead yet."

"You are all right. Only a man of your intrepidity could have saved himself."

In this Dr. Monygham was sincere. He esteemed highly the intrepidity of that man, whom he valued but little, being disillusioned as to mankind in general, because of the particular instance in which his own manhood had failed. Having had to encounter singlehanded during his period of eclipse many physical dangers, he was well aware of the most dangerous element common to them all: of the crushing, paralyzing sense of human littleness, which is what really defeats a man struggling with natural forces, alone, far from the eyes of his fellows. He was eminently fit to appreciate the mental image he made for himself of the Capataz, after hours of tension and anxiety, precipitated suddenly into an abyss of waters and darkness, without earth or sky, and confronting it not only with an undismayed mind, but with sensible success. Of course, the man was an incomparable swimmer, that was known, but the doctor judged that this instance testified to a still greater intrepidity of spirit. It was pleasing to him; he augured well from it for the success of the arduous mission with which he meant to entrust the Capataz so marvellously restored to usefulness. And in a tone vaguely gratified, he observed —

"It must have been terribly dark!"

"It was the worst darkness of the Golfo," the Capataz assented, briefly. He was mollified by what seemed a sign of some faint interest in such things as had befallen him, and dropped a few descriptive phrases with an affected and curt nonchalance. At that moment he felt communicative. He expected the continuance of that interest

which, whether accepted or rejected, would have restored to him his personality — the only thing lost in that desperate affair. But the doctor, engrossed by a desperate adventure of his own, was terrible in the pursuit of his idea. He let an exclamation of regret escape him.

“I could almost wish you had shouted and shown a light.”

This unexpected utterance astounded the Capataz by its character of cold-blooded atrocity. It was as much as to say, “I wish you had shown yourself a coward; I wish you had had your throat cut for your pains.” Naturally he referred it to himself, whereas it related only to the silver, being uttered simply and with many mental reservations. Surprise and rage rendered him speechless, and the doctor pursued, practically unheard by Nostromo, whose stirred blood was beating violently in his ears.

“For I am convinced Sotillo in possession of the silver would have turned short round and made for some small port abroad. Economically it would have been wasteful, but still less wasteful than having it sunk. It was the next best thing to having it at hand in some safe place, and using part of it to buy up Sotillo. But I doubt whether Don Carlos would have ever made up his mind to it. He is not fit for Costaguana, and that is a fact, Capataz.”

The Capataz had mastered the fury that was like a tempest in his ears in time to hear the name of Don Carlos. He seemed to have come out of it a changed man — a man who spoke thoughtfully in a soft and even voice.

“And would Don Carlos have been content if I had surrendered this treasure?”

“I should not wonder if they were all of that way of thinking now,” the doctor said, grimly. “I was never consulted. Decoud had it his own way. Their eyes are opened by this time, I should think. I for one know that if that silver turned up this moment miraculously ashore I would give it to Sotillo. And, as things stand, I would be approved.”

“Turned up miraculously,” repeated the Capataz very low; then raised his voice. “That, senor, would be a greater miracle than any saint could perform.”

“I believe you, Capataz,” said the doctor, drily.

He went on to develop his view of Sotillo’s dangerous influence upon the situation. And the Capataz, listening as if in a dream, felt himself of as little account as the indistinct, motionless shape of the dead man whom he saw upright under the beam, with his air of listening also, disregarded, forgotten, like a terrible example of neglect.

“Was it for an unconsidered and foolish whim that they came to me, then?” he interrupted suddenly. “Had I not done enough for them to be of some account, por Dios? Is it that the hombres finos — the gentlemen — need not think as long as there is a man of the people ready to risk his body and soul? Or, perhaps, we have no souls — like dogs?”

“There was Decoud, too, with his plan,” the doctor reminded him again.

“Si! And the rich man in San Francisco who had something to do with that treasure, too — what do I know? No! I have heard too many things. It seems to me that everything is permitted to the rich.”

"I understand, Capataz," the doctor began.

"What Capataz?" broke in Nostromo, in a forcible but even voice. "The Capataz is undone, destroyed. There is no Capataz. Oh, no! You will find the Capataz no more."

"Come, this is childish!" remonstrated the doctor; and the other calmed down suddenly.

"I have been indeed like a little child," he muttered.

And as his eyes met again the shape of the murdered man suspended in his awful immobility, which seemed the uncomplaining immobility of attention, he asked, wondering gently —

"Why did Sotillo give the estrapade to this pitiful wretch? Do you know? No torture could have been worse than his fear. Killing I can understand. His anguish was intolerable to behold. But why should he torment him like this? He could tell no more."

"No; he could tell nothing more. Any sane man would have seen that. He had told him everything. But I tell you what it is, Capataz. Sotillo would not believe what he was told. Not everything."

"What is it he would not believe? I cannot understand."

"I can, because I have seen the man. He refuses to believe that the treasure is lost."

"What?" the Capataz cried out in a discomposed tone.

"That startles you — eh?"

"Am I to understand, senor," Nostromo went on in a deliberate and, as it were, watchful tone, "that Sotillo thinks the treasure has been saved by some means?"

"No! no! That would be impossible," said the doctor, with conviction; and Nostromo emitted a grunt in the dark. "That would be impossible. He thinks that the silver was no longer in the lighter when she was sunk. He has convinced himself that the whole show of getting it away to sea is a mere sham got up to deceive Gamacho and his Nationals, Pedrito Montero, Senor Fuentes, our new Gefe Politico, and himself, too. Only, he says, he is no such fool."

"But he is devoid of sense. He is the greatest imbecile that ever called himself a colonel in this country of evil," growled Nostromo.

"He is no more unreasonable than many sensible men," said the doctor. "He has convinced himself that the treasure can be found because he desires passionately to possess himself of it. And he is also afraid of his officers turning upon him and going over to Pedrito, whom he has not the courage either to fight or trust. Do you see that, Capataz? He need fear no desertion as long as some hope remains of that enormous plunder turning up. I have made it my business to keep this very hope up."

"You have?" the Capataz de Cargadores repeated cautiously. "Well, that is wonderful. And how long do you think you are going to keep it up?"

"As long as I can."

"What does that mean?"

"I can tell you exactly. As long as I live," the doctor retorted in a stubborn voice. Then, in a few words, he described the story of his arrest and the circumstances of his release. "I was going back to that silly scoundrel when we met," he concluded.

Nostromo had listened with profound attention. "You have made up your mind, then, to a speedy death," he muttered through his clenched teeth.

"Perhaps, my illustrious Capataz," the doctor said, testily. "You are not the only one here who can look an ugly death in the face."

"No doubt," mumbled Nostromo, loud enough to be overheard. "There may be even more than two fools in this place. Who knows?"

"And that is my affair," said the doctor, curtly.

"As taking out the accursed silver to sea was my affair," retorted Nostromo. "I see. Bueno! Each of us has his reasons. But you were the last man I conversed with before I started, and you talked to me as if I were a fool."

Nostromo had a great distaste for the doctor's sardonic treatment of his great reputation. Decoud's faintly ironic recognition used to make him uneasy; but the familiarity of a man like Don Martin was flattering, whereas the doctor was a nobody. He could remember him a penniless outcast, slinking about the streets of Sulaco, without a single friend or acquaintance, till Don Carlos Gould took him into the service of the mine.

"You may be very wise," he went on, thoughtfully, staring into the obscurity of the room, pervaded by the gruesome enigma of the tortured and murdered Hirsch. "But I am not such a fool as when I started. I have learned one thing since, and that is that you are a dangerous man."

Dr. Monygham was too startled to do more than exclaim —

"What is it you say?"

"If he could speak he would say the same thing," pursued Nostromo, with a nod of his shadowy head silhouetted against the starlit window.

"I do not understand you," said Dr. Monygham, faintly.

"No? Perhaps, if you had not confirmed Sotillo in his madness, he would have been in no haste to give the estrapade to that miserable Hirsch."

The doctor started at the suggestion. But his devotion, absorbing all his sensibilities, had left his heart steeled against remorse and pity. Still, for complete relief, he felt the necessity of repelling it loudly and contemptuously.

"Bah! You dare to tell me that, with a man like Sotillo. I confess I did not give a thought to Hirsch. If I had it would have been useless. Anybody can see that the luckless wretch was doomed from the moment he caught hold of the anchor. He was doomed, I tell you! Just as I myself am doomed — most probably."

This is what Dr. Monygham said in answer to Nostromo's remark, which was plausible enough to prick his conscience. He was not a callous man. But the necessity, the magnitude, the importance of the task he had taken upon himself dwarfed all merely humane considerations. He had undertaken it in a fanatical spirit. He did not like it. To lie, to deceive, to circumvent even the basest of mankind was odious to him. It was odious to him by training, instinct, and tradition. To do these things in the character of a traitor was abhorrent to his nature and terrible to his feelings. He had made that sacrifice in a spirit of abasement. He had said to himself bitterly, "I am the only one fit

for that dirty work.” And he believed this. He was not subtle. His simplicity was such that, though he had no sort of heroic idea of seeking death, the risk, deadly enough, to which he exposed himself, had a sustaining and comforting effect. To that spiritual state the fate of Hirsch presented itself as part of the general atrocity of things. He considered that episode practically. What did it mean? Was it a sign of some dangerous change in Sotillo’s delusion? That the man should have been killed like this was what the doctor could not understand.

“Yes. But why shot?” he murmured to himself.

Nostromo kept very still.

Chapter 9

Distracted between doubts and hopes, dismayed by the sound of bells pealing out the arrival of Pedrito Montero, Sotillo had spent the morning in battling with his thoughts; a contest to which he was unequal, from the vacuity of his mind and the violence of his passions. Disappointment, greed, anger, and fear made a tumult, in the colonel’s breast louder than the din of bells in the town. Nothing he had planned had come to pass. Neither Sulaco nor the silver of the mine had fallen into his hands. He had performed no military exploit to secure his position, and had obtained no enormous booty to make off with. Pedrito Montero, either as friend or foe, filled him with dread. The sound of bells maddened him.

Imagining at first that he might be attacked at once, he had made his battalion stand to arms on the shore. He walked to and fro all the length of the room, stopping sometimes to gnaw the finger-tips of his right hand with a lurid sideways glare fixed on the floor; then, with a sullen, repelling glance all round, he would resume his tramping in savage aloofness. His hat, horsewhip, sword, and revolver were lying on the table. His officers, crowding the window giving the view of the town gate, disputed amongst themselves the use of his field-glass bought last year on long credit from Anzani. It passed from hand to hand, and the possessor for the time being was besieged by anxious inquiries.

“There is nothing; there is nothing to see!” he would repeat impatiently.

There was nothing. And when the picket in the bushes near the Casa Viola had been ordered to fall back upon the main body, no stir of life appeared on the stretch of dusty and arid land between the town and the waters of the port. But late in the afternoon a horseman issuing from the gate was made out riding up fearlessly. It was an emissary from Senor Fuentes. Being all alone he was allowed to come on. Dismounting at the great door he greeted the silent bystanders with cheery impudence, and begged to be taken up at once to the “muy valliente” colonel.

Senor Fuentes, on entering upon his functions of Gefe Politico, had turned his diplomatic abilities to getting hold of the harbour as well as of the mine. The man he pitched upon to negotiate with Sotillo was a Notary Public, whom the revolution had

found languishing in the common jail on a charge of forging documents. Liberated by the mob along with the other "victims of Blanco tyranny," he had hastened to offer his services to the new Government.

He set out determined to display much zeal and eloquence in trying to induce Sotillo to come into town alone for a conference with Pedrito Montero. Nothing was further from the colonel's intentions. The mere fleeting idea of trusting himself into the famous Pedrito's hands had made him feel unwell several times. It was out of the question — it was madness. And to put himself in open hostility was madness, too. It would render impossible a systematic search for that treasure, for that wealth of silver which he seemed to feel somewhere about, to scent somewhere near.

But where? Where? Heavens! Where? Oh! why had he allowed that doctor to go! Imbecile that he was. But no! It was the only right course, he reflected distractedly, while the messenger waited downstairs chatting agreeably to the officers. It was in that scoundrelly doctor's true interest to return with positive information. But what if anything stopped him? A general prohibition to leave the town, for instance! There would be patrols!

The colonel, seizing his head in his hands, turned in his tracks as if struck with vertigo. A flash of craven inspiration suggested to him an expedient not unknown to European statesmen when they wish to delay a difficult negotiation. Booted and spurred, he scrambled into the hammock with undignified haste. His handsome face had turned yellow with the strain of weighty cares. The ridge of his shapely nose had grown sharp; the audacious nostrils appeared mean and pinched. The velvety, caressing glance of his fine eyes seemed dead, and even decomposed; for these almond-shaped, languishing orbs had become inappropriately bloodshot with much sinister sleeplessness. He addressed the surprised envoy of Senor Fuentes in a deadened, exhausted voice. It came pathetically feeble from under a pile of ponchos, which buried his elegant person right up to the black moustaches, uncurled, pendant, in sign of bodily prostration and mental incapacity. Fever, fever — a heavy fever had overtaken the "muy valliente" colonel. A wavering wildness of expression, caused by the passing spasms of a slight colic which had declared itself suddenly, and the rattling teeth of repressed panic, had a genuineness which impressed the envoy. It was a cold fit. The colonel explained that he was unable to think, to listen, to speak. With an appearance of superhuman effort the colonel gasped out that he was not in a state to return a suitable reply or to execute any of his Excellency's orders. But to-morrow! To-morrow! Ah! to-morrow! Let his Excellency Don Pedro be without uneasiness. The brave Esmeralda Regiment held the harbour, held — And closing his eyes, he rolled his aching head like a half-delirious invalid under the inquisitive stare of the envoy, who was obliged to bend down over the hammock in order to catch the painful and broken accents. Meantime, Colonel Sotillo trusted that his Excellency's humanity would permit the doctor, the English doctor, to come out of town with his case of foreign remedies to attend upon him. He begged anxiously his worship the caballero now present for the grace of looking in as he passed the Casa Gould, and informing the English doctor, who was probably there, that his

services were immediately required by Colonel Sotillo, lying ill of fever in the Custom House. Immediately. Most urgently required. Awaited with extreme impatience. A thousand thanks. He closed his eyes wearily and would not open them again, lying perfectly still, deaf, dumb, insensible, overcome, vanquished, crushed, annihilated by the fell disease.

But as soon as the other had shut after him the door of the landing, the colonel leaped out with a fling of both feet in an avalanche of woollen coverings. His spurs having become entangled in a perfect welter of ponchos he nearly pitched on his head, and did not recover his balance till the middle of the room. Concealed behind the half-closed jalousies he listened to what went on below.

The envoy had already mounted, and turning to the morose officers occupying the great doorway, took off his hat formally.

“Caballeros,” he said, in a very loud tone, “allow me to recommend you to take great care of your colonel. It has done me much honour and gratification to have seen you all, a fine body of men exercising the soldierly virtue of patience in this exposed situation, where there is much sun, and no water to speak of, while a town full of wine and feminine charms is ready to embrace you for the brave men you are. Caballeros, I have the honour to salute you. There will be much dancing to-night in Sulaco. Good-bye!”

But he reined in his horse and inclined his head sideways on seeing the old major step out, very tall and meagre, in a straight narrow coat coming down to his ankles as it were the casing of the regimental colours rolled round their staff.

The intelligent old warrior, after enunciating in a dogmatic tone the general proposition that the “world was full of traitors,” went on pronouncing deliberately a panegyric upon Sotillo. He ascribed to him with leisurely emphasis every virtue under heaven, summing it all up in an absurd colloquialism current amongst the lower class of Occidentals (especially about Esmeralda). “And,” he concluded, with a sudden rise in the voice, “a man of many teeth — ‘hombre de muchos dientes.’ Si, señor. As to us,” he pursued, portentous and impressive, “your worship is beholding the finest body of officers in the Republic, men unequalled for valour and sagacity, ‘y hombres de muchos dientes.’”

“What? All of them?” inquired the disreputable envoy of Senor Fuentes, with a faint, derisive smile.

“Todos. Si, señor,” the major affirmed, gravely, with conviction. “Men of many teeth.”

The other wheeled his horse to face the portal resembling the high gate of a dismal barn. He raised himself in his stirrups, extended one arm. He was a facetious scoundrel, entertaining for these stupid Occidentals a feeling of great scorn natural in a native from the central provinces. The folly of Esmeraldians especially aroused his amused contempt. He began an oration upon Pedro Montero, keeping a solemn countenance. He flourished his hand as if introducing him to their notice. And when he saw every face set, all the eyes fixed upon his lips, he began to shout a sort of catalogue of perfections: “Generous, valorous, affable, profound” — (he snatched off his hat enthusiastically) —

"a statesman, an invincible chief of partisans — " He dropped his voice startlingly to a deep, hollow note — "and a dentist."

He was off instantly at a smart walk; the rigid straddle of his legs, the turned-out feet, the stiff back, the rakish slant of the sombrero above the square, motionless set of the shoulders expressing an infinite, awe-inspiring impudence.

Upstairs, behind the jalousies, Sotillo did not move for a long time. The audacity of the fellow appalled him. What were his officers saying below? They were saying nothing. Complete silence. He quaked. It was not thus that he had imagined himself at that stage of the expedition. He had seen himself triumphant, unquestioned, appeased, the idol of the soldiers, weighing in secret complacency the agreeable alternatives of power and wealth open to his choice. Alas! How different! Distracted, restless, supine, burning with fury, or frozen with terror, he felt a dread as fathomless as the sea creep upon him from every side. That rogue of a doctor had to come out with his information. That was clear. It would be of no use to him — alone. He could do nothing with it. Malediction! The doctor would never come out. He was probably under arrest already, shut up together with Don Carlos. He laughed aloud insanely. Ha! ha! ha! ha! It was Pedrito Montero who would get the information. Ha! ha! ha! ha! — and the silver. Ha!

All at once, in the midst of the laugh, he became motionless and silent as if turned into stone. He too, had a prisoner. A prisoner who must, must know the real truth. He would have to be made to speak. And Sotillo, who all that time had not quite forgotten Hirsch, felt an inexplicable reluctance at the notion of proceeding to extremities.

He felt a reluctance — part of that unfathomable dread that crept on all sides upon him. He remembered reluctantly, too, the dilated eyes of the hide merchant, his contortions, his loud sobs and protestations. It was not compassion or even mere nervous sensibility. The fact was that though Sotillo did never for a moment believe his story — he could not believe it; nobody could believe such nonsense — yet those accents of despairing truth impressed him disagreeably. They made him feel sick. And he suspected also that the man might have gone mad with fear. A lunatic is a hopeless subject. Bah! A pretence. Nothing but a pretence. He would know how to deal with that.

He was working himself up to the right pitch of ferocity. His fine eyes squinted slightly; he clapped his hands; a bare-footed orderly appeared noiselessly, a corporal, with his bayonet hanging on his thigh and a stick in his hand.

The colonel gave his orders, and presently the miserable Hirsch, pushed in by several soldiers, found him frowning awfully in a broad armchair, hat on head, knees wide apart, arms akimbo, masterful, imposing, irresistible, haughty, sublime, terrible.

Hirsch, with his arms tied behind his back, had been bundled violently into one of the smaller rooms. For many hours he remained apparently forgotten, stretched lifelessly on the floor. From that solitude, full of despair and terror, he was torn out brutally, with kicks and blows, passive, sunk in hebetude. He listened to threats and admonitions, and afterwards made his usual answers to questions, with his chin sunk on his breast, his hands tied behind his back, swaying a little in front of Sotillo, and

never looking up. When he was forced to hold up his head, by means of a bayonet-point prodding him under the chin, his eyes had a vacant, trance-like stare, and drops of perspiration as big as peas were seen hailing down the dirt, bruises, and scratches of his white face. Then they stopped suddenly.

Sotillo looked at him in silence. "Will you depart from your obstinacy, you rogue?" he asked. Already a rope, whose one end was fastened to Senor Hirsch's wrists, had been thrown over a beam, and three soldiers held the other end, waiting. He made no answer. His heavy lower lip hung stupidly. Sotillo made a sign. Hirsch was jerked up off his feet, and a yell of despair and agony burst out in the room, filled the passage of the great buildings, rent the air outside, caused every soldier of the camp along the shore to look up at the windows, started some of the officers in the hall babbling excitedly, with shining eyes; others, setting their lips, looked gloomily at the floor.

Sotillo, followed by the soldiers, had left the room. The sentry on the landing presented arms. Hirsch went on screaming all alone behind the half-closed jalousies while the sunshine, reflected from the water of the harbour, made an ever-running ripple of light high up on the wall. He screamed with uplifted eyebrows and a wide-open mouth — incredibly wide, black, enormous, full of teeth — comical.

In the still burning air of the windless afternoon he made the waves of his agony travel as far as the O. S. N. Company's offices. Captain Mitchell on the balcony, trying to make out what went on generally, had heard him faintly but distinctly, and the feeble and appalling sound lingered in his ears after he had retreated indoors with blanched cheeks. He had been driven off the balcony several times during that afternoon.

Sotillo, irritable, moody, walked restlessly about, held consultations with his officers, gave contradictory orders in this shrill clamour pervading the whole empty edifice. Sometimes there would be long and awful silences. Several times he had entered the torture-chamber where his sword, horsewhip, revolver, and field-glass were lying on the table, to ask with forced calmness, "Will you speak the truth now? No? I can wait." But he could not afford to wait much longer. That was just it. Every time he went in and came out with a slam of the door, the sentry on the landing presented arms, and got in return a black, venomous, unsteady glance, which, in reality, saw nothing at all, being merely the reflection of the soul within — a soul of gloomy hatred, irresolution, avarice, and fury.

The sun had set when he went in once more. A soldier carried in two lighted candles and slunk out, shutting the door without noise.

"Speak, thou Jewish child of the devil! The silver! The silver, I say! Where is it? Where have you foreign rogues hidden it? Confess or — "

A slight quiver passed up the taut rope from the racked limbs, but the body of Senor Hirsch, enterprising business man from Esmeralda, hung under the heavy beam perpendicular and silent, facing the colonel awfully. The inflow of the night air, cooled by the snows of the Sierra, spread gradually a delicious freshness through the close heat of the room.

"Speak — thief — scoundrel — picaro — or — "

Sotillo had seized the riding-whip, and stood with his arm lifted up. For a word, for one little word, he felt he would have knelt, cringed, grovelled on the floor before the drowsy, conscious stare of those fixed eyeballs starting out of the grimy, dishevelled head that drooped very still with its mouth closed askew. The colonel ground his teeth with rage and struck. The rope vibrated leisurely to the blow, like the long string of a pendulum starting from a rest. But no swinging motion was imparted to the body of Senor Hirsch, the well-known hide merchant on the coast. With a convulsive effort of the twisted arms it leaped up a few inches, curling upon itself like a fish on the end of a line. Senor Hirsch's head was flung back on his straining throat; his chin trembled. For a moment the rattle of his chattering teeth pervaded the vast, shadowy room, where the candles made a patch of light round the two flames burning side by side. And as Sotillo, staying his raised hand, waited for him to speak, with the sudden flash of a grin and a straining forward of the wrenched shoulders, he spat violently into his face.

The uplifted whip fell, and the colonel sprang back with a low cry of dismay, as if asspersed by a jet of deadly venom. Quick as thought he snatched up his revolver, and fired twice. The report and the concussion of the shots seemed to throw him at once from ungovernable rage into idiotic stupor. He stood with drooping jaw and stony eyes. What had he done, Sangre de Dios! What had he done? He was basely appalled at his impulsive act, sealing for ever these lips from which so much was to be extorted. What could he say? How could he explain? Ideas of headlong flight somewhere, anywhere, passed through his mind; even the craven and absurd notion of hiding under the table occurred to his cowardice. It was too late; his officers had rushed in tumultuously, in a great clatter of scabbards, clamouring, with astonishment and wonder. But since they did not immediately proceed to plunge their swords into his breast, the brazen side of his character asserted itself. Passing the sleeve of his uniform over his face he pulled himself together, His truculent glance turned slowly here and there, checked the noise where it fell; and the stiff body of the late Senor Hirsch, merchant, after swaying imperceptibly, made a half turn, and came to a rest in the midst of awed murmurs and uneasy shuffling.

A voice remarked loudly, "Behold a man who will never speak again." And another, from the back row of faces, timid and pressing, cried out —

"Why did you kill him, mi colonel?"

"Because he has confessed everything," answered Sotillo, with the hardihood of desperation. He felt himself cornered. He brazened it out on the strength of his reputation with very fair success. His hearers thought him very capable of such an act. They were disposed to believe his flattering tale. There is no credulity so eager and blind as the credulity of covetousness, which, in its universal extent, measures the moral misery and the intellectual destitution of mankind. Ah! he had confessed everything, this fractious Jew, this bribon. Good! Then he was no longer wanted. A sudden dense guffaw was heard from the senior captain — a big-headed man, with little round eyes and monstrously fat cheeks which never moved. The old major, tall and fantastically ragged like a scarecrow, walked round the body of the late Senor Hirsch, muttering to

himself with ineffable complacency that like this there was no need to guard against any future treacheries of that scoundrel. The others stared, shifting from foot to foot, and whispering short remarks to each other.

Sotillo buckled on his sword and gave curt, peremptory orders to hasten the retirement decided upon in the afternoon. Sinister, impressive, his sombrero pulled right down upon his eyebrows, he marched first through the door in such disorder of mind that he forgot utterly to provide for Dr. Monygham's possible return. As the officers trooped out after him, one or two looked back hastily at the late Senor Hirsch, merchant from Esmeralda, left swinging rigidly at rest, alone with the two burning candles. In the emptiness of the room the burly shadow of head and shoulders on the wall had an air of life.

Below, the troops fell in silently and moved off by companies without drum or trumpet. The old scarecrow major commanded the rearguard; but the party he left behind with orders to fire the Custom House (and "burn the carcass of the treacherous Jew where it hung") failed somehow in their haste to set the staircase properly alight. The body of the late Senor Hirsch dwelt alone for a time in the dismal solitude of the unfinished building, resounding weirdly with sudden slams and clicks of doors and latches, with rustling scurries of torn papers, and the tremulous sighs that at each gust of wind passed under the high roof. The light of the two candles burning before the perpendicular and breathless immobility of the late Senor Hirsch threw a gleam afar over land and water, like a signal in the night. He remained to startle Nostromo by his presence, and to puzzle Dr. Monygham by the mystery of his atrocious end.

"But why shot?" the doctor again asked himself, audibly. This time he was answered by a dry laugh from Nostromo.

"You seem much concerned at a very natural thing, senor doctor. I wonder why? It is very likely that before long we shall all get shot one after another, if not by Sotillo, then by Pedrito, or Fuentes, or Gamacho. And we may even get the estrapade, too, or worse — *quien sabe?* — with your pretty tale of the silver you put into Sotillo's head."

"It was in his head already," the doctor protested. "I only — "

"Yes. And you only nailed it there so that the devil himself — "

"That is precisely what I meant to do," caught up the doctor.

"That is what you meant to do. Bueno. It is as I say. You are a dangerous man."

Their voices, which without rising had been growing quarrelsome, ceased suddenly. The late Senor Hirsch, erect and shadowy against the stars, seemed to be waiting attentive, in impartial silence.

But Dr. Monygham had no mind to quarrel with Nostromo. At this supremely critical point of Sulaco's fortunes it was borne upon him at last that this man was really indispensable, more indispensable than ever the infatuation of Captain Mitchell, his proud discoverer, could conceive; far beyond what Decoud's best dry raillery about "my illustrious friend, the unique Capataz de Cargadores," had ever intended. The fellow was unique. He was not "one in a thousand." He was absolutely the only one. The doctor surrendered. There was something in the genius of that Genoese seaman

which dominated the destinies of great enterprises and of many people, the fortunes of Charles Gould, the fate of an admirable woman. At this last thought the doctor had to clear his throat before he could speak.

In a completely changed tone he pointed out to the Capataz that, to begin with, he personally ran no great risk. As far as everybody knew he was dead. It was an enormous advantage. He had only to keep out of sight in the Casa Viola, where the old Garibaldino was known to be alone — with his dead wife. The servants had all run away. No one would think of searching for him there, or anywhere else on earth, for that matter.

“That would be very true,” Nostromo spoke up, bitterly, “if I had not met you.”

For a time the doctor kept silent. “Do you mean to say that you think I may give you away?” he asked in an unsteady voice. “Why? Why should I do that?”

“What do I know? Why not? To gain a day perhaps. It would take Sotillo a day to give me the estrapade, and try some other things perhaps, before he puts a bullet through my heart — as he did to that poor wretch here. Why not?”

The doctor swallowed with difficulty. His throat had gone dry in a moment. It was not from indignation. The doctor, pathetically enough, believed that he had forfeited the right to be indignant with any one — for anything. It was simple dread. Had the fellow heard his story by some chance? If so, there was an end of his usefulness in that direction. The indispensable man escaped his influence, because of that indelible blot which made him fit for dirty work. A feeling as of sickness came upon the doctor. He would have given anything to know, but he dared not clear up the point. The fanaticism of his devotion, fed on the sense of his abasement, hardened his heart in sadness and scorn.

“Why not, indeed?” he reechoed, sardonically. “Then the safe thing for you is to kill me on the spot. I would defend myself. But you may just as well know I am going about unarmed.”

“Por Dios!” said the Capataz, passionately. “You fine people are all alike. All dangerous. All betrayers of the poor who are your dogs.”

“You do not understand,” began the doctor, slowly.

“I understand you all!” cried the other with a violent movement, as shadowy to the doctor’s eyes as the persistent immobility of the late Senor Hirsch. “A poor man amongst you has got to look after himself. I say that you do not care for those that serve you. Look at me! After all these years, suddenly, here I find myself like one of these curs that bark outside the walls — without a kennel or a dry bone for my teeth. Caramba!” But he relented with a contemptuous fairness. “Of course,” he went on, quietly, “I do not suppose that you would hasten to give me up to Sotillo, for example. It is not that. It is that I am nothing! Suddenly — ” He swung his arm downwards. “Nothing to any one,” he repeated.

The doctor breathed freely. “Listen, Capataz,” he said, stretching out his arm almost affectionately towards Nostromo’s shoulder. “I am going to tell you a very simple thing.

You are safe because you are needed. I would not give you away for any conceivable reason, because I want you."

In the dark Nostromo bit his lip. He had heard enough of that. He knew what that meant. No more of that for him. But he had to look after himself now, he thought. And he thought, too, that it would not be prudent to part in anger from his companion. The doctor, admitted to be a great healer, had, amongst the populace of Sulaco, the reputation of being an evil sort of man. It was based solidly on his personal appearance, which was strange, and on his rough ironic manner — proofs visible, sensible, and incontrovertible of the doctor's malevolent disposition. And Nostromo was of the people. So he only grunted incredulously.

"You, to speak plainly, are the only man," the doctor pursued. "It is in your power to save this town and . . . everybody from the destructive rapacity of men who — "

"No, senior," said Nostromo, sullenly. "It is not in my power to get the treasure back for you to give up to Sotillo, or Pedrito, or Gamacho. What do I know?"

"Nobody expects the impossible," was the answer.

"You have said it yourself — nobody," muttered Nostromo, in a gloomy, threatening tone.

But Dr. Monygham, full of hope, disregarded the enigmatic words and the threatening tone. To their eyes, accustomed to obscurity, the late Senor Hirsch, growing more distinct, seemed to have come nearer. And the doctor lowered his voice in exposing his scheme as though afraid of being overheard.

He was taking the indispensable man into his fullest confidence. Its implied flattery and suggestion of great risks came with a familiar sound to the Capataz. His mind, floating in irresolution and discontent, recognized it with bitterness. He understood well that the doctor was anxious to save the San Tome mine from annihilation. He would be nothing without it. It was his interest. Just as it had been the interest of Senor Decoud, of the Blancos, and of the Europeans to get his Cargadores on their side. His thought became arrested upon Decoud. What would happen to him?

Nostromo's prolonged silence made the doctor uneasy. He pointed out, quite unnecessarily, that though for the present he was safe, he could not live concealed for ever. The choice was between accepting the mission to Barrios, with all its dangers and difficulties, and leaving Sulaco by stealth, ingloriously, in poverty.

"None of your friends could reward you and protect you just now, Capataz. Not even Don Carlos himself."

"I would have none of your protection and none of your rewards. I only wish I could trust your courage and your sense. When I return in triumph, as you say, with Barrios, I may find you all destroyed. You have the knife at your throat now."

It was the doctor's turn to remain silent in the contemplation of horrible contingencies.

"Well, we would trust your courage and your sense. And you, too, have a knife at your throat."

“Ah! And whom am I to thank for that? What are your politics and your mines to me — your silver and your constitutions — your Don Carlos this, and Don Jose that — ”

“I don’t know,” burst out the exasperated doctor. “There are innocent people in danger whose little finger is worth more than you or I and all the Ribierists together. I don’t know. You should have asked yourself before you allowed Decoud to lead you into all this. It was your place to think like a man; but if you did not think then, try to act like a man now. Did you imagine Decoud cared very much for what would happen to you?”

“No more than you care for what will happen to me,” muttered the other.

“No; I care for what will happen to you as little as I care for what will happen to myself.”

“And all this because you are such a devoted Ribierist?” Nostromo said in an incredulous tone.

“All this because I am such a devoted Ribierist,” repeated Dr. Monygham, grimly.

Again Nostromo, gazing abstractedly at the body of the late Senor Hirsch, remained silent, thinking that the doctor was a dangerous person in more than one sense. It was impossible to trust him.

“Do you speak in the name of Don Carlos?” he asked at last.

“Yes. I do,” the doctor said, loudly, without hesitation. “He must come forward now. He must,” he added in a mutter, which Nostromo did not catch.

“What did you say, senor?”

The doctor started. “I say that you must be true to yourself, Capataz. It would be worse than folly to fail now.”

“True to myself,” repeated Nostromo. “How do you know that I would not be true to myself if I told you to go to the devil with your propositions?”

“I do not know. Maybe you would,” the doctor said, with a roughness of tone intended to hide the sinking of his heart and the faltering of his voice. “All I know is, that you had better get away from here. Some of Sotillo’s men may turn up here looking for me.”

He slipped off the table, listening intently. The Capataz, too, stood up.

“Suppose I went to Cayta, what would you do meantime?” he asked.

“I would go to Sotillo directly you had left — in the way I am thinking of.”

“A very good way — if only that engineer-in-chief consents. Remind him, senor, that I looked after the old rich Englishman who pays for the railway, and that I saved the lives of some of his people that time when a gang of thieves came from the south to wreck one of his pay-trains. It was I who discovered it all at the risk of my life, by pretending to enter into their plans. Just as you are doing with Sotillo.”

“Yes. Yes, of course. But I can offer him better arguments,” the doctor said, hastily. “Leave it to me.”

“Ah, yes! True. I am nothing.”

“Not at all. You are everything.”

They moved a few paces towards the door. Behind them the late Senor Hirsch preserved the immobility of a disregarded man.

“That will be all right. I know what to say to the engineer,” pursued the doctor, in a low tone. “My difficulty will be with Sotillo.”

And Dr. Monygham stopped short in the doorway as if intimidated by the difficulty. He had made the sacrifice of his life. He considered this a fitting opportunity. But he did not want to throw his life away too soon. In his quality of betrayer of Don Carlos’ confidence, he would have ultimately to indicate the hiding-place of the treasure. That would be the end of his deception, and the end of himself as well, at the hands of the infuriated colonel. He wanted to delay him to the very last moment; and he had been racking his brains to invent some place of concealment at once plausible and difficult of access.

He imparted his trouble to Nostromo, and concluded —

“Do you know what, Capataz? I think that when the time comes and some information must be given, I shall indicate the Great Isabel. That is the best place I can think of. What is the matter?”

A low exclamation had escaped Nostromo. The doctor waited, surprised, and after a moment of profound silence, heard a thick voice stammer out, “Utter folly,” and stop with a gasp.

“Why folly?”

“Ah! You do not see it,” began Nostromo, scathingly, gathering scorn as he went on. “Three men in half an hour would see that no ground had been disturbed anywhere on that island. Do you think that such a treasure can be buried without leaving traces of the work — eh! senor doctor? Why! you would not gain half a day more before having your throat cut by Sotillo. The Isabel! What stupidity! What miserable invention! Ah! you are all alike, you fine men of intelligence. All you are fit for is to betray men of the people into undertaking deadly risks for objects that you are not even sure about. If it comes off you get the benefit. If not, then it does not matter. He is only a dog. Ah! Madre de Dios, I would — ” He shook his fists above his head.

The doctor was overwhelmed at first by this fierce, hissing vehemence.

“Well! It seems to me on your own showing that the men of the people are no mean fools, too,” he said, sullenly. “No, but come. You are so clever. Have you a better place?”

Nostromo had calmed down as quickly as he had flared up.

“I am clever enough for that,” he said, quietly, almost with indifference. “You want to tell him of a hiding-place big enough to take days in ransacking — a place where a treasure of silver ingots can be buried without leaving a sign on the surface.”

“And close at hand,” the doctor put in.

“Just so, senor. Tell him it is sunk.”

“This has the merit of being the truth,” the doctor said, contemptuously. “He will not believe it.”

“You tell him that it is sunk where he may hope to lay his hands on it, and he will believe you quick enough. Tell him it has been sunk in the harbour in order to

be recovered afterwards by divers. Tell him you found out that I had orders from Don Carlos Gould to lower the cases quietly overboard somewhere in a line between the end of the jetty and the entrance. The depth is not too great there. He has no divers, but he has a ship, boats, ropes, chains, sailors — of a sort. Let him fish for the silver. Let him set his fools to drag backwards and forwards and crossways while he sits and watches till his eyes drop out of his head.”

“Really, this is an admirable idea,” muttered the doctor.

“Si. You tell him that, and see whether he will not believe you! He will spend days in rage and torment — and still he will believe. He will have no thought for anything else. He will not give up till he is driven off — why, he may even forget to kill you. He will neither eat nor sleep. He — ”

“The very thing! The very thing!” the doctor repeated in an excited whisper. “Capataz, I begin to believe that you are a great genius in your way.”

Nostromo had paused; then began again in a changed tone, sombre, speaking to himself as though he had forgotten the doctor’s existence.

“There is something in a treasure that fastens upon a man’s mind. He will pray and blaspheme and still persevere, and will curse the day he ever heard of it, and will let his last hour come upon him unawares, still believing that he missed it only by a foot. He will see it every time he closes his eyes. He will never forget it till he is dead — and even then — — Doctor, did you ever hear of the miserable gringos on Azuera, that cannot die? Ha! ha! Sailors like myself. There is no getting away from a treasure that once fastens upon your mind.”

“You are a devil of a man, Capataz. It is the most plausible thing.”

Nostromo pressed his arm.

“It will be worse for him than thirst at sea or hunger in a town full of people. Do you know what that is? He shall suffer greater torments than he inflicted upon that terrified wretch who had no invention. None! none! Not like me. I could have told Sotillo a deadly tale for very little pain.”

He laughed wildly and turned in the doorway towards the body of the late Senor Hirsch, an opaque long blotch in the semi-transparent obscurity of the room between the two tall parallelograms of the windows full of stars.

“You man of fear!” he cried. “You shall be avenged by me — Nostromo. Out of my way, doctor! Stand aside — or, by the suffering soul of a woman dead without confession, I will strangle you with my two hands.”

He bounded downwards into the black, smoky hall. With a grunt of astonishment, Dr. Monygham threw himself recklessly into the pursuit. At the bottom of the charred stairs he had a fall, pitching forward on his face with a force that would have stunned a spirit less intent upon a task of love and devotion. He was up in a moment, jarred, shaken, with a queer impression of the terrestrial globe having been flung at his head in the dark. But it wanted more than that to stop Dr. Monygham’s body, possessed by the exaltation of self-sacrifice; a reasonable exaltation, determined not to lose whatever advantage chance put into its way. He ran with headlong, tottering swiftness, his arms

going like a windmill in his effort to keep his balance on his crippled feet. He lost his hat; the tails of his open gaberdine flew behind him. He had no mind to lose sight of the indispensable man. But it was a long time, and a long way from the Custom House, before he managed to seize his arm from behind, roughly, out of breath.

“Stop! Are you mad?”

Already Nostromo was walking slowly, his head dropping, as if checked in his pace by the weariness of irresolution.

“What is that to you? Ah! I forgot you want me for something. Always. Siempre Nostromo.”

“What do you mean by talking of strangling me?” panted the doctor.

“What do I mean? I mean that the king of the devils himself has sent you out of this town of cowards and talkers to meet me to-night of all the nights of my life.”

Under the starry sky the Albergo d’Italia Una emerged, black and low, breaking the dark level of the plain. Nostromo stopped altogether.

“The priests say he is a tempter, do they not?” he added, through his clenched teeth.

“My good man, you drivel. The devil has nothing to do with this. Neither has the town, which you may call by what name you please. But Don Carlos Gould is neither a coward nor an empty talker. You will admit that?” He waited. “Well?”

“Could I see Don Carlos?”

“Great heavens! No! Why? What for?” exclaimed the doctor in agitation. “I tell you it is madness. I will not let you go into the town for anything.”

“I must.”

“You must not!” hissed the doctor, fiercely, almost beside himself with the fear of the man doing away with his usefulness for an imbecile whim of some sort. “I tell you you shall not. I would rather — — ”

He stopped at loss for words, feeling fagged out, powerless, holding on to Nostromo’s sleeve, absolutely for support after his run.

“I am betrayed!” muttered the Capataz to himself; and the doctor, who overheard the last word, made an effort to speak calmly.

“That is exactly what would happen to you. You would be betrayed.”

He thought with a sickening dread that the man was so well known that he could not escape recognition. The house of the Senor Administrador was beset by spies, no doubt. And even the very servants of the casa were not to be trusted. “Reflect, Capataz,” he said, impressively. . . . “What are you laughing at?”

“I am laughing to think that if somebody that did not approve of my presence in town, for instance — you understand, senor doctor — if somebody were to give me up to Pedrito, it would not be beyond my power to make friends even with him. It is true. What do you think of that?”

“You are a man of infinite resource, Capataz,” said Dr. Monygham, dismally. “I recognize that. But the town is full of talk about you; and those few Cargadores that are not in hiding with the railway people have been shouting ‘Viva Montero’ on the Plaza all day.”

"My poor Cargadores!" muttered Nostromo. "Betrayed! Betrayed!"

"I understand that on the wharf you were pretty free in laying about you with a stick amongst your poor Cargadores," the doctor said in a grim tone, which showed that he was recovering from his exertions. "Make no mistake. Pedrito is furious at Senor Ribiera's rescue, and at having lost the pleasure of shooting Decoud. Already there are rumours in the town of the treasure having been spirited away. To have missed that does not please Pedrito either; but let me tell you that if you had all that silver in your hand for ransom it would not save you."

Turning swiftly, and catching the doctor by the shoulders, Nostromo thrust his face close to his.

"Maladetta! You follow me speaking of the treasure. You have sworn my ruin. You were the last man who looked upon me before I went out with it. And Sidoni the engine-driver says you have an evil eye."

"He ought to know. I saved his broken leg for him last year," the doctor said, stoically. He felt on his shoulders the weight of these hands famed amongst the populace for snapping thick ropes and bending horseshoes. "And to you I offer the best means of saving yourself — let me go — and of retrieving your great reputation. You boasted of making the Capataz de Cargadores famous from one end of America to the other about this wretched silver. But I bring you a better opportunity — let me go, hombre!"

Nostromo released him abruptly, and the doctor feared that the indispensable man would run off again. But he did not. He walked on slowly. The doctor hobbled by his side till, within a stone's throw from the Casa Viola, Nostromo stopped again.

Silent in inhospitable darkness, the Casa Viola seemed to have changed its nature; his home appeared to repel him with an air of hopeless and inimical mystery. The doctor said —

"You will be safe there. Go in, Capataz."

"How can I go in?" Nostromo seemed to ask himself in a low, inward tone. "She cannot unsay what she said, and I cannot undo what I have done."

"I tell you it is all right. Viola is all alone in there. I looked in as I came out of the town. You will be perfectly safe in that house till you leave it to make your name famous on the Campo. I am going now to arrange for your departure with the engineer-in-chief, and I shall bring you news here long before daybreak."

Dr. Monygham, disregarding, or perhaps fearing to penetrate the meaning of Nostromo's silence, clapped him lightly on the shoulder, and starting off with his smart, lame walk, vanished utterly at the third or fourth hop in the direction of the railway track. Arrested between the two wooden posts for people to fasten their horses to, Nostromo did not move, as if he, too, had been planted solidly in the ground. At the end of half an hour he lifted his head to the deep baying of the dogs at the railway yards, which had burst out suddenly, tumultuous and deadened as if coming from under the plain. That lame doctor with the evil eye had got there pretty fast.

Step by step Nostromo approached the Albergo d'Italia Una, which he had never known so lightless, so silent, before. The door, all black in the pale wall, stood open

as he had left it twenty-four hours before, when he had nothing to hide from the world. He remained before it, irresolute, like a fugitive, like a man betrayed. Poverty, misery, starvation! Where had he heard these words? The anger of a dying woman had prophesied that fate for his folly. It looked as if it would come true very quickly. And the leperos would laugh — she had said. Yes, they would laugh if they knew that the Capataz de Cargadores was at the mercy of the mad doctor whom they could remember, only a few years ago, buying cooked food from a stall on the Plaza for a copper coin — like one of themselves.

At that moment the notion of seeking Captain Mitchell passed through his mind. He glanced in the direction of the jetty and saw a small gleam of light in the O.S.N. Company's building. The thought of lighted windows was not attractive. Two lighted windows had decoyed him into the empty Custom House, only to fall into the clutches of that doctor. No! He would not go near lighted windows again on that night. Captain Mitchell was there. And what could he be told? That doctor would worm it all out of him as if he were a child.

On the threshold he called out "Giorgio!" in an undertone. Nobody answered. He stepped in. "Ola! viejo! Are you there? . . ." In the impenetrable darkness his head swam with the illusion that the obscurity of the kitchen was as vast as the Placid Gulf, and that the floor dipped forward like a sinking lighter. "Ola! viejo!" he repeated, falteringly, swaying where he stood. His hand, extended to steady himself, fell upon the table. Moving a step forward, he shifted it, and felt a box of matches under his fingers. He fancied he had heard a quiet sigh. He listened for a moment, holding his breath; then, with trembling hands, tried to strike a light.

The tiny piece of wood flamed up quite blindingly at the end of his fingers, raised above his blinking eyes. A concentrated glare fell upon the leonine white head of old Giorgio against the black fire-place — showed him leaning forward in a chair in staring immobility, surrounded, overhung, by great masses of shadow, his legs crossed, his cheek in his hand, an empty pipe in the corner of his mouth. It seemed hours before he attempted to turn his face; at the very moment the match went out, and he disappeared, overwhelmed by the shadows, as if the walls and roof of the desolate house had collapsed upon his white head in ghostly silence.

Nostromo heard him stir and utter dispassionately the words —

"It may have been a vision."

"No," he said, softly. "It is no vision, old man."

A strong chest voice asked in the dark —

"Is that you I hear, Giovann' Battista?"

"Si, viejo. Steady. Not so loud."

After his release by Sotillo, Giorgio Viola, attended to the very door by the good-natured engineer-in-chief, had reentered his house, which he had been made to leave almost at the very moment of his wife's death. All was still. The lamp above was burning. He nearly called out to her by name; and the thought that no call from him

would ever again evoke the answer of her voice, made him drop heavily into the chair with a loud groan, wrung out by the pain as of a keen blade piercing his breast.

The rest of the night he made no sound. The darkness turned to grey, and on the colourless, clear, glassy dawn the jagged sierra stood out flat and opaque, as if cut out of paper.

The enthusiastic and severe soul of Giorgio Viola, sailor, champion of oppressed humanity, enemy of kings, and, by the grace of Mrs. Gould, hotel-keeper of the Sulaco harbour, had descended into the open abyss of desolation amongst the shattered vestiges of his past. He remembered his wooing between two campaigns, a single short week in the season of gathering olives. Nothing approached the grave passion of that time but the deep, passionate sense of his bereavement. He discovered all the extent of his dependence upon the silenced voice of that woman. It was her voice that he missed. Abstracted, busy, lost in inward contemplation, he seldom looked at his wife in those later years. The thought of his girls was a matter of concern, not of consolation. It was her voice that he would miss. And he remembered the other child — the little boy who died at sea. Ah! a man would have been something to lean upon. And, alas! even Gian' Battista — he of whom, and of Linda, his wife had spoken to him so anxiously before she dropped off into her last sleep on earth, he on whom she had called aloud to save the children, just before she died — even he was dead!

And the old man, bent forward, his head in his hand, sat through the day in immobility and solitude. He never heard the brazen roar of the bells in town. When it ceased the earthenware filter in the corner of the kitchen kept on its swift musical drip, drip into the great porous jar below.

Towards sunset he got up, and with slow movements disappeared up the narrow staircase. His bulk filled it; and the rubbing of his shoulders made a small noise as of a mouse running behind the plaster of a wall. While he remained up there the house was as dumb as a grave. Then, with the same faint rubbing noise, he descended. He had to catch at the chairs and tables to regain his seat. He seized his pipe off the high mantel of the fire-place — but made no attempt to reach the tobacco — thrust it empty into the corner of his mouth, and sat down again in the same staring pose. The sun of Pedrito's entry into Sulaco, the last sun of Senor Hirsch's life, the first of Decoud's solitude on the Great Isabel, passed over the Albergo d'Italia Una on its way to the west. The tinkling drip, drip of the filter had ceased, the lamp upstairs had burnt itself out, and the night beset Giorgio Viola and his dead wife with its obscurity and silence that seemed invincible till the Capataz de Cargadores, returning from the dead, put them to flight with the splutter and flare of a match.

“Si, viejo. It is me. Wait.”

Nostromo, after barricading the door and closing the shutters carefully, groped upon a shelf for a candle, and lit it.

Old Viola had risen. He followed with his eyes in the dark the sounds made by Nostromo. The light disclosed him standing without support, as if the mere presence

of that man who was loyal, brave, incorruptible, who was all his son would have been, were enough for the support of his decaying strength.

He extended his hand grasping the briar-wood pipe, whose bowl was charred on the edge, and knitted his bushy eyebrows heavily at the light.

“You have returned,” he said, with shaky dignity. “Ah! Very well! I — — ”

He broke off. Nostromo, leaning back against the table, his arms folded on his breast, nodded at him slightly.

“You thought I was drowned! No! The best dog of the rich, of the aristocrats, of these fine men who can only talk and betray the people, is not dead yet.”

The Garibaldino, motionless, seemed to drink in the sound of the well-known voice. His head moved slightly once as if in sign of approval; but Nostromo saw clearly that the old man understood nothing of the words. There was no one to understand; no one he could take into the confidence of Decoud’s fate, of his own, into the secret of the silver. That doctor was an enemy of the people — a tempter. . . .

Old Giorgio’s heavy frame shook from head to foot with the effort to overcome his emotion at the sight of that man, who had shared the intimacies of his domestic life as though he had been a grown-up son.

“She believed you would return,” he said, solemnly.

Nostromo raised his head.

“She was a wise woman. How could I fail to come back — — ?”

He finished the thought mentally: “Since she has prophesied for me an end of poverty, misery, and starvation.” These words of Teresa’s anger, from the circumstances in which they had been uttered, like the cry of a soul prevented from making its peace with God, stirred the obscure superstition of personal fortune from which even the greatest genius amongst men of adventure and action is seldom free. They reigned over Nostromo’s mind with the force of a potent malediction. And what a curse it was that which her words had laid upon him! He had been orphaned so young that he could remember no other woman whom he called mother. Henceforth there would be no enterprise in which he would not fail. The spell was working already. Death itself would elude him now. . . . He said violently —

“Come, viejo! Get me something to eat. I am hungry! Sangre de Dios! The emptiness of my belly makes me lightheaded.”

With his chin dropped again upon his bare breast above his folded arms, barefooted, watching from under a gloomy brow the movements of old Viola foraging amongst the cupboards, he seemed as if indeed fallen under a curse — a ruined and sinister Capataz.

Old Viola walked out of a dark corner, and, without a word, emptied upon the table out of his hollowed palms a few dry crusts of bread and half a raw onion.

While the Capataz began to devour this beggar’s fare, taking up with stony-eyed voracity piece after piece lying by his side, the Garibaldino went off, and squatting down in another corner filled an earthenware mug with red wine out of a wicker-covered demijohn. With a familiar gesture, as when serving customers in the cafe, he had thrust his pipe between his teeth to have his hands free.

The Capataz drank greedily. A slight flush deepened the bronze of his cheek. Before him, Viola, with a turn of his white and massive head towards the staircase, took his empty pipe out of his mouth, and pronounced slowly —

“After the shot was fired down here, which killed her as surely as if the bullet had struck her oppressed heart, she called upon you to save the children. Upon you, Gian’ Battista.”

The Capataz looked up.

“Did she do that, Padrone? To save the children! They are with the English senora, their rich benefactress. Hey! old man of the people. Thy benefactress. . . .”

“I am old,” muttered Giorgio Viola. “An Englishwoman was allowed to give a bed to Garibaldi lying wounded in prison. The greatest man that ever lived. A man of the people, too — a sailor. I may let another keep a roof over my head. Si . . . I am old. I may let her. Life lasts too long sometimes.”

“And she herself may not have a roof over her head before many days are out, unless I . . . What do you say? Am I to keep a roof over her head? Am I to try — and save all the Blancos together with her?”

“You shall do it,” said old Viola in a strong voice. “You shall do it as my son would have. . . .”

“Thy son, viejo! . . . There never has been a man like thy son. Ha, I must try. . . . But what if it were only a part of the curse to lure me on? . . . And so she called upon me to save — and then — — ?”

“She spoke no more.” The heroic follower of Garibaldi, at the thought of the eternal stillness and silence fallen upon the shrouded form stretched out on the bed upstairs, averted his face and raised his hand to his furrowed brow. “She was dead before I could seize her hands,” he stammered out, pitifully.

Before the wide eyes of the Capataz, staring at the doorway of the dark staircase, floated the shape of the Great Isabel, like a strange ship in distress, freighted with enormous wealth and the solitary life of a man. It was impossible for him to do anything. He could only hold his tongue, since there was no one to trust. The treasure would be lost, probably — unless Decoud. . . . And his thought came abruptly to an end. He perceived that he could not imagine in the least what Decoud was likely to do.

Old Viola had not stirred. And the motionless Capataz dropped his long, soft eye-lashes, which gave to the upper part of his fierce, black-whiskered face a touch of feminine ingenuousness. The silence had lasted for a long time.

“God rest her soul!” he murmured, gloomily.

Chapter 10

The next day was quiet in the morning, except for the faint sound of firing to the northward, in the direction of Los Hatos. Captain Mitchell had listened to it from his balcony anxiously. The phrase, “In my delicate position as the only consular agent then

in the port, everything, sir, everything was a just cause for anxiety," had its place in the more or less stereotyped relation of the "historical events" which for the next few years was at the service of distinguished strangers visiting Sulaco. The mention of the dignity and neutrality of the flag, so difficult to preserve in his position, "right in the thick of these events between the lawlessness of that piratical villain Sotillo and the more regularly established but scarcely less atrocious tyranny of his Excellency Don Pedro Montero," came next in order. Captain Mitchell was not the man to enlarge upon mere dangers much. But he insisted that it was a memorable day. On that day, towards dusk, he had seen "that poor fellow of mine — Nostromo. The sailor whom I discovered, and, I may say, made, sir. The man of the famous ride to Cayta, sir. An historical event, sir!"

Regarded by the O. S. N. Company as an old and faithful servant, Captain Mitchell was allowed to attain the term of his usefulness in ease and dignity at the head of the enormously extended service. The augmentation of the establishment, with its crowds of clerks, an office in town, the old office in the harbour, the division into departments — passenger, cargo, lighterage, and so on — secured a greater leisure for his last years in the regenerated Sulaco, the capital of the Occidental Republic. Liked by the natives for his good nature and the formality of his manner, self-important and simple, known for years as a "friend of our country," he felt himself a personality of mark in the town. Getting up early for a turn in the market-place while the gigantic shadow of Higuerota was still lying upon the fruit and flower stalls piled up with masses of gorgeous colouring, attending easily to current affairs, welcomed in houses, greeted by ladies on the Alameda, with his entry into all the clubs and a footing in the Casa Gould, he led his privileged old bachelor, man-about-town existence with great comfort and solemnity. But on mail-boat days he was down at the Harbour Office at an early hour, with his own gig, manned by a smart crew in white and blue, ready to dash off and board the ship directly she showed her bows between the harbour heads.

It would be into the Harbour Office that he would lead some privileged passenger he had brought off in his own boat, and invite him to take a seat for a moment while he signed a few papers. And Captain Mitchell, seating himself at his desk, would keep on talking hospitably —

"There isn't much time if you are to see everything in a day. We shall be off in a moment. We'll have lunch at the Amarilla Club — though I belong also to the Anglo-American — mining engineers and business men, don't you know — and to the Mirliflores as well, a new club — English, French, Italians, all sorts — lively young fellows mostly, who wanted to pay a compliment to an old resident, sir. But we'll lunch at the Amarilla. Interest you, I fancy. Real thing of the country. Men of the first families. The President of the Occidental Republic himself belongs to it, sir. Fine old bishop with a broken nose in the patio. Remarkable piece of statuary, I believe. Cavaliere Parrochetti — you know Parrochetti, the famous Italian sculptor — was working here for two years — thought very highly of our old bishop. . . . There! I am very much at your service now."

Proud of his experience, penetrated by the sense of historical importance of men, events, and buildings, he talked pompously in jerky periods, with slight sweeps of his short, thick arm, letting nothing “escape the attention” of his privileged captive.

“Lot of building going on, as you observe. Before the Separation it was a plain of burnt grass smothered in clouds of dust, with an ox-cart track to our Jetty. Nothing more. This is the Harbour Gate. Picturesque, is it not? Formerly the town stopped short there. We enter now the Calle de la Constitucion. Observe the old Spanish houses. Great dignity. Eh? I suppose it’s just as it was in the time of the Viceroys, except for the pavement. Wood blocks now. Sulaco National Bank there, with the sentry boxes each side of the gate. Casa Avellanos this side, with all the ground-floor windows shuttered. A wonderful woman lives there — Miss Avellanos — the beautiful Antonia. A character, sir! A historical woman! Opposite — Casa Gould. Noble gateway. Yes, the Goulds of the original Gould Concession, that all the world knows of now. I hold seventeen of the thousand-dollar shares in the Consolidated San Tome mines. All the poor savings of my lifetime, sir, and it will be enough to keep me in comfort to the end of my days at home when I retire. I got in on the ground-floor, you see. Don Carlos, great friend of mine. Seventeen shares — quite a little fortune to leave behind one, too. I have a niece — married a parson — most worthy man, incumbent of a small parish in Sussex; no end of children. I was never married myself. A sailor should exercise self-denial. Standing under that very gateway, sir, with some young engineer-fellows, ready to defend that house where we had received so much kindness and hospitality, I saw the first and last charge of Pedrito’s horsemen upon Barrios’s troops, who had just taken the Harbour Gate. They could not stand the new rifles brought out by that poor Decoud. It was a murderous fire. In a moment the street became blocked with a mass of dead men and horses. They never came on again.”

And all day Captain Mitchell would talk like this to his more or less willing victim

—
“The Plaza. I call it magnificent. Twice the area of Trafalgar Square.”

From the very centre, in the blazing sunshine, he pointed out the buildings —

“The Intendencia, now President’s Palace — Cabildo, where the Lower Chamber of Parliament sits. You notice the new houses on that side of the Plaza? Compania Anzani, a great general store, like those cooperative things at home. Old Anzani was murdered by the National Guards in front of his safe. It was even for that specific crime that the deputy Gamacho, commanding the Nationals, a bloodthirsty and savage brute, was executed publicly by garrotte upon the sentence of a court-martial ordered by Barrios. Anzani’s nephews converted the business into a company. All that side of the Plaza had been burnt; used to be colonnaded before. A terrible fire, by the light of which I saw the last of the fighting, the llaneros flying, the Nationals throwing their arms down, and the miners of San Tome, all Indians from the Sierra, rolling by like a torrent to the sound of pipes and cymbals, green flags flying, a wild mass of men in white ponchos and green hats, on foot, on mules, on donkeys. Such a sight, sir, will never be seen again. The miners, sir, had marched upon the town, Don Pepe leading on his black

horse, and their very wives in the rear on burros, screaming encouragement, sir, and beating tambourines. I remember one of these women had a green parrot seated on her shoulder, as calm as a bird of stone. They had just saved their Senor Administrador; for Barrios, though he ordered the assault at once, at night, too, would have been too late. Pedrito Montero had Don Carlos led out to be shot — like his uncle many years ago — and then, as Barrios said afterwards, ‘Sulaco would not have been worth fighting for.’ Sulaco without the Concession was nothing; and there were tons and tons of dynamite distributed all over the mountain with detonators arranged, and an old priest, Father Roman, standing by to annihilate the San Tome mine at the first news of failure. Don Carlos had made up his mind not to leave it behind, and he had the right men to see to it, too.”

Thus Captain Mitchell would talk in the middle of the Plaza, holding over his head a white umbrella with a green lining; but inside the cathedral, in the dim light, with a faint scent of incense floating in the cool atmosphere, and here and there a kneeling female figure, black or all white, with a veiled head, his lowered voice became solemn and impressive.

“Here,” he would say, pointing to a niche in the wall of the dusky aisle, “you see the bust of Don Jose Avellanos, ‘Patriot and Statesman,’ as the inscription says, ‘Minister to Courts of England and Spain, etc., etc., died in the woods of Los Hatos worn out with his lifelong struggle for Right and Justice at the dawn of the New Era.’ A fair likeness. Parrochetti’s work from some old photographs and a pencil sketch by Mrs. Gould. I was well acquainted with that distinguished Spanish-American of the old school, a true Hidalgo, beloved by everybody who knew him. The marble medallion in the wall, in the antique style, representing a veiled woman seated with her hands clasped loosely over her knees, commemorates that unfortunate young gentleman who sailed out with Nostromo on that fatal night, sir. See, ‘To the memory of Martin Decoud, his betrothed Antonia Avellanos.’ Frank, simple, noble. There you have that lady, sir, as she is. An exceptional woman. Those who thought she would give way to despair were mistaken, sir. She has been blamed in many quarters for not having taken the veil. It was expected of her. But Dona Antonia is not the stuff they make nuns of. Bishop Corbelan, her uncle, lives with her in the Corbelan town house. He is a fierce sort of priest, everlastingly worrying the Government about the old Church lands and convents. I believe they think a lot of him in Rome. Now let us go to the Amarilla Club, just across the Plaza, to get some lunch.”

Directly outside the cathedral on the very top of the noble flight of steps, his voice rose pompously, his arm found again its sweeping gesture.

“Porvenir, over there on that first floor, above those French plate-glass shop-fronts; our biggest daily. Conservative, or, rather, I should say, Parliamentary. We have the Parliamentary party here of which the actual Chief of the State, Don Juste Lopez, is the head; a very sagacious man, I think. A first-rate intellect, sir. The Democratic party in opposition rests mostly, I am sorry to say, on these socialistic Italians, sir, with their secret societies, camorras, and such-like. There are lots of Italians settled

here on the railway lands, dismissed navvies, mechanics, and so on, all along the trunk line. There are whole villages of Italians on the Campo. And the natives, too, are being drawn into these ways . . . American bar? Yes. And over there you can see another. New Yorkers mostly frequent that one — — Here we are at the Amarilla. Observe the bishop at the foot of the stairs to the right as we go in.”

And the lunch would begin and terminate its lavish and leisurely course at a little table in the gallery, Captain Mitchell nodding, bowing, getting up to speak for a moment to different officials in black clothes, merchants in jackets, officers in uniform, middle-aged caballeros from the Campo — sallow, little, nervous men, and fat, placid, swarthy men, and Europeans or North Americans of superior standing, whose faces looked very white amongst the majority of dark complexions and black, glistening eyes.

Captain Mitchell would lie back in the chair, casting around looks of satisfaction, and tender over the table a case full of thick cigars.

“Try a weed with your coffee. Local tobacco. The black coffee you get at the Amarilla, sir, you don’t meet anywhere in the world. We get the bean from a famous cafeteria in the foot-hills, whose owner sends three sacks every year as a present to his fellow members in remembrance of the fight against Gamacho’s Nationals, carried on from these very windows by the caballeros. He was in town at the time, and took part, sir, to the bitter end. It arrives on three mules — not in the common way, by rail; no fear! — right into the patio, escorted by mounted peons, in charge of the Mayoral of his estate, who walks upstairs, booted and spurred, and delivers it to our committee formally with the words, ‘For the sake of those fallen on the third of May.’ We call it Tres de Mayo coffee. Taste it.”

Captain Mitchell, with an expression as though making ready to hear a sermon in a church, would lift the tiny cup to his lips. And the nectar would be sipped to the bottom during a restful silence in a cloud of cigar smoke.

“Look at this man in black just going out,” he would begin, leaning forward hastily. “This is the famous Hernandez, Minister of War. The Times’ special correspondent, who wrote that striking series of letters calling the Occidental Republic the ‘Treasure House of the World,’ gave a whole article to him and the force he has organized — the renowned Carabineers of the Campo.”

Captain Mitchell’s guest, staring curiously, would see a figure in a long-tailed black coat walking gravely, with downcast eyelids in a long, composed face, a brow furrowed horizontally, a pointed head, whose grey hair, thin at the top, combed down carefully on all sides and rolled at the ends, fell low on the neck and shoulders. This, then, was the famous bandit of whom Europe had heard with interest. He put on a high-crowned sombrero with a wide flat brim; a rosary of wooden beads was twisted about his right wrist. And Captain Mitchell would proceed —

“The protector of the Sulaco refugees from the rage of Pedrito. As general of cavalry with Barrios he distinguished himself at the storming of Tonoro, where Senor Fuentes was killed with the last remnant of the Monterists. He is the friend and humble servant

of Bishop Corbelan. Hears three Masses every day. I bet you he will step into the cathedral to say a prayer or two on his way home to his siesta.”

He took several puffs at his cigar in silence; then, in his most important manner, pronounced:

“The Spanish race, sir, is prolific of remarkable characters in every rank of life. . . . I propose we go now into the billiard-room, which is cool, for a quiet chat. There’s never anybody there till after five. I could tell you episodes of the Separationist revolution that would astonish you. When the great heat’s over, we’ll take a turn on the Alameda.”

The programme went on relentless, like a law of Nature. The turn on the Alameda was taken with slow steps and stately remarks.

“All the great world of Sulaco here, sir.” Captain Mitchell bowed right and left with no end of formality; then with animation, “Dona Emilia, Mrs. Gould’s carriage. Look. Always white mules. The kindest, most gracious woman the sun ever shone upon. A great position, sir. A great position. First lady in Sulaco — far before the President’s wife. And worthy of it.” He took off his hat; then, with a studied change of tone, added, negligently, that the man in black by her side, with a high white collar and a scarred, snarly face, was Dr. Monygham, Inspector of State Hospitals, chief medical officer of the Consolidated San Tome mines. “A familiar of the house. Everlastingly there. No wonder. The Goulds made him. Very clever man and all that, but I never liked him. Nobody does. I can recollect him limping about the streets in a check shirt and native sandals with a watermelon under his arm — all he would get to eat for the day. A big-wig now, sir, and as nasty as ever. However . . . There’s no doubt he played his part fairly well at the time. He saved us all from the deadly incubus of Sotillo, where a more particular man might have failed — — ”

His arm went up.

“The equestrian statue that used to stand on the pedestal over there has been removed. It was an anachronism,” Captain Mitchell commented, obscurely. “There is some talk of replacing it by a marble shaft commemorative of Separation, with angels of peace at the four corners, and bronze Justice holding an even balance, all gilt, on the top. Cavaliere Parrochetti was asked to make a design, which you can see framed under glass in the Municipal Sala. Names are to be engraved all round the base. Well! They could do no better than begin with the name of Nostromo. He has done for Separation as much as anybody else, and,” added Captain Mitchell, “has got less than many others by it — when it comes to that.” He dropped on to a stone seat under a tree, and tapped invitingly at the place by his side. “He carried to Barrios the letters from Sulaco which decided the General to abandon Cayta for a time, and come back to our help here by sea. The transports were still in harbour fortunately. Sir, I did not even know that my Capataz de Cargadores was alive. I had no idea. It was Dr. Monygham who came upon him, by chance, in the Custom House, evacuated an hour or two before by the wretched Sotillo. I was never told; never given a hint, nothing — as if I were unworthy of confidence. Monygham arranged it all. He went to the railway yards, and got admission to the engineer-in-chief, who, for the sake of the Goulds as

much as for anything else, consented to let an engine make a dash down the line, one hundred and eighty miles, with Nostromo aboard. It was the only way to get him off. In the Construction Camp at the railhead, he obtained a horse, arms, some clothing, and started alone on that marvellous ride — four hundred miles in six days, through a disturbed country, ending by the feat of passing through the Monterist lines outside Cayta. The history of that ride, sir, would make a most exciting book. He carried all our lives in his pocket. Devotion, courage, fidelity, intelligence were not enough. Of course, he was perfectly fearless and incorruptible. But a man was wanted that would know how to succeed. He was that man, sir. On the fifth of May, being practically a prisoner in the Harbour Office of my Company, I suddenly heard the whistle of an engine in the railway yards, a quarter of a mile away. I could not believe my ears. I made one jump on to the balcony, and beheld a locomotive under a great head of steam run out of the yard gates, screeching like mad, enveloped in a white cloud, and then, just abreast of old Viola's inn, check almost to a standstill. I made out, sir, a man — I couldn't tell who — dash out of the Albergo d'Italia Una, climb into the cab, and then, sir, that engine seemed positively to leap clear of the house, and was gone in the twinkling of an eye. As you blow a candle out, sir! There was a first-rate driver on the foot-plate, sir, I can tell you. They were fired heavily upon by the National Guards in Rincon and one other place. Fortunately the line had not been torn up. In four hours they reached the Construction Camp. Nostromo had his start. . . . The rest you know. You've got only to look round you. There are people on this Alameda that ride in their carriages, or even are alive at all to-day, because years ago I engaged a runaway Italian sailor for a foreman of our wharf simply on the strength of his looks. And that's a fact. You can't get over it, sir. On the seventeenth of May, just twelve days after I saw the man from the Casa Viola get on the engine, and wondered what it meant, Barrios's transports were entering this harbour, and the 'Treasure House of the World,' as The Times man calls Sulaco in his book, was saved intact for civilization — for a great future, sir. Pedrito, with Hernandez on the west, and the San Tome miners pressing on the land gate, was not able to oppose the landing. He had been sending messages to Sotillo for a week to join him. Had Sotillo done so there would have been massacres and proscription that would have left no man or woman of position alive. But that's where Dr. Monygham comes in. Sotillo, blind and deaf to everything, stuck on board his steamer watching the dragging for silver, which he believed to be sunk at the bottom of the harbour. They say that for the last three days he was out of his mind raving and foaming with disappointment at getting nothing, flying about the deck, and yelling curses at the boats with the drags, ordering them in, and then suddenly stamping his foot and crying out, 'And yet it is there! I see it! I feel it!'

“He was preparing to hang Dr. Monygham (whom he had on board) at the end of the after-derrick, when the first of Barrios's transports, one of our own ships at that, steamed right in, and ranging close alongside opened a small-arm fire without as much preliminaries as a hail. It was the completest surprise in the world, sir. They were too astounded at first to bolt below. Men were falling right and left like ninepins. It's

a miracle that Monygham, standing on the after-hatch with the rope already round his neck, escaped being riddled through and through like a sieve. He told me since that he had given himself up for lost, and kept on yelling with all the strength of his lungs: 'Hoist a white flag! Hoist a white flag!' Suddenly an old major of the Esmeralda regiment, standing by, unsheathed his sword with a shriek: 'Die, perjured traitor!' and ran Sotillo clean through the body, just before he fell himself shot through the head."

Captain Mitchell stopped for a while.

"Begad, sir! I could spin you a yarn for hours. But it's time we started off to Rincon. It would not do for you to pass through Sulaco and not see the lights of the San Tome mine, a whole mountain ablaze like a lighted palace above the dark Campo. It's a fashionable drive. . . . But let me tell you one little anecdote, sir; just to show you. A fortnight or more later, when Barrios, declared Generalissimo, was gone in pursuit of Pedrito away south, when the Provisional Junta, with Don Juste Lopez at its head, had promulgated the new Constitution, and our Don Carlos Gould was packing up his trunks bound on a mission to San Francisco and Washington (the United States, sir, were the first great power to recognize the Occidental Republic) — a fortnight later, I say, when we were beginning to feel that our heads were safe on our shoulders, if I may express myself so, a prominent man, a large shipper by our line, came to see me on business, and, says he, the first thing: 'I say, Captain Mitchell, is that fellow' (meaning Nostromo) 'still the Capataz of your Cargadores or not?' 'What's the matter?' says I. 'Because, if he is, then I don't mind; I send and receive a good lot of cargo by your ships; but I have observed him several days loafing about the wharf, and just now he stopped me as cool as you please, with a request for a cigar. Now, you know, my cigars are rather special, and I can't get them so easily as all that.' 'I hope you stretched a point,' I said, very gently. 'Why, yes. But it's a confounded nuisance. The fellow's everlastingly cadging for smokes.' Sir, I turned my eyes away, and then asked, 'Weren't you one of the prisoners in the Cabildo?' 'You know very well I was, and in chains, too,' says he. 'And under a fine of fifteen thousand dollars?' He coloured, sir, because it got about that he fainted from fright when they came to arrest him, and then behaved before Fuentes in a manner to make the very policianos, who had dragged him there by the hair of his head, smile at his cringing. 'Yes,' he says, in a sort of shy way. 'Why?' 'Oh, nothing. You stood to lose a tidy bit,' says I, 'even if you saved your life. . . . But what can I do for you?' He never even saw the point. Not he. And that's how the world wags, sir."

He rose a little stiffly, and the drive to Rincon would be taken with only one philosophical remark, uttered by the merciless cicerone, with his eyes fixed upon the lights of San Tome, that seemed suspended in the dark night between earth and heaven.

"A great power, this, for good and evil, sir. A great power."

And the dinner of the Mirliflores would be eaten, excellent as to cooking, and leaving upon the traveller's mind an impression that there were in Sulaco many pleasant, able young men with salaries apparently too large for their discretion, and amongst them

a few, mostly Anglo-Saxon, skilled in the art of, as the saying is, "taking a rise" out of his kind host.

With a rapid, jingling drive to the harbour in a two-wheeled machine (which Captain Mitchell called a curricl) behind a fleet and scraggy mule beaten all the time by an obviously Neapolitan driver, the cycle would be nearly closed before the lighted-up offices of the O. S. N. Company, remaining open so late because of the steamer. Nearly — but not quite.

"Ten o'clock. Your ship won't be ready to leave till half-past twelve, if by then. Come in for a brandy-and-soda and one more cigar."

And in the superintendent's private room the privileged passenger by the Ceres, or Juno, or Pallas, stunned and as it were annihilated mentally by a sudden surfeit of sights, sounds, names, facts, and complicated information imperfectly apprehended, would listen like a tired child to a fairy tale; would hear a voice, familiar and surprising in its pompousness, tell him, as if from another world, how there was "in this very harbour" an international naval demonstration, which put an end to the Costaguana-Sulaco War. How the United States cruiser, Powhattan, was the first to salute the Occidental flag — white, with a wreath of green laurel in the middle encircling a yellow amarilla flower. Would hear how General Montero, in less than a month after proclaiming himself Emperor of Costaguana, was shot dead (during a solemn and public distribution of orders and crosses) by a young artillery officer, the brother of his then mistress.

"The abominable Pedrito, sir, fled the country," the voice would say. And it would continue: "A captain of one of our ships told me lately that he recognized Pedrito the Guerrillero, arrayed in purple slippers and a velvet smoking-cap with a gold tassel, keeping a disorderly house in one of the southern ports."

"Abominable Pedrito! Who the devil was he?" would wonder the distinguished bird of passage hovering on the confines of waking and sleep with resolutely open eyes and a faint but amiable curl upon his lips, from between which stuck out the eighteenth or twentieth cigar of that memorable day.

"He appeared to me in this very room like a haunting ghost, sir" — Captain Mitchell was talking of his Nostromo with true warmth of feeling and a touch of wistful pride. "You may imagine, sir, what an effect it produced on me. He had come round by sea with Barrios, of course. And the first thing he told me after I became fit to hear him was that he had picked up the lighter's boat floating in the gulf! He seemed quite overcome by the circumstance. And a remarkable enough circumstance it was, when you remember that it was then sixteen days since the sinking of the silver. At once I could see he was another man. He stared at the wall, sir, as if there had been a spider or something running about there. The loss of the silver preyed on his mind. The first thing he asked me about was whether Dona Antonia had heard yet of Decoud's death. His voice trembled. I had to tell him that Dona Antonia, as a matter of fact, was not back in town yet. Poor girl! And just as I was making ready to ask him a thousand questions, with a sudden, 'Pardon me, senior,' he cleared out of the office altogether. I

did not see him again for three days. I was terribly busy, you know. It seems that he wandered about in and out of the town, and on two nights turned up to sleep in the baracoons of the railway people. He seemed absolutely indifferent to what went on. I asked him on the wharf, 'When are you going to take hold again, Nostromo? There will be plenty of work for the Cargadores presently.'

"'Senor,' says he, looking at me in a slow, inquisitive manner, 'would it surprise you to hear that I am too tired to work just yet? And what work could I do now? How can I look my Cargadores in the face after losing a lighter?'

"I begged him not to think any more about the silver, and he smiled. A smile that went to my heart, sir. 'It was no mistake,' I told him. 'It was a fatality. A thing that could not be helped.' 'Si, si!' he said, and turned away. I thought it best to leave him alone for a bit to get over it. Sir, it took him years really, to get over it. I was present at his interview with Don Carlos. I must say that Gould is rather a cold man. He had to keep a tight hand on his feelings, dealing with thieves and rascals, in constant danger of ruin for himself and wife for so many years, that it had become a second nature. They looked at each other for a long time. Don Carlos asked what he could do for him, in his quiet, reserved way.

"'My name is known from one end of Sulaco to the other,' he said, as quiet as the other. 'What more can you do for me?' That was all that passed on that occasion. Later, however, there was a very fine coasting schooner for sale, and Mrs. Gould and I put our heads together to get her bought and presented to him. It was done, but he paid all the price back within the next three years. Business was booming all along this seaboard, sir. Moreover, that man always succeeded in everything except in saving the silver. Poor Dona Antonia, fresh from her terrible experiences in the woods of Los Hatos, had an interview with him, too. Wanted to hear about Decoud: what they said, what they did, what they thought up to the last on that fatal night. Mrs. Gould told me his manner was perfect for quietness and sympathy. Miss Avellanos burst into tears only when he told her how Decoud had happened to say that his plan would be a glorious success. . . . And there's no doubt, sir, that it is. It is a success."

The cycle was about to close at last. And while the privileged passenger, shivering with the pleasant anticipations of his berth, forgot to ask himself, "What on earth Decoud's plan could be?" Captain Mitchell was saying, "Sorry we must part so soon. Your intelligent interest made this a pleasant day to me. I shall see you now on board. You had a glimpse of the 'Treasure House of the World.' A very good name that." And the coxswain's voice at the door, announcing that the gig was ready, closed the cycle.

Nostromo had, indeed, found the lighter's boat, which he had left on the Great Isabel with Decoud, floating empty far out in the gulf. He was then on the bridge of the first of Barrios's transports, and within an hour's steaming from Sulaco. Barrios, always delighted with a feat of daring and a good judge of courage, had taken a great liking to the Capataz. During the passage round the coast the General kept Nostromo near his person, addressing him frequently in that abrupt and boisterous manner which was the sign of his high favour.

Nostromo's eyes were the first to catch, broad on the bow, the tiny, elusive dark speck, which, alone with the forms of the Three Isabels right ahead, appeared on the flat, shimmering emptiness of the gulf. There are times when no fact should be neglected as insignificant; a small boat so far from the land might have had some meaning worth finding out. At a nod of consent from Barrios the transport swept out of her course, passing near enough to ascertain that no one manned the little cockle-shell. It was merely a common small boat gone adrift with her oars in her. But Nostromo, to whose mind Decoud had been insistently present for days, had long before recognized with excitement the dinghy of the lighter.

There could be no question of stopping to pick up that thing. Every minute of time was momentous with the lives and futures of a whole town. The head of the leading ship, with the General on board, fell off to her course. Behind her, the fleet of transports, scattered haphazard over a mile or so in the offing, like the finish of an ocean race, pressed on, all black and smoking on the western sky.

"Mi General," Nostromo's voice rang out loud, but quiet, from behind a group of officers, "I should like to save that little boat. Por Dios, I know her. She belongs to my Company."

"And, por Dios," guffawed Barrios, in a noisy, good-humoured voice, "you belong to me. I am going to make you a captain of cavalry directly we get within sight of a horse again."

"I can swim far better than I can ride, mi General," cried Nostromo, pushing through to the rail with a set stare in his eyes. "Let me — —"

"Let you? What a conceited fellow that is," bantered the General, jovially, without even looking at him. "Let him go! Ha! ha! ha! He wants me to admit that we cannot take Sulaco without him! Ha! ha! ha! Would you like to swim off to her, my son?"

A tremendous shout from one end of the ship to the other stopped his guffaw. Nostromo had leaped overboard; and his black head bobbed up far away already from the ship. The General muttered an appalled "Cielo! Sinner that I am!" in a thunderstruck tone. One anxious glance was enough to show him that Nostromo was swimming with perfect ease; and then he thundered terribly, "No! no! We shall not stop to pick up this impertinent fellow. Let him drown — that mad Capataz."

Nothing short of main force would have kept Nostromo from leaping overboard. That empty boat, coming out to meet him mysteriously, as if rowed by an invisible spectre, exercised the fascination of some sign, of some warning, seemed to answer in a startling and enigmatic way the persistent thought of a treasure and of a man's fate. He would have leaped if there had been death in that half-mile of water. It was as smooth as a pond, and for some reason sharks are unknown in the Placid Gulf, though on the other side of the Punta Mala the coastline swarms with them.

The Capataz seized hold of the stern and blew with force. A queer, faint feeling had come over him while he swam. He had got rid of his boots and coat in the water. He hung on for a time, regaining his breath. In the distance the transports, more in a bunch now, held on straight for Sulaco, with their air of friendly contest, of nautical

sport, of a regatta; and the united smoke of their funnels drove like a thin, sulphurous fogbank right over his head. It was his daring, his courage, his act that had set these ships in motion upon the sea, hurrying on to save the lives and fortunes of the Blancos, the taskmasters of the people; to save the San Tome mine; to save the children.

With a vigorous and skilful effort he clambered over the stern. The very boat! No doubt of it; no doubt whatever. It was the dinghy of the lighter No. 3 — the dinghy left with Martin Decoud on the Great Isabel so that he should have some means to help himself if nothing could be done for him from the shore. And here she had come out to meet him empty and inexplicable. What had become of Decoud? The Capataz made a minute examination. He looked for some scratch, for some mark, for some sign. All he discovered was a brown stain on the gunwale abreast of the thwart. He bent his face over it and rubbed hard with his finger. Then he sat down in the stern sheets, passive, with his knees close together and legs aslant.

Streaming from head to foot, with his hair and whiskers hanging lank and dripping and a lustreless stare fixed upon the bottom boards, the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores resembled a drowned corpse come up from the bottom to idle away the sunset hour in a small boat. The excitement of his adventurous ride, the excitement of the return in time, of achievement, of success, all this excitement centred round the associated ideas of the great treasure and of the only other man who knew of its existence, had departed from him. To the very last moment he had been cudgelling his brains as to how he could manage to visit the Great Isabel without loss of time and undetected. For the idea of secrecy had come to be connected with the treasure so closely that even to Barrios himself he had refrained from mentioning the existence of Decoud and of the silver on the island. The letters he carried to the General, however, made brief mention of the loss of the lighter, as having its bearing upon the situation in Sulaco. In the circumstances, the one-eyed tiger-slayer, scenting battle from afar, had not wasted his time in making inquiries from the messenger. In fact, Barrios, talking with Nostromo, assumed that both Don Martin Decoud and the ingots of San Tome were lost together, and Nostromo, not questioned directly, had kept silent, under the influence of some indefinable form of resentment and distrust. Let Don Martin speak of everything with his own lips — was what he told himself mentally.

And now, with the means of gaining the Great Isabel thrown thus in his way at the earliest possible moment, his excitement had departed, as when the soul takes flight leaving the body inert upon an earth it knows no more. Nostromo did not seem to know the gulf. For a long time even his eyelids did not flutter once upon the glazed emptiness of his stare. Then slowly, without a limb having stirred, without a twitch of muscle or quiver of an eyelash, an expression, a living expression came upon the still features, deep thought crept into the empty stare — as if an outcast soul, a quiet, brooding soul, finding that untenanted body in its way, had come in stealthily to take possession.

The Capataz frowned: and in the immense stillness of sea, islands, and coast, of cloud forms on the sky and trails of light upon the water, the knitting of that brow

had the emphasis of a powerful gesture. Nothing else budged for a long time; then the Capataz shook his head and again surrendered himself to the universal repose of all visible things. Suddenly he seized the oars, and with one movement made the dinghy spin round, head-on to the Great Isabel. But before he began to pull he bent once more over the brown stain on the gunwale.

“I know that thing,” he muttered to himself, with a sagacious jerk of the head. “That’s blood.”

His stroke was long, vigorous, and steady. Now and then he looked over his shoulder at the Great Isabel, presenting its low cliff to his anxious gaze like an impenetrable face. At last the stem touched the strand. He flung rather than dragged the boat up the little beach. At once, turning his back upon the sunset, he plunged with long strides into the ravine, making the water of the stream spurt and fly upwards at every step, as if spurning its shallow, clear, murmuring spirit with his feet. He wanted to save every moment of daylight.

A mass of earth, grass, and smashed bushes had fallen down very naturally from above upon the cavity under the leaning tree. Decoud had attended to the concealment of the silver as instructed, using the spade with some intelligence. But Nostromo’s half-smile of approval changed into a scornful curl of the lip by the sight of the spade itself flung there in full view, as if in utter carelessness or sudden panic, giving away the whole thing. Ah! They were all alike in their folly, these *hombres finos* that invented laws and governments and barren tasks for the people.

The Capataz picked up the spade, and with the feel of the handle in his palm the desire of having a look at the horse-hide boxes of treasure came upon him suddenly. In a very few strokes he uncovered the edges and corners of several; then, clearing away more earth, became aware that one of them had been slashed with a knife.

He exclaimed at that discovery in a stifled voice, and dropped on his knees with a look of irrational apprehension over one shoulder, then over the other. The stiff hide had closed, and he hesitated before he pushed his hand through the long slit and felt the ingots inside. There they were. One, two, three. Yes, four gone. Taken away. Four ingots. But who? Decoud? Nobody else. And why? For what purpose? For what cursed fancy? Let him explain. Four ingots carried off in a boat, and — blood!

In the face of the open gulf, the sun, clear, unclouded, unaltered, plunged into the waters in a grave and untroubled mystery of self-immolation consummated far from all mortal eyes, with an infinite majesty of silence and peace. Four ingots short! — and blood!

The Capataz got up slowly.

“He might simply have cut his hand,” he muttered. “But, then — — ”

He sat down on the soft earth, unresisting, as if he had been chained to the treasure, his drawn-up legs clasped in his hands with an air of hopeless submission, like a slave set on guard. Once only he lifted his head smartly: the rattle of hot musketry fire had reached his ears, like pouring from on high a stream of dry peas upon a drum. After listening for a while, he said, half aloud —

“He will never come back to explain.”

And he lowered his head again.

“Impossible!” he muttered, gloomily.

The sounds of firing died out. The loom of a great conflagration in Sulaco flashed up red above the coast, played on the clouds at the head of the gulf, seemed to touch with a ruddy and sinister reflection the forms of the Three Isabels. He never saw it, though he raised his head.

“But, then, I cannot know,” he pronounced, distinctly, and remained silent and staring for hours.

He could not know. Nobody was to know. As might have been supposed, the end of Don Martin Decoud never became a subject of speculation for any one except Nostromo. Had the truth of the facts been known, there would always have remained the question. Why? Whereas the version of his death at the sinking of the lighter had no uncertainty of motive. The young apostle of Separation had died striving for his idea by an ever-lamented accident. But the truth was that he died from solitude, the enemy known but to few on this earth, and whom only the simplest of us are fit to withstand. The brilliant Costaguanero of the boulevards had died from solitude and want of faith in himself and others.

For some good and valid reasons beyond mere human comprehension, the sea-birds of the gulf shun the Isabels. The rocky head of Azuera is their haunt, whose stony levels and chasms resound with their wild and tumultuous clamour as if they were for ever quarrelling over the legendary treasure.

At the end of his first day on the Great Isabel, Decoud, turning in his lair of coarse grass, under the shade of a tree, said to himself —

“I have not seen as much as one single bird all day.”

And he had not heard a sound, either, all day but that one now of his own muttering voice. It had been a day of absolute silence — the first he had known in his life. And he had not slept a wink. Not for all these wakeful nights and the days of fighting, planning, talking; not for all that last night of danger and hard physical toil upon the gulf, had he been able to close his eyes for a moment. And yet from sunrise to sunset he had been lying prone on the ground, either on his back or on his face.

He stretched himself, and with slow steps descended into the gully to spend the night by the side of the silver. If Nostromo returned — as he might have done at any moment — it was there that he would look first; and night would, of course, be the proper time for an attempt to communicate. He remembered with profound indifference that he had not eaten anything yet since he had been left alone on the island.

He spent the night open-eyed, and when the day broke he ate something with the same indifference. The brilliant “Son Decoud,” the spoiled darling of the family, the lover of Antonia and journalist of Sulaco, was not fit to grapple with himself single-handed. Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and scepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief.

After three days of waiting for the sight of some human face, Decoud caught himself entertaining a doubt of his own individuality. It had merged into the world of cloud and water, of natural forces and forms of nature. In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part. Decoud lost all belief in the reality of his action past and to come. On the fifth day an immense melancholy descended upon him palpably. He resolved not to give himself up to these people in Sulaco, who had beset him, unreal and terrible, like jibbering and obscene spectres. He saw himself struggling feebly in their midst, and Antonia, gigantic and lovely like an allegorical statue, looking on with scornful eyes at his weakness.

Not a living being, not a speck of distant sail, appeared within the range of his vision; and, as if to escape from this solitude, he absorbed himself in his melancholy. The vague consciousness of a misdirected life given up to impulses whose memory left a bitter taste in his mouth was the first moral sentiment of his manhood. But at the same time he felt no remorse. What should he regret? He had recognized no other virtue than intelligence, and had erected passions into duties. Both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith. Sleeplessness had robbed his will of all energy, for he had not slept seven hours in the seven days. His sadness was the sadness of a sceptical mind. He beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images. Nostromo was dead. Everything had failed ignominiously. He no longer dared to think of Antonia. She had not survived. But if she survived he could not face her. And all exertion seemed senseless.

On the tenth day, after a night spent without even dozing off once (it had occurred to him that Antonia could not possibly have ever loved a being so impalpable as himself), the solitude appeared like a great void, and the silence of the gulf like a tense, thin cord to which he hung suspended by both hands, without fear, without surprise, without any sort of emotion whatever. Only towards the evening, in the comparative relief of coolness, he began to wish that this cord would snap. He imagined it snapping with a report as of a pistol — a sharp, full crack. And that would be the end of him. He contemplated that eventuality with pleasure, because he dreaded the sleepless nights in which the silence, remaining unbroken in the shape of a cord to which he hung with both hands, vibrated with senseless phrases, always the same but utterly incomprehensible, about Nostromo, Antonia, Barrios, and proclamations mingled into an ironical and senseless buzzing. In the daytime he could look at the silence like a still cord stretched to breaking-point, with his life, his vain life, suspended to it like a weight.

“I wonder whether I would hear it snap before I fell,” he asked himself.

The sun was two hours above the horizon when he got up, gaunt, dirty, white-faced, and looked at it with his red-rimmed eyes. His limbs obeyed him slowly, as if full of lead, yet without tremor; and the effect of that physical condition gave to his movements an unhesitating, deliberate dignity. He acted as if accomplishing some sort of rite. He descended into the gully; for the fascination of all that silver, with its potential power,

survived alone outside of himself. He picked up the belt with the revolver, that was lying there, and buckled it round his waist. The cord of silence could never snap on the island. It must let him fall and sink into the sea, he thought. And sink! He was looking at the loose earth covering the treasure. In the sea! His aspect was that of a somnambulist. He lowered himself down on his knees slowly and went on grubbing with his fingers with industrious patience till he uncovered one of the boxes. Without a pause, as if doing some work done many times before, he slit it open and took four ingots, which he put in his pockets. He covered up the exposed box again and step by step came out of the gully. The bushes closed after him with a swish.

It was on the third day of his solitude that he had dragged the dinghy near the water with an idea of rowing away somewhere, but had desisted partly at the whisper of lingering hope that Nostromo would return, partly from conviction of utter uselessness of all effort. Now she wanted only a slight shove to be set afloat. He had eaten a little every day after the first, and had some muscular strength left yet. Taking up the oars slowly, he pulled away from the cliff of the Great Isabel, that stood behind him warm with sunshine, as if with the heat of life, bathed in a rich light from head to foot as if in a radiance of hope and joy. He pulled straight towards the setting sun. When the gulf had grown dark, he ceased rowing and flung the sculls in. The hollow clatter they made in falling was the loudest noise he had ever heard in his life. It was a revelation. It seemed to recall him from far away, Actually the thought, "Perhaps I may sleep to-night," passed through his mind. But he did not believe it. He believed in nothing; and he remained sitting on the thwart.

The dawn from behind the mountains put a gleam into his unwinking eyes. After a clear daybreak the sun appeared splendidly above the peaks of the range. The great gulf burst into a glitter all around the boat; and in this glory of merciless solitude the silence appeared again before him, stretched taut like a dark, thin string.

His eyes looked at it while, without haste, he shifted his seat from the thwart to the gunwale. They looked at it fixedly, while his hand, feeling about his waist, unbuttoned the flap of the leather case, drew the revolver, cocked it, brought it forward pointing at his breast, pulled the trigger, and, with convulsive force, sent the still-smoking weapon hurtling through the air. His eyes looked at it while he fell forward and hung with his breast on the gunwale and the fingers of his right hand hooked under the thwart. They looked — —

"It is done," he stammered out, in a sudden flow of blood. His last thought was: "I wonder how that Capataz died." The stiffness of the fingers relaxed, and the lover of Antonia Avellanos rolled overboard without having heard the cord of silence snap in the solitude of the Placid Gulf, whose glittering surface remained untroubled by the fall of his body.

A victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity, the brilliant Don Martin Decoud, weighted by the bars of San Tome silver, disappeared without a trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things. His sleepless, crouching figure was gone from the side of the San Tome silver; and for a

time the spirits of good and evil that hover near every concealed treasure of the earth might have thought that this one had been forgotten by all mankind. Then, after a few days, another form appeared striding away from the setting sun to sit motionless and awake in the narrow black gully all through the night, in nearly the same pose, in the same place in which had sat that other sleepless man who had gone away for ever so quietly in a small boat, about the time of sunset. And the spirits of good and evil that hover about a forbidden treasure understood well that the silver of San Tome was provided now with a faithful and lifelong slave.

The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, victim of the disenchanting vanity which is the reward of audacious action, sat in the weary pose of a hunted outcast through a night of sleeplessness as tormenting as any known to Decoud, his companion in the most desperate affair of his life. And he wondered how Decoud had died. But he knew the part he had played himself. First a woman, then a man, abandoned both in their last extremity, for the sake of this accursed treasure. It was paid for by a soul lost and by a vanished life. The blank stillness of awe was succeeded by a gust of immense pride. There was no one in the world but Gian' Battista Fidanza, Capataz de Cargadores, the incorruptible and faithful Nostromo, to pay such a price.

He had made up his mind that nothing should be allowed now to rob him of his bargain. Nothing. Decoud had died. But how? That he was dead he had not a shadow of a doubt. But four ingots? . . . What for? Did he mean to come for more — some other time?

The treasure was putting forth its latent power. It troubled the clear mind of the man who had paid the price. He was sure that Decoud was dead. The island seemed full of that whisper. Dead! Gone! And he caught himself listening for the swish of bushes and the splash of the footfalls in the bed of the brook. Dead! The talker, the novio of Dona Antonia!

"Ha!" he murmured, with his head on his knees, under the livid clouded dawn breaking over the liberated Sulaco and upon the gulf as gray as ashes. "It is to her that he will fly. To her that he will fly!"

And four ingots! Did he take them in revenge, to cast a spell, like the angry woman who had prophesied remorse and failure, and yet had laid upon him the task of saving the children? Well, he had saved the children. He had defeated the spell of poverty and starvation. He had done it all alone — or perhaps helped by the devil. Who cared? He had done it, betrayed as he was, and saving by the same stroke the San Tome mine, which appeared to him hateful and immense, lording it by its vast wealth over the valour, the toil, the fidelity of the poor, over war and peace, over the labours of the town, the sea, and the Campo.

The sun lit up the sky behind the peaks of the Cordillera. The Capataz looked down for a time upon the fall of loose earth, stones, and smashed bushes, concealing the hiding-place of the silver.

"I must grow rich very slowly," he meditated, aloud.

Chapter 11

Sulaco outstripped Nostromo's prudence, growing rich swiftly on the hidden treasures of the earth, hovered over by the anxious spirits of good and evil, torn out by the labouring hands of the people. It was like a second youth, like a new life, full of promise, of unrest, of toil, scattering lavishly its wealth to the four corners of an excited world. Material changes swept along in the train of material interests. And other changes more subtle, outwardly unmarked, affected the minds and hearts of the workers. Captain Mitchell had gone home to live on his savings invested in the San Tome mine; and Dr. Monygham had grown older, with his head steel-grey and the unchanged expression of his face, living on the inexhaustible treasure of his devotion drawn upon in the secret of his heart like a store of unlawful wealth.

The Inspector-General of State Hospitals (whose maintenance is a charge upon the Gould Concession), Official Adviser on Sanitation to the Municipality, Chief Medical Officer of the San Tome Consolidated Mines (whose territory, containing gold, silver, copper, lead, cobalt, extends for miles along the foot-hills of the Cordillera), had felt poverty-stricken, miserable, and starved during the prolonged, second visit the Goulds paid to Europe and the United States of America. Intimate of the casa, proved friend, a bachelor without ties and without establishment (except of the professional sort), he had been asked to take up his quarters in the Gould house. In the eleven months of their absence the familiar rooms, recalling at every glance the woman to whom he had given all his loyalty, had grown intolerable. As the day approached for the arrival of the mail boat *Hermes* (the latest addition to the O. S. N. Co.'s splendid fleet), the doctor hobbled about more vivaciously, snapped more sardonically at simple and gentle out of sheer nervousness.

He packed up his modest trunk with speed, with fury, with enthusiasm, and saw it carried out past the old porter at the gate of the Casa Gould with delight, with intoxication; then, as the hour approached, sitting alone in the great landau behind the white mules, a little sideways, his drawn-in face positively venomous with the effort of self-control, and holding a pair of new gloves in his left hand, he drove to the harbour.

His heart dilated within him so, when he saw the Goulds on the deck of the *Hermes*, that his greetings were reduced to a casual mutter. Driving back to town, all three were silent. And in the patio the doctor, in a more natural manner, said —

"I'll leave you now to yourselves. I'll call to-morrow if I may?"

"Come to lunch, dear Dr. Monygham, and come early," said Mrs. Gould, in her travelling dress and her veil down, turning to look at him at the foot of the stairs; while at the top of the flight the Madonna, in blue robes and the Child on her arm, seemed to welcome her with an aspect of pitying tenderness.

"Don't expect to find me at home," Charles Gould warned him. "I'll be off early to the mine."

After lunch, Dona Emilia and the senior doctor came slowly through the inner gateway of the patio. The large gardens of the Casa Gould, surrounded by high walls, and the red-tile slopes of neighbouring roofs, lay open before them, with masses of shade under the trees and level surfaces of sunlight upon the lawns. A triple row of old orange trees surrounded the whole. Barefooted, brown gardeners, in snowy white shirts and wide calzoneras, dotted the grounds, squatting over flowerbeds, passing between the trees, dragging slender India-rubber tubes across the gravel of the paths; and the fine jets of water crossed each other in graceful curves, sparkling in the sunshine with a slight pattering noise upon the bushes, and an effect of showered diamonds upon the grass.

Dona Emilia, holding up the train of a clear dress, walked by the side of Dr. Monygham, in a longish black coat and severe black bow on an immaculate shirt-front. Under a shady clump of trees, where stood scattered little tables and wicker easy-chairs, Mrs. Gould sat down in a low and ample seat.

“Don’t go yet,” she said to Dr. Monygham, who was unable to tear himself away from the spot. His chin nestling within the points of his collar, he devoured her stealthily with his eyes, which, luckily, were round and hard like clouded marbles, and incapable of disclosing his sentiments. His pitying emotion at the marks of time upon the face of that woman, the air of frailty and weary fatigue that had settled upon the eyes and temples of the “Never-tired Senora” (as Don Pepe years ago used to call her with admiration), touched him almost to tears. “Don’t go yet. To-day is all my own,” Mrs. Gould urged, gently. “We are not back yet officially. No one will come. It’s only to-morrow that the windows of the Casa Gould are to be lit up for a reception.”

The doctor dropped into a chair.

“Giving a tertulia?” he said, with a detached air.

“A simple greeting for all the kind friends who care to come.”

“And only to-morrow?”

“Yes. Charles would be tired out after a day at the mine, and so I — — It would be good to have him to myself for one evening on our return to this house I love. It has seen all my life.”

“Ah, yes!” snarled the doctor, suddenly. “Women count time from the marriage feast. Didn’t you live a little before?”

“Yes; but what is there to remember? There were no cares.”

Mrs. Gould sighed. And as two friends, after a long separation, will revert to the most agitated period of their lives, they began to talk of the Sulaco Revolution. It seemed strange to Mrs. Gould that people who had taken part in it seemed to forget its memory and its lesson.

“And yet,” struck in the doctor, “we who played our part in it had our reward. Don Pepe, though superannuated, still can sit a horse. Barrios is drinking himself to death in jovial company away somewhere on his fundacion beyond the Bolson de Tonoro. And the heroic Father Roman — I imagine the old padre blowing up systematically the San Tome mine, uttering a pious exclamation at every bang, and taking handfuls

of snuff between the explosions — the heroic Padre Roman says that he is not afraid of the harm Holroyd's missionaries can do to his flock, as long as he is alive."

Mrs. Gould shuddered a little at the allusion to the destruction that had come so near to the San Tome mine.

"Ah, but you, dear friend?"

"I did the work I was fit for."

"You faced the most cruel dangers of all. Something more than death."

"No, Mrs. Gould! Only death — by hanging. And I am rewarded beyond my deserts."

Noticing Mrs. Gould's gaze fixed upon him, he dropped his eyes.

"I've made my career — as you see," said the Inspector-General of State Hospitals, taking up lightly the lapels of his superfine black coat. The doctor's self-respect marked inwardly by the almost complete disappearance from his dreams of Father Beron appeared visibly in what, by contrast with former carelessness, seemed an immoderate cult of personal appearance. Carried out within severe limits of form and colour, and in perpetual freshness, this change of apparel gave to Dr. Monygham an air at the same time professional and festive; while his gait and the unchanged crabbed character of his face acquired from it a startling force of incongruity.

"Yes," he went on. "We all had our rewards — the engineer-in-chief, Captain Mitchell — —"

"We saw him," interrupted Mrs. Gould, in her charming voice. "The poor dear man came up from the country on purpose to call on us in our hotel in London. He comported himself with great dignity, but I fancy he regrets Sulaco. He rambled feebly about 'historical events' till I felt I could have a cry."

"H'm," grunted the doctor; "getting old, I suppose. Even Nostromo is getting older — though he is not changed. And, speaking of that fellow, I wanted to tell you something — —"

For some time the house had been full of murmurs, of agitation. Suddenly the two gardeners, busy with rose trees at the side of the garden arch, fell upon their knees with bowed heads on the passage of Antonia Avellanos, who appeared walking beside her uncle.

Invested with the red hat after a short visit to Rome, where he had been invited by the Propaganda, Father Corbelan, missionary to the wild Indians, conspirator, friend and patron of Hernandez the robber, advanced with big, slow strides, gaunt and leaning forward, with his powerful hands clasped behind his back. The first Cardinal-Archbishop of Sulaco had preserved his fanatical and morose air; the aspect of a chaplain of bandits. It was believed that his unexpected elevation to the purple was a counter-move to the Protestant invasion of Sulaco organized by the Holroyd Missionary Fund. Antonia, the beauty of her face as if a little blurred, her figure slightly fuller, advanced with her light walk and her high serenity, smiling from a distance at Mrs. Gould. She had brought her uncle over to see dear Emilia, without ceremony, just for a moment before the siesta.

When all were seated again, Dr. Monygham, who had come to dislike heartily everybody who approached Mrs. Gould with any intimacy, kept aside, pretending to be lost in profound meditation. A louder phrase of Antonia made him lift his head.

“How can we abandon, groaning under oppression, those who have been our countrymen only a few years ago, who are our countrymen now?” Miss Avellanos was saying. “How can we remain blind, and deaf without pity to the cruel wrongs suffered by our brothers? There is a remedy.”

“Annex the rest of Costaguana to the order and prosperity of Sulaco,” snapped the doctor. “There is no other remedy.”

“I am convinced, senior doctor,” Antonia said, with the earnest calm of invincible resolution, “that this was from the first poor Martin’s intention.”

“Yes, but the material interests will not let you jeopardize their development for a mere idea of pity and justice,” the doctor muttered grumpily. “And it is just as well perhaps.”

The Cardinal-Archbishop straightened up his gaunt, bony frame.

“We have worked for them; we have made them, these material interests of the foreigners,” the last of the Corbelans uttered in a deep, denunciatory tone.

“And without them you are nothing,” cried the doctor from the distance. “They will not let you.”

“Let them beware, then, lest the people, prevented from their aspirations, should rise and claim their share of the wealth and their share of the power,” the popular Cardinal-Archbishop of Sulaco declared, significantly, menacingly.

A silence ensued, during which his Eminence stared, frowning at the ground, and Antonia, graceful and rigid in her chair, breathed calmly in the strength of her convictions. Then the conversation took a social turn, touching on the visit of the Goulds to Europe. The Cardinal-Archbishop, when in Rome, had suffered from neuralgia in the head all the time. It was the climate — the bad air.

When uncle and niece had gone away, with the servants again falling on their knees, and the old porter, who had known Henry Gould, almost totally blind and impotent now, creeping up to kiss his Eminence’s extended hand, Dr. Monygham, looking after them, pronounced the one word —

“Incorrigible!”

Mrs. Gould, with a look upwards, dropped wearily on her lap her white hands flashing with the gold and stones of many rings.

“Conspiring. Yes!” said the doctor. “The last of the Avellanos and the last of the Corbelans are conspiring with the refugees from Sta. Marta that flock here after every revolution. The Cafe Lambroso at the corner of the Plaza is full of them; you can hear their chatter across the street like the noise of a parrot-house. They are conspiring for the invasion of Costaguana. And do you know where they go for strength, for the necessary force? To the secret societies amongst immigrants and natives, where Nostromo — I should say Captain Fidanza — is the great man. What gives him that position? Who can say? Genius? He has genius. He is greater with the populace than

ever he was before. It is as if he had some secret power; some mysterious means to keep up his influence. He holds conferences with the Archbishop, as in those old days which you and I remember. Barrios is useless. But for a military head they have the pious Hernandez. And they may raise the country with the new cry of the wealth for the people."

"Will there be never any peace? Will there be no rest?" Mrs. Gould whispered. "I thought that we — —"

"No!" interrupted the doctor. "There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back."

"How can you say that, Dr. Monygham?" she cried out, as if hurt in the most sensitive place of her soul.

"I can say what is true," the doctor insisted, obstinately. "It'll weigh as heavily, and provoke resentment, bloodshed, and vengeance, because the men have grown different. Do you think that now the mine would march upon the town to save their *Senor Administrador*? Do you think that?"

She pressed the backs of her entwined hands on her eyes and murmured hopelessly

"Is it this we have worked for, then?"

The doctor lowered his head. He could follow her silent thought. Was it for this that her life had been robbed of all the intimate felicities of daily affection which her tenderness needed as the human body needs air to breathe? And the doctor, indignant with Charles Gould's blindness, hastened to change the conversation.

"It is about Nostromo that I wanted to talk to you. Ah! that fellow has some continuity and force. Nothing will put an end to him. But never mind that. There's something inexplicable going on — or perhaps only too easy to explain. You know, Linda is practically the lighthouse keeper of the Great Isabel light. The *Garibaldino* is too old now. His part is to clean the lamps and to cook in the house; but he can't get up the stairs any longer. The black-eyed Linda sleeps all day and watches the light all night. Not all day, though. She is up towards five in the afternoon, when our *Nostromo*, whenever he is in harbour with his schooner, comes out on his courting visit, pulling in a small boat."

"Aren't they married yet?" Mrs. Gould asked. "The mother wished it, as far as I can understand, while Linda was yet quite a child. When I had the girls with me for a year or so during the War of Separation, that extraordinary Linda used to declare quite simply that she was going to be *Gian' Battista's* wife."

"They are not married yet," said the doctor, curtly. "I have looked after them a little."

“Thank you, dear Dr. Monygham,” said Mrs. Gould; and under the shade of the big trees her little, even teeth gleamed in a youthful smile of gentle malice. “People don’t know how really good you are. You will not let them know, as if on purpose to annoy me, who have put my faith in your good heart long ago.”

The doctor, with a lifting up of his upper lip, as though he were longing to bite, bowed stiffly in his chair. With the utter absorption of a man to whom love comes late, not as the most splendid of illusions, but like an enlightening and priceless misfortune, the sight of that woman (of whom he had been deprived for nearly a year) suggested ideas of adoration, of kissing the hem of her robe. And this excess of feeling translated itself naturally into an augmented grimness of speech.

“I am afraid of being overwhelmed by too much gratitude. However, these people interest me. I went out several times to the Great Isabel light to look after old Giorgio.”

He did not tell Mrs. Gould that it was because he found there, in her absence, the relief of an atmosphere of congenial sentiment in old Giorgio’s austere admiration for the “English signora — the benefactress”; in black-eyed Linda’s voluble, torrential, passionate affection for “our Dona Emilia — that angel”; in the white-throated, fair Giselle’s adoring upward turn of the eyes, which then glided towards him with a side-long, half-arch, half-candid glance, which made the doctor exclaim to himself mentally, “If I weren’t what I am, old and ugly, I would think the minx is making eyes at me. And perhaps she is. I dare say she would make eyes at anybody.” Dr. Monygham said nothing of this to Mrs. Gould, the providence of the Viola family, but reverted to what he called “our great Nostromo.”

“What I wanted to tell you is this: Our great Nostromo did not take much notice of the old man and the children for some years. It’s true, too, that he was away on his coasting voyages certainly ten months out of the twelve. He was making his fortune, as he told Captain Mitchell once. He seems to have done uncommonly well. It was only to be expected. He is a man full of resource, full of confidence in himself, ready to take chances and risks of every sort. I remember being in Mitchell’s office one day, when he came in with that calm, grave air he always carries everywhere. He had been away trading in the Gulf of California, he said, looking straight past us at the wall, as his manner is, and was glad to see on his return that a lighthouse was being built on the cliff of the Great Isabel. Very glad, he repeated. Mitchell explained that it was the O. S. N. Co. who was building it, for the convenience of the mail service, on his own advice. Captain Fidanza was good enough to say that it was excellent advice. I remember him twisting up his moustaches and looking all round the cornice of the room before he proposed that old Giorgio should be made the keeper of that light.”

“I heard of this. I was consulted at the time,” Mrs. Gould said. “I doubted whether it would be good for these girls to be shut up on that island as if in a prison.”

“The proposal fell in with the old Garibaldino’s humour. As to Linda, any place was lovely and delightful enough for her as long as it was Nostromo’s suggestion. She could wait for her Gian’ Battista’s good pleasure there as well as anywhere else. My opinion

is that she was always in love with that incorruptible Capataz. Moreover, both father and sister were anxious to get Giselle away from the attentions of a certain Ramirez.”

“Ah!” said Mrs. Gould, interested. “Ramirez? What sort of man is that?”

“Just a mozo of the town. His father was a Cargador. As a lanky boy he ran about the wharf in rags, till Nostromo took him up and made a man of him. When he got a little older, he put him into a lighter and very soon gave him charge of the No. 3 boat — the boat which took the silver away, Mrs. Gould. Nostromo selected that lighter for the work because she was the best sailing and the strongest boat of all the Company’s fleet. Young Ramirez was one of the five Cargadores entrusted with the removal of the treasure from the Custom House on that famous night. As the boat he had charge of was sunk, Nostromo, on leaving the Company’s service, recommended him to Captain Mitchell for his successor. He had trained him in the routine of work perfectly, and thus Mr. Ramirez, from a starving waif, becomes a man and the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores.”

“Thanks to Nostromo,” said Mrs. Gould, with warm approval.

“Thanks to Nostromo,” repeated Dr. Monygham. “Upon my word, the fellow’s power frightens me when I think of it. That our poor old Mitchell was only too glad to appoint somebody trained to the work, who saved him trouble, is not surprising. What is wonderful is the fact that the Sulaco Cargadores accepted Ramirez for their chief, simply because such was Nostromo’s good pleasure. Of course, he is not a second Nostromo, as he fondly imagined he would be; but still, the position was brilliant enough. It emboldened him to make up to Giselle Viola, who, you know, is the recognized beauty of the town. The old Garibaldino, however, took a violent dislike to him. I don’t know why. Perhaps because he was not a model of perfection like his Gian’ Battista, the incarnation of the courage, the fidelity, the honour of ‘the people.’ Signor Viola does not think much of Sulaco natives. Both of them, the old Spartan and that white-faced Linda, with her red mouth and coal-black eyes, were looking rather fiercely after the fair one. Ramirez was warned off. Father Viola, I am told, threatened him with his gun once.”

“But what of Giselle herself?” asked Mrs. Gould.

“She’s a bit of a flirt, I believe,” said the doctor. “I don’t think she cared much one way or another. Of course she likes men’s attentions. Ramirez was not the only one, let me tell you, Mrs. Gould. There was one engineer, at least, on the railway staff who got warned off with a gun, too. Old Viola does not allow any trifling with his honour. He has grown uneasy and suspicious since his wife died. He was very pleased to remove his youngest girl away from the town. But look what happens, Mrs. Gould. Ramirez, the honest, lovelorn swain, is forbidden the island. Very well. He respects the prohibition, but naturally turns his eyes frequently towards the Great Isabel. It seems as though he had been in the habit of gazing late at night upon the light. And during these sentimental vigils he discovers that Nostromo, Captain Fidanza that is, returns very late from his visits to the Violas. As late as midnight at times.”

The doctor paused and stared meaningly at Mrs. Gould.

“Yes. But I don’t understand,” she began, looking puzzled.

“Now comes the strange part,” went on Dr. Monygham. “Viola, who is king on his island, will allow no visitor on it after dark. Even Captain Fidanza has got to leave after sunset, when Linda has gone up to tend the light. And Nostromo goes away obediently. But what happens afterwards? What does he do in the gulf between half-past six and midnight? He has been seen more than once at that late hour pulling quietly into the harbour. Ramirez is devoured by jealousy. He dared not approach old Viola; but he plucked up courage to rail at Linda about it on Sunday morning as she came on the mainland to hear mass and visit her mother’s grave. There was a scene on the wharf, which, as a matter of fact, I witnessed. It was early morning. He must have been waiting for her on purpose. I was there by the merest chance, having been called to an urgent consultation by the doctor of the German gunboat in the harbour. She poured wrath, scorn, and flame upon Ramirez, who seemed out of his mind. It was a strange sight, Mrs. Gould: the long jetty, with this raving Cargador in his crimson sash and the girl all in black, at the end; the early Sunday morning quiet of the harbour in the shade of the mountains; nothing but a canoe or two moving between the ships at anchor, and the German gunboat’s gig coming to take me off. Linda passed me within a foot. I noticed her wild eyes. I called out to her. She never heard me. She never saw me. But I looked at her face. It was awful in its anger and wretchedness.”

Mrs. Gould sat up, opening her eyes very wide.

“What do you mean, Dr. Monygham? Do you mean to say that you suspect the younger sister?”

“Quien sabe! Who can tell?” said the doctor, shrugging his shoulders like a born Costaguanero. “Ramirez came up to me on the wharf. He reeled — he looked insane. He took his head into his hands. He had to talk to someone — simply had to. Of course for all his mad state he recognized me. People know me well here. I have lived too long amongst them to be anything else but the evil-eyed doctor, who can cure all the ills of the flesh, and bring bad luck by a glance. He came up to me. He tried to be calm. He tried to make it out that he wanted merely to warn me against Nostromo. It seems that Captain Fidanza at some secret meeting or other had mentioned me as the worst despiser of all the poor — of the people. It’s very possible. He honours me with his undying dislike. And a word from the great Fidanza may be quite enough to send some fool’s knife into my back. The Sanitary Commission I preside over is not in favour with the populace. ‘Beware of him, senior doctor. Destroy him, senior doctor,’ Ramirez hissed right into my face. And then he broke out. ‘That man,’ he spluttered, ‘has cast a spell upon both these girls.’ As to himself, he had said too much. He must run away now — run away and hide somewhere. He moaned tenderly about Giselle, and then called her names that cannot be repeated. If he thought she could be made to love him by any means, he would carry her off from the island. Off into the woods. But it was no good. . . . He strode away, flourishing his arms above his head. Then I noticed an old negro, who had been sitting behind a pile of cases, fishing from the wharf. He wound up his lines and slunk away at once. But he must have heard something, and

must have talked, too, because some of the old Garibaldino's railway friends, I suppose, warned him against Ramirez. At any rate, the father has been warned. But Ramirez has disappeared from the town."

"I feel I have a duty towards these girls," said Mrs. Gould, uneasily. "Is Nostromo in Sulaco now?"

"He is, since last Sunday."

"He ought to be spoken to — at once."

"Who will dare speak to him? Even the love-mad Ramirez runs away from the mere shadow of Captain Fidanza."

"I can. I will," Mrs. Gould declared. "A word will be enough for a man like Nostromo."

The doctor smiled sourly.

"He must end this situation which lends itself to — — I can't believe it of that child," pursued Mrs. Gould.

"He's very attractive," muttered the doctor, gloomily.

"He'll see it, I am sure. He must put an end to all this by marrying Linda at once," pronounced the first lady of Sulaco with immense decision.

Through the garden gate emerged Basilio, grown fat and sleek, with an elderly hairless face, wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, and his jet-black, coarse hair plastered down smoothly. Stooping carefully behind an ornamental clump of bushes, he put down with precaution a small child he had been carrying on his shoulder — his own and Leonarda's last born. The pouting, spoiled Camerista and the head mozo of the Casa Gould had been married for some years now.

He remained squatting on his heels for a time, gazing fondly at his offspring, which returned his stare with imperturbable gravity; then, solemn and respectable, walked down the path.

"What is it, Basilio?" asked Mrs. Gould.

"A telephone came through from the office of the mine. The master remains to sleep at the mountain to-night."

Dr. Monygham had got up and stood looking away. A profound silence reigned for a time under the shade of the biggest trees in the lovely gardens of the Casa Gould.

"Very well, Basilio," said Mrs. Gould. She watched him walk away along the path, step aside behind the flowering bush, and reappear with the child seated on his shoulder. He passed through the gateway between the garden and the patio with measured steps, careful of his light burden.

The doctor, with his back to Mrs. Gould, contemplated a flower-bed away in the sunshine. People believed him scornful and soured. The truth of his nature consisted in his capacity for passion and in the sensitiveness of his temperament. What he lacked was the polished callousness of men of the world, the callousness from which springs an easy tolerance for oneself and others; the tolerance wide as poles asunder from true sympathy and human compassion. This want of callousness accounted for his sardonic turn of mind and his biting speeches.

In profound silence, and glaring viciously at the brilliant flower-bed, Dr. Monygham poured mental imprecations on Charles Gould's head. Behind him the immobility of Mrs. Gould added to the grace of her seated figure the charm of art, of an attitude caught and interpreted for ever. Turning abruptly, the doctor took his leave.

Mrs. Gould leaned back in the shade of the big trees planted in a circle. She leaned back with her eyes closed and her white hands lying idle on the arms of her seat. The half-light under the thick mass of leaves brought out the youthful prettiness of her face; made the clear, light fabrics and white lace of her dress appear luminous. Small and dainty, as if radiating a light of her own in the deep shade of the interlaced boughs, she resembled a good fairy, weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labours, the powerlessness of her magic.

Had anybody asked her of what she was thinking, alone in the garden of the Casa, with her husband at the mine and the house closed to the street like an empty dwelling, her frankness would have had to evade the question. It had come into her mind that for life to be large and full, it must contain the care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the present. Our daily work must be done to the glory of the dead, and for the good of those who come after. She thought that, and sighed without opening her eyes — without moving at all. Mrs. Gould's face became set and rigid for a second, as if to receive, without flinching, a great wave of loneliness that swept over her head. And it came into her mind, too, that no one would ever ask her with solicitude what she was thinking of. No one. No one, but perhaps the man who had just gone away. No; no one who could be answered with careless sincerity in the ideal perfection of confidence.

The word "incorrigible" — a word lately pronounced by Dr. Monygham — floated into her still and sad immobility. Incorrigible in his devotion to the great silver mine was the Senor Administrador! Incorrigible in his hard, determined service of the material interests to which he had pinned his faith in the triumph of order and justice. Poor boy! She had a clear vision of the grey hairs on his temples. He was perfect — perfect. What more could she have expected? It was a colossal and lasting success; and love was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication, whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness, as if it had been a deep grief lived through. There was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea. She saw the San Tome mountain hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. He did not see it. He could not see it. It was not his fault. He was perfect, perfect; but she would never have him to herself. Never; not for one short hour altogether to herself in this old Spanish house she loved so well! Incorrigible, the last of the Corbelans, the last of the Avellanos, the doctor had said; but she saw clearly the San Tome mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds; mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father. A terrible success for the last of the

Goulds. The last! She had hoped for a long, long time, that perhaps — — But no! There were to be no more. An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love, of work — all alone in the Treasure House of the World. The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words —

“Material interest.”

Chapter 12

Nostromo had been growing rich very slowly. It was an effect of his prudence. He could command himself even when thrown off his balance. And to become the slave of a treasure with full self-knowledge is an occurrence rare and mentally disturbing. But it was also in a great part because of the difficulty of converting it into a form in which it could become available. The mere act of getting it away from the island piecemeal, little by little, was surrounded by difficulties, by the dangers of imminent detection. He had to visit the Great Isabel in secret, between his voyages along the coast, which were the ostensible source of his fortune. The crew of his own schooner were to be feared as if they had been spies upon their dreaded captain. He did not dare stay too long in port. When his coaster was unloaded, he hurried away on another trip, for he feared arousing suspicion even by a day's delay. Sometimes during a week's stay, or more, he could only manage one visit to the treasure. And that was all. A couple of ingots. He suffered through his fears as much as through his prudence. To do things by stealth humiliated him. And he suffered most from the concentration of his thought upon the treasure.

A transgression, a crime, entering a man's existence, eats it up like a malignant growth, consumes it like a fever. Nostromo had lost his peace; the genuineness of all his qualities was destroyed. He felt it himself, and often cursed the silver of San Tome. His courage, his magnificence, his leisure, his work, everything was as before, only everything was a sham. But the treasure was real. He clung to it with a more tenacious, mental grip. But he hated the feel of the ingots. Sometimes, after putting away a couple of them in his cabin — the fruit of a secret night expedition to the Great Isabel — he would look fixedly at his fingers, as if surprised they had left no stain on his skin.

He had found means of disposing of the silver bars in distant ports. The necessity to go far afield made his coasting voyages long, and caused his visits to the Viola household to be rare and far between. He was fated to have his wife from there. He had said so once to Giorgio himself. But the Garibaldino had put the subject aside

with a majestic wave of his hand, clutching a smouldering black briar-root pipe. There was plenty of time; he was not the man to force his girls upon anybody.

As time went on, Nostromo discovered his preference for the younger of the two. They had some profound similarities of nature, which must exist for complete confidence and understanding, no matter what outward differences of temperament there may be to exercise their own fascination of contrast. His wife would have to know his secret or else life would be impossible. He was attracted by Giselle, with her candid gaze and white throat, pliable, silent, fond of excitement under her quiet indolence; whereas Linda, with her intense, passionately pale face, energetic, all fire and words, touched with gloom and scorn, a chip of the old block, true daughter of the austere republican, but with Teresa's voice, inspired him with a deep-seated mistrust. Moreover, the poor girl could not conceal her love for Gian' Battista. He could see it would be violent, exacting, suspicious, uncompromising — like her soul. Giselle, by her fair but warm beauty, by the surface placidity of her nature holding a promise of submissiveness, by the charm of her girlish mysteriousness, excited his passion and allayed his fears as to the future.

His absences from Sulaco were long. On returning from the longest of them, he made out lighters loaded with blocks of stone lying under the cliff of the Great Isabel; cranes and scaffolding above; workmen's figures moving about, and a small lighthouse already rising from its foundations on the edge of the cliff.

At this unexpected, undreamt-of, startling sight, he thought himself lost irretrievably. What could save him from detection now? Nothing! He was struck with amazed dread at this turn of chance, that would kindle a far-reaching light upon the only secret spot of his life; that life whose very essence, value, reality, consisted in its reflection from the admiring eyes of men. All of it but that thing which was beyond common comprehension; which stood between him and the power that hears and gives effect to the evil intention of curses. It was dark. Not every man had such a darkness. And they were going to put a light there. A light! He saw it shining upon disgrace, poverty, contempt. Somebody was sure to. . . . Perhaps somebody had already. . . .

The incomparable Nostromo, the Capataz, the respected and feared Captain Fianza, the unquestioned patron of secret societies, a republican like old Giorgio, and a revolutionist at heart (but in another manner), was on the point of jumping overboard from the deck of his own schooner. That man, subjective almost to insanity, looked suicide deliberately in the face. But he never lost his head. He was checked by the thought that this was no escape. He imagined himself dead, and the disgrace, the shame going on. Or, rather, properly speaking, he could not imagine himself dead. He was possessed too strongly by the sense of his own existence, a thing of infinite duration in its changes, to grasp the notion of finality. The earth goes on for ever.

And he was courageous. It was a corrupt courage, but it was as good for his purposes as the other kind. He sailed close to the cliff of the Great Isabel, throwing a penetrating glance from the deck at the mouth of the ravine, tangled in an undisturbed growth of bushes. He sailed close enough to exchange hails with the workmen, shading their

eyes on the edge of the sheer drop of the cliff overhung by the jib-head of a powerful crane. He perceived that none of them had any occasion even to approach the ravine where the silver lay hidden; let alone to enter it. In the harbour he learned that no one slept on the island. The labouring gangs returned to port every evening, singing chorus songs in the empty lighters towed by a harbour tug. For the moment he had nothing to fear.

But afterwards? he asked himself. Later, when a keeper came to live in the cottage that was being built some hundred and fifty yards back from the low lighttower, and four hundred or so from the dark, shaded, jungly ravine, containing the secret of his safety, of his influence, of his magnificence, of his power over the future, of his defiance of ill-luck, of every possible betrayal from rich and poor alike — what then? He could never shake off the treasure. His audacity, greater than that of other men, had welded that vein of silver into his life. And the feeling of fearful and ardent subjection, the feeling of his slavery — so irremediable and profound that often, in his thoughts, he compared himself to the legendary Gringos, neither dead nor alive, bound down to their conquest of unlawful wealth on Azuera — weighed heavily on the independent Captain Fidanza, owner and master of a coasting schooner, whose smart appearance (and fabulous good-luck in trading) were so well known along the western seaboard of a vast continent.

Fiercely whiskered and grave, a shade less supple in his walk, the vigour and symmetry of his powerful limbs lost in the vulgarity of a brown tweed suit, made by Jews in the slums of London, and sold by the clothing department of the Compania Anzani, Captain Fidanza was seen in the streets of Sulaco attending to his business, as usual, that trip. And, as usual, he allowed it to get about that he had made a great profit on his cargo. It was a cargo of salt fish, and Lent was approaching. He was seen in tramcars going to and fro between the town and the harbour; he talked with people in a cafe or two in his measured, steady voice. Captain Fidanza was seen. The generation that would know nothing of the famous ride to Cayta was not born yet.

Nostromo, the miscalled Capataz de Cargadores, had made for himself, under his rightful name, another public existence, but modified by the new conditions, less picturesque, more difficult to keep up in the increased size and varied population of Sulaco, the progressive capital of the Occidental Republic.

Captain Fidanza, unpicturesque, but always a little mysterious, was recognized quite sufficiently under the lofty glass and iron roof of the Sulaco railway station. He took a local train, and got out in Rincon, where he visited the widow of the Cargador who had died of his wounds (at the dawn of the New Era, like Don Jose Avellanos) in the patio of the Casa Gould. He consented to sit down and drink a glass of cool lemonade in the hut, while the woman, standing up, poured a perfect torrent of words to which he did not listen. He left some money with her, as usual. The orphaned children, growing up and well schooled, calling him uncle, clamoured for his blessing. He gave that, too; and in the doorway paused for a moment to look at the flat face of the San Tome mountain with a faint frown. This slight contraction of his bronzed brow casting a marked tinge

of severity upon his usual unbending expression, was observed at the Lodge which he attended — but went away before the banquet. He wore it at the meeting of some good comrades, Italians and Occidentals, assembled in his honour under the presidency of an indigent, sickly, somewhat hunchbacked little photographer, with a white face and a magnanimous soul dyed crimson by a bloodthirsty hate of all capitalists, oppressors of the two hemispheres. The heroic Giorgio Viola, old revolutionist, would have understood nothing of his opening speech; and Captain Fidanza, lavishly generous as usual to some poor comrades, made no speech at all. He had listened, frowning, with his mind far away, and walked off unapproachable, silent, like a man full of cares.

His frown deepened as, in the early morning, he watched the stone-masons go off to the Great Isabel, in lighters loaded with squared blocks of stone, enough to add another course to the squat light-tower. That was the rate of the work. One course per day.

And Captain Fidanza meditated. The presence of strangers on the island would cut him completely off the treasure. It had been difficult and dangerous enough before. He was afraid, and he was angry. He thought with the resolution of a master and the cunning of a cowed slave. Then he went ashore.

He was a man of resource and ingenuity; and, as usual, the expedient he found at a critical moment was effective enough to alter the situation radically. He had the gift of evolving safety out of the very danger, this incomparable Nostromo, this “fellow in a thousand.” With Giorgio established on the Great Isabel, there would be no need for concealment. He would be able to go openly, in daylight, to see his daughters — one of his daughters — and stay late talking to the old Garibaldino. Then in the dark . . . Night after night . . . He would dare to grow rich quicker now. He yearned to clasp, embrace, absorb, subjugate in unquestioned possession this treasure, whose tyranny had weighed upon his mind, his actions, his very sleep.

He went to see his friend Captain Mitchell — and the thing was done as Dr. Monygham had related to Mrs. Gould. When the project was mooted to the Garibaldino, something like the faint reflection, the dim ghost of a very ancient smile, stole under the white and enormous moustaches of the old hater of kings and ministers. His daughters were the object of his anxious care. The younger, especially. Linda, with her mother’s voice, had taken more her mother’s place. Her deep, vibrating “Eh, Padre?” seemed, but for the change of the word, the very echo of the impassioned, remonstrating “Eh, Giorgio?” of poor Signora Teresa. It was his fixed opinion that the town was no proper place for his girls. The infatuated but guileless Ramirez was the object of his profound aversion, as resuming the sins of the country whose people were blind, vile esclavos.

On his return from his next voyage, Captain Fidanza found the Violas settled in the light-keeper’s cottage. His knowledge of Giorgio’s idiosyncrasies had not played him false. The Garibaldino had refused to entertain the idea of any companion whatever, except his girls. And Captain Mitchell, anxious to please his poor Nostromo, with that

felicity of inspiration which only true affection can give, had formally appointed Linda Viola as under-keeper of the Isabel's Light.

"The light is private property," he used to explain. "It belongs to my Company. I've the power to nominate whom I like, and Viola it shall be. It's about the only thing Nostromo — a man worth his weight in gold, mind you — has ever asked me to do for him."

Directly his schooner was anchored opposite the New Custom House, with its sham air of a Greek temple, flatroofed, with a colonnade, Captain Fidanza went pulling his small boat out of the harbour, bound for the Great Isabel, openly in the light of a declining day, before all men's eyes, with a sense of having mastered the fates. He must establish a regular position. He would ask him for his daughter now. He thought of Giselle as he pulled. Linda loved him, perhaps, but the old man would be glad to keep the elder, who had his wife's voice.

He did not pull for the narrow strand where he had landed with Decoud, and afterwards alone on his first visit to the treasure. He made for the beach at the other end, and walked up the regular and gentle slope of the wedge-shaped island. Giorgio Viola, whom he saw from afar, sitting on a bench under the front wall of the cottage, lifted his arm slightly to his loud hail. He walked up. Neither of the girls appeared.

"It is good here," said the old man, in his austere, far-away manner.

Nostromo nodded; then, after a short silence —

"You saw my schooner pass in not two hours ago? Do you know why I am here before, so to speak, my anchor has fairly bitten into the ground of this port of Sulaco?"

"You are welcome like a son," the old man declared, quietly, staring away upon the sea.

"Ah! thy son. I know. I am what thy son would have been. It is well, viejo. It is a very good welcome. Listen, I have come to ask you for — —"

A sudden dread came upon the fearless and incorruptible Nostromo. He dared not utter the name in his mind. The slight pause only imparted a marked weight and solemnity to the changed end of the phrase.

"For my wife!" . . . His heart was beating fast. "It is time you — —"

The Garibaldino arrested him with an extended arm. "That was left for you to judge."

He got up slowly. His beard, unclipped since Teresa's death, thick, snow-white, covered his powerful chest. He turned his head to the door, and called out in his strong voice —

"Linda."

Her answer came sharp and faint from within; and the appalled Nostromo stood up, too, but remained mute, gazing at the door. He was afraid. He was not afraid of being refused the girl he loved — no mere refusal could stand between him and a woman he desired — but the shining spectre of the treasure rose before him, claiming his allegiance in a silence that could not be gainsaid. He was afraid, because, neither dead nor alive, like the Gringos on Azuera, he belonged body and soul to the unlawfulness

of his audacity. He was afraid of being forbidden the island. He was afraid, and said nothing.

Seeing the two men standing up side by side to await her, Linda stopped in the doorway. Nothing could alter the passionate dead whiteness of her face; but her black eyes seemed to catch and concentrate all the light of the low sun in a flaming spark within the black depths, covered at once by the slow descent of heavy eyelids.

“Behold thy husband, master, and benefactor.” Old Viola’s voice resounded with a force that seemed to fill the whole gulf.

She stepped forward with her eyes nearly closed, like a sleep-walker in a beatific dream.

Nostromo made a superhuman effort. “It is time, Linda, we two were betrothed,” he said, steadily, in his level, careless, unbending tone.

She put her hand into his offered palm, lowering her head, dark with bronze glints, upon which her father’s hand rested for a moment.

“And so the soul of the dead is satisfied.”

This came from Giorgio Viola, who went on talking for a while of his dead wife; while the two, sitting side by side, never looked at each other. Then the old man ceased; and Linda, motionless, began to speak.

“Ever since I felt I lived in the world, I have lived for you alone, Gian’ Battista. And that you knew! You knew it . . . Battistino.”

She pronounced the name exactly with her mother’s intonation. A gloom as of the grave covered Nostromo’s heart.

“Yes. I knew,” he said.

The heroic Garibaldino sat on the same bench bowing his hoary head, his old soul dwelling alone with its memories, tender and violent, terrible and dreary — solitary on the earth full of men.

And Linda, his best-loved daughter, was saying, “I was yours ever since I can remember. I had only to think of you for the earth to become empty to my eyes. When you were there, I could see no one else. I was yours. Nothing is changed. The world belongs to you, and you let me live in it.” . . . She dropped her low, vibrating voice to a still lower note, and found other things to say — torturing for the man at her side. Her murmur ran on ardent and voluble. She did not seem to see her sister, who came out with an altar-cloth she was embroidering in her hands, and passed in front of them, silent, fresh, fair, with a quick glance and a faint smile, to sit a little away on the other side of Nostromo.

The evening was still. The sun sank almost to the edge of a purple ocean; and the white lighthouse, livid against the background of clouds filling the head of the gulf, bore the lantern red and glowing, like a live ember kindled by the fire of the sky. Giselle, indolent and demure, raised the altar-cloth from time to time to hide nervous yawns, as of a young panther.

Suddenly Linda rushed at her sister, and seizing her head, covered her face with kisses. Nostromo’s brain reeled. When she left her, as if stunned by the violent caresses,

with her hands lying in her lap, the slave of the treasure felt as if he could shoot that woman. Old Giorgio lifted his leonine head.

“Where are you going, Linda?”

“To the light, padre mio.”

“Si, si — to your duty.”

He got up, too, looked after his eldest daughter; then, in a tone whose festive note seemed the echo of a mood lost in the night of ages —

“I am going in to cook something. Aha! Son! The old man knows where to find a bottle of wine, too.”

He turned to Giselle, with a change to austere tenderness.

“And you, little one, pray not to the God of priests and slaves, but to the God of orphans, of the oppressed, of the poor, of little children, to give thee a man like this one for a husband.”

His hand rested heavily for a moment on Nostromo’s shoulder; then he went in. The hopeless slave of the San Tome silver felt at these words the venomous fangs of jealousy biting deep into his heart. He was appalled by the novelty of the experience, by its force, by its physical intimacy. A husband! A husband for her! And yet it was natural that Giselle should have a husband at some time or other. He had never realized that before. In discovering that her beauty could belong to another he felt as though he could kill this one of old Giorgio’s daughters also. He muttered moodily —

“They say you love Ramirez.”

She shook her head without looking at him. Coppery glints rippled to and fro on the wealth of her gold hair. Her smooth forehead had the soft, pure sheen of a priceless pearl in the splendour of the sunset, mingling the gloom of starry spaces, the purple of the sea, and the crimson of the sky in a magnificent stillness.

“No,” she said, slowly. “I never loved him. I think I never . . . He loves me — perhaps.”

The seduction of her slow voice died out of the air, and her raised eyes remained fixed on nothing, as if indifferent and without thought.

“Ramirez told you he loved you?” asked Nostromo, restraining himself.

“Ah! once — one evening . . .”

“The miserable . . . Ha!”

He had jumped up as if stung by a gad-fly, and stood before her mute with anger.

“Misericordia Divina! You, too, Gian’ Battista! Poor wretch that I am!” she lamented in ingenuous tones. “I told Linda, and she scolded — she scolded. Am I to live blind, dumb, and deaf in this world? And she told father, who took down his gun and cleaned it. Poor Ramirez! Then you came, and she told you.”

He looked at her. He fastened his eyes upon the hollow of her white throat, which had the invincible charm of things young, palpitating, delicate, and alive. Was this the child he had known? Was it possible? It dawned upon him that in these last years he had really seen very little — nothing — of her. Nothing. She had come into the world like a thing unknown. She had come upon him unawares. She was a danger. A frightful danger. The instinctive mood of fierce determination that had never failed

him before the perils of this life added its steady force to the violence of his passion. She, in a voice that recalled to him the song of running water, the tinkling of a silver bell, continued —

“And between you three you have brought me here into this captivity to the sky and water. Nothing else. Sky and water. Oh, Sanctissima Madre. My hair shall turn grey on this tedious island. I could hate you, Gian’ Battista!”

He laughed loudly. Her voice enveloped him like a caress. She bemoaned her fate, spreading unconsciously, like a flower its perfume in the coolness of the evening, the indefinable seduction of her person. Was it her fault that nobody ever had admired Linda? Even when they were little, going out with their mother to Mass, she remembered that people took no notice of Linda, who was fearless, and chose instead to frighten her, who was timid, with their attention. It was her hair like gold, she supposed.

He broke out —

“Your hair like gold, and your eyes like violets, and your lips like the rose; your round arms, your white throat.” . . .

Imperturbable in the indolence of her pose, she blushed deeply all over to the roots of her hair. She was not conceited. She was no more self-conscious than a flower. But she was pleased. And perhaps even a flower loves to hear itself praised. He glanced down, and added, impetuously —

“Your little feet!”

Leaning back against the rough stone wall of the cottage, she seemed to bask languidly in the warmth of the rosy flush. Only her lowered eyes glanced at her little feet.

“And so you are going at last to marry our Linda. She is terrible. Ah! now she will understand better since you have told her you love her. She will not be so fierce.”

“Chica!” said Nostromo, “I have not told her anything.”

“Then make haste. Come to-morrow. Come and tell her, so that I may have some peace from her scolding and — perhaps — who knows . . .”

“Be allowed to listen to your Ramirez, eh? Is that it? You . . .”

“Mercy of God! How violent you are, Giovanni,” she said, unmoved. “Who is Ramirez . . . Ramirez . . . Who is he?” she repeated, dreamily, in the dusk and gloom of the clouded gulf, with a low red streak in the west like a hot bar of glowing iron laid across the entrance of a world sombre as a cavern, where the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores had hidden his conquests of love and wealth.

“Listen, Giselle,” he said, in measured tones; “I will tell no word of love to your sister. Do you want to know why?”

“Alas! I could not understand perhaps, Giovanni. Father says you are not like other men; that no one had ever understood you properly; that the rich will be surprised yet. . . . Oh! saints in heaven! I am weary.”

She raised her embroidery to conceal the lower part of her face, then let it fall on her lap. The lantern was shaded on the land side, but slanting away from the dark

column of the lighthouse they could see the long shaft of light, kindled by Linda, go out to strike the expiring glow in a horizon of purple and red.

Giselle Viola, with her head resting against the wall of the house, her eyes half closed, and her little feet, in white stockings and black slippers, crossed over each other, seemed to surrender herself, tranquil and fatal, to the gathering dusk. The charm of her body, the promising mysteriousness of her indolence, went out into the night of the Placid Gulf like a fresh and intoxicating fragrance spreading out in the shadows, impregnating the air. The incorruptible Nostromo breathed her ambient seduction in the tumultuous heaving of his breast. Before leaving the harbour he had thrown off the store clothing of Captain Fidanza, for greater ease in the long pull out to the islands. He stood before her in the red sash and check shirt as he used to appear on the Company's wharf — a Mediterranean sailor come ashore to try his luck in Costaguana. The dusk of purple and red enveloped him, too — close, soft, profound, as no more than fifty yards from that spot it had gathered evening after evening about the self-destructive passion of Don Martin Decoud's utter scepticism, flaming up to death in solitude.

"You have got to hear," he began at last, with perfect self-control. "I shall say no word of love to your sister, to whom I am betrothed from this evening, because it is you that I love. It is you!" . . .

The dusk let him see yet the tender and voluptuous smile that came instinctively upon her lips shaped for love and kisses, freeze hard in the drawn, haggard lines of terror. He could not restrain himself any longer. While she shrank from his approach, her arms went out to him, abandoned and regal in the dignity of her languid surrender. He held her head in his two hands, and showered rapid kisses upon the upturned face that gleamed in the purple dusk. Masterful and tender, he was entering slowly upon the fulness of his possession. And he perceived that she was crying. Then the incomparable Capataz, the man of careless loves, became gentle and caressing, like a woman to the grief of a child. He murmured to her fondly. He sat down by her and nursed her fair head on his breast. He called her his star and his little flower.

It had grown dark. From the living-room of the light-keeper's cottage, where Giorgio, one of the Immortal Thousand, was bending his leonine and heroic head over a charcoal fire, there came the sound of sizzling and the aroma of an artistic frittura.

In the obscure disarray of that thing, happening like a cataclysm, it was in her feminine head that some gleam of reason survived. He was lost to the world in their embraced stillness. But she said, whispering into his ear —

"God of mercy! What will become of me — here — now — between this sky and this water I hate? Linda, Linda — I see her!" . . . She tried to get out of his arms, suddenly relaxed at the sound of that name. But there was no one approaching their black shapes, enlaced and struggling on the white background of the wall. "Linda! Poor Linda! I tremble! I shall die of fear before my poor sister Linda, betrothed to-day to Giovanni — my lover! Giovanni, you must have been mad! I cannot understand you! You are not like other men! I will not give you up — never — only to God himself! But why have you done this blind, mad, cruel, frightful thing?"

Released, she hung her head, let fall her hands. The altar-cloth, as if tossed by a great wind, lay far away from them, gleaming white on the black ground.

"From fear of losing my hope of you," said Nostromo.

"You knew that you had my soul! You know everything! It was made for you! But what could stand between you and me? What? Tell me!" she repeated, without impatience, in superb assurance.

"Your dead mother," he said, very low.

"Ah! . . . Poor mother! She has always . . . She is a saint in heaven now, and I cannot give you up to her. No, Giovanni. Only to God alone. You were mad — but it is done. Oh! what have you done? Giovanni, my beloved, my life, my master, do not leave me here in this grave of clouds. You cannot leave me now. You must take me away — at once — this instant — in the little boat. Giovanni, carry me off to-night, from my fear of Linda's eyes, before I have to look at her again."

She nestled close to him. The slave of the San Tome silver felt the weight as of chains upon his limbs, a pressure as of a cold hand upon his lips. He struggled against the spell.

"I cannot," he said. "Not yet. There is something that stands between us two and the freedom of the world."

She pressed her form closer to his side with a subtle and naive instinct of seduction.

"You rave, Giovanni — my lover!" she whispered, engagingly. "What can there be? Carry me off — in thy very hands — to Dona Emilia — away from here. I am not very heavy."

It seemed as though she expected him to lift her up at once in his two palms. She had lost the notion of all impossibility. Anything could happen on this night of wonder. As he made no movement, she almost cried aloud —

"I tell you I am afraid of Linda!" And still he did not move. She became quiet and wily. "What can there be?" she asked, coaxingly.

He felt her warm, breathing, alive, quivering in the hollow of his arm. In the exulting consciousness of his strength, and the triumphant excitement of his mind, he struck out for his freedom.

"A treasure," he said. All was still. She did not understand. "A treasure. A treasure of silver to buy a gold crown for thy brow."

"A treasure?" she repeated in a faint voice, as if from the depths of a dream. "What is it you say?"

She disengaged herself gently. He got up and looked down at her, aware of her face, of her hair, her lips, the dimples on her cheeks — seeing the fascination of her person in the night of the gulf as if in the blaze of noonday. Her nonchalant and seductive voice trembled with the excitement of admiring awe and ungovernable curiosity.

"A treasure of silver!" she stammered out. Then pressed on faster: "What? Where? How did you get it, Giovanni?"

He wrestled with the spell of captivity. It was as if striking a heroic blow that he burst out —

“Like a thief!”

The densest blackness of the Placid Gulf seemed to fall upon his head. He could not see her now. She had vanished into a long, obscure abysmal silence, whence her voice came back to him after a time with a faint glimmer, which was her face.

“I love you! I love you!”

These words gave him an unwonted sense of freedom; they cast a spell stronger than the accursed spell of the treasure; they changed his weary subjection to that dead thing into an exulting conviction of his power. He would cherish her, he said, in a splendour as great as Dona Emilia’s. The rich lived on wealth stolen from the people, but he had taken from the rich nothing — nothing that was not lost to them already by their folly and their betrayal. For he had been betrayed — he said — deceived, tempted. She believed him. . . . He had kept the treasure for purposes of revenge; but now he cared nothing for it. He cared only for her. He would put her beauty in a palace on a hill crowned with olive trees — a white palace above a blue sea. He would keep her there like a jewel in a casket. He would get land for her — her own land fertile with vines and corn — to set her little feet upon. He kissed them. . . . He had already paid for it all with the soul of a woman and the life of a man. . . . The Capataz de Cargadores tasted the supreme intoxication of his generosity. He flung the mastered treasure superbly at her feet in the impenetrable darkness of the gulf, in the darkness defying — as men said — the knowledge of God and the wit of the devil. But she must let him grow rich first — he warned her.

She listened as if in a trance. Her fingers stirred in his hair. He got up from his knees reeling, weak, empty, as though he had flung his soul away.

“Make haste, then,” she said. “Make haste, Giovanni, my lover, my master, for I will give thee up to no one but God. And I am afraid of Linda.”

He guessed at her shudder, and swore to do his best. He trusted the courage of her love. She promised to be brave in order to be loved always — far away in a white palace upon a hill above a blue sea. Then with a timid, tentative eagerness she murmured —

“Where is it? Where? Tell me that, Giovanni.”

He opened his mouth and remained silent — thunderstruck.

“Not that! Not that!” he gasped out, appalled at the spell of secrecy that had kept him dumb before so many people falling upon his lips again with unimpaired force. Not even to her. Not even to her. It was too dangerous. “I forbid thee to ask,” he cried at her, deadening cautiously the anger of his voice.

He had not regained his freedom. The spectre of the unlawful treasure arose, standing by her side like a figure of silver, pitiless and secret, with a finger on its pale lips. His soul died within him at the vision of himself creeping in presently along the ravine, with the smell of earth, of damp foliage in his nostrils — creeping in, determined in a purpose that numbed his breast, and creeping out again loaded with silver, with his ears alert to every sound. It must be done on this very night — that work of a craven slave!

He stooped low, pressed the hem of her skirt to his lips, with a muttered command

“Tell him I would not stay,” and was gone suddenly from her, silent, without as much as a footfall in the dark night.

She sat still, her head resting indolently against the wall, and her little feet in white stockings and black slippers crossed over each other. Old Giorgio, coming out, did not seem to be surprised at the intelligence as much as she had vaguely feared. For she was full of inexplicable fear now — fear of everything and everybody except of her Giovanni and his treasure. But that was incredible.

The heroic Garibaldino accepted Nostromo’s abrupt departure with a sagacious indulgence. He remembered his own feelings, and exhibited a masculine penetration of the true state of the case.

“Va bene. Let him go. Ha! ha! No matter how fair the woman, it galls a little. Liberty, liberty. There’s more than one kind! He has said the great word, and son Gian’ Battista is not tame.” He seemed to be instructing the motionless and scared Giselle. . . . “A man should not be tame,” he added, dogmatically out of the doorway. Her stillness and silence seemed to displease him. “Do not give way to the enviousness of your sister’s lot,” he admonished her, very grave, in his deep voice.

Presently he had to come to the door again to call in his younger daughter. It was late. He shouted her name three times before she even moved her head. Left alone, she had become the helpless prey of astonishment. She walked into the bedroom she shared with Linda like a person profoundly asleep. That aspect was so marked that even old Giorgio, spectacled, raising his eyes from the Bible, shook his head as she shut the door behind her.

She walked right across the room without looking at anything, and sat down at once by the open window. Linda, stealing down from the tower in the exuberance of her happiness, found her with a lighted candle at her back, facing the black night full of sighing gusts of wind and the sound of distant showers — a true night of the gulf, too dense for the eye of God and the wiles of the devil. She did not turn her head at the opening of the door.

There was something in that immobility which reached Linda in the depths of her paradise. The elder sister guessed angrily: the child is thinking of that wretched Ramirez. Linda longed to talk. She said in her arbitrary voice, “Giselle!” and was not answered by the slightest movement.

The girl that was going to live in a palace and walk on ground of her own was ready to die with terror. Not for anything in the world would she have turned her head to face her sister. Her heart was beating madly. She said with subdued haste —

“Do not speak to me. I am praying.”

Linda, disappointed, went out quietly; and Giselle sat on unbelieving, lost, dazed, patient, as if waiting for the confirmation of the incredible. The hopeless blackness of the clouds seemed part of a dream, too. She waited.

She did not wait in vain. The man whose soul was dead within him, creeping out of the ravine, weighted with silver, had seen the gleam of the lighted window, and could not help retracing his steps from the beach.

On that impenetrable background, obliterating the lofty mountains by the seaboard, she saw the slave of the San Tome silver, as if by an extraordinary power of a miracle. She accepted his return as if henceforth the world could hold no surprise for all eternity.

She rose, compelled and rigid, and began to speak long before the light from within fell upon the face of the approaching man.

“You have come back to carry me off. It is well! Open thy arms, Giovanni, my lover. I am coming.”

His prudent footsteps stopped, and with his eyes glistening wildly, he spoke in a harsh voice:

“Not yet. I must grow rich slowly.” . . . A threatening note came into his tone. “Do not forget that you have a thief for your lover.”

“Yes! Yes!” she whispered, hastily. “Come nearer! Listen! Do not give me up, Giovanni! Never, never! . . . I will be patient! . . .”

Her form drooped consolingly over the low casement towards the slave of the unlawful treasure. The light in the room went out, and weighted with silver, the magnificent Capataz clasped her round her white neck in the darkness of the gulf as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

Chapter 13

On the day Mrs. Gould was going, in Dr. Monygham's words, to "give a tertulia," Captain Fidanza went down the side of his schooner lying in Sulaco harbour, calm, unbending, deliberate in the way he sat down in his dinghy and took up his sculls. He was later than usual. The afternoon was well advanced before he landed on the beach of the Great Isabel, and with a steady pace climbed the slope of the island.

From a distance he made out Giselle sitting in a chair tilted back against the end of the house, under the window of the girl's room. She had her embroidery in her hands, and held it well up to her eyes. The tranquillity of that girlish figure exasperated the feeling of perpetual struggle and strife he carried in his breast. He became angry. It seemed to him that she ought to hear the clanking of his fetters — his silver fetters, from afar. And while ashore that day, he had met the doctor with the evil eye, who had looked at him very hard.

The raising of her eyes mollified him. They smiled in their flower-like freshness straight upon his heart. Then she frowned. It was a warning to be cautious. He stopped some distance away, and in a loud, indifferent tone, said —

"Good day, Giselle. Is Linda up yet?"

"Yes. She is in the big room with father."

He approached then, and, looking through the window into the bedroom for fear of being detected by Linda returning there for some reason, he said, moving only his lips

"You love me?"

"More than my life." She went on with her embroidery under his contemplating gaze and continued to speak, looking at her work, "Or I could not live. I could not, Giovanni. For this life is like death. Oh, Giovanni, I shall perish if you do not take me away."

He smiled carelessly. "I will come to the window when it's dark," he said.

"No, don't, Giovanni. Not-to-night. Linda and father have been talking together for a long time today."

"What about?"

"Ramirez, I fancy I heard. I do not know. I am afraid. I am always afraid. It is like dying a thousand times a day. Your love is to me like your treasure to you. It is there, but I can never get enough of it."

He looked at her very still. She was beautiful. His desire had grown within him. He had two masters now. But she was incapable of sustained emotion. She was sincere in what she said, but she slept placidly at night. When she saw him she flamed up always. Then only an increased taciturnity marked the change in her. She was afraid

of betraying herself. She was afraid of pain, of bodily harm, of sharp words, of facing anger, and witnessing violence. For her soul was light and tender with a pagan sincerity in its impulses. She murmured —

“Give up the palazzo, Giovanni, and the vineyard on the hills, for which we are starving our love.”

She ceased, seeing Linda standing silent at the corner of the house.

Nostromo turned to his affianced wife with a greeting, and was amazed at her sunken eyes, at her hollow cheeks, at the air of illness and anguish in her face.

“Have you been ill?” he asked, trying to put some concern into this question.

Her black eyes blazed at him. “Am I thinner?” she asked.

“Yes — perhaps — a little.”

“And older?”

“Every day counts — for all of us.”

“I shall go grey, I fear, before the ring is on my finger,” she said, slowly, keeping her gaze fastened upon him.

She waited for what he would say, rolling down her turned-up sleeves.

“No fear of that,” he said, absently.

She turned away as if it had been something final, and busied herself with household cares while Nostromo talked with her father. Conversation with the old Garibaldino was not easy. Age had left his faculties unimpaired, only they seemed to have withdrawn somewhere deep within him. His answers were slow in coming, with an effect of august gravity. But that day he was more animated, quicker; there seemed to be more life in the old lion. He was uneasy for the integrity of his honour. He believed Sidoni’s warning as to Ramirez’s designs upon his younger daughter. And he did not trust her. She was flighty. He said nothing of his cares to “Son Gian’ Battista.” It was a touch of senile vanity. He wanted to show that he was equal yet to the task of guarding alone the honour of his house.

Nostromo went away early. As soon as he had disappeared, walking towards the beach, Linda stepped over the threshold and, with a haggard smile, sat down by the side of her father.

Ever since that Sunday, when the infatuated and desperate Ramirez had waited for her on the wharf, she had no doubts whatever. The jealous ravings of that man were no revelation. They had only fixed with precision, as with a nail driven into her heart, that sense of unreality and deception which, instead of bliss and security, she had found in her intercourse with her promised husband. She had passed on, pouring indignation and scorn upon Ramirez; but, that Sunday, she nearly died of wretchedness and shame, lying on the carved and lettered stone of Teresa’s grave, subscribed for by the engine-drivers and the fitters of the railway workshops, in sign of their respect for the hero of Italian Unity. Old Viola had not been able to carry out his desire of burying his wife in the sea; and Linda wept upon the stone.

The gratuitous outrage appalled her. If he wished to break her heart — well and good. Everything was permitted to Gian’ Battista. But why trample upon the pieces;

why seek to humiliate her spirit? Aha! He could not break that. She dried her tears. And Giselle! Giselle! The little one that, ever since she could toddle, had always clung to her skirt for protection. What duplicity! But she could not help it probably. When there was a man in the case the poor featherheaded wretch could not help herself.

Linda had a good share of the Viola stoicism. She resolved to say nothing. But woman-like she put passion into her stoicism. Giselle's short answers, prompted by fearful caution, drove her beside herself by their curtness that resembled disdain. One day she flung herself upon the chair in which her indolent sister was lying and impressed the mark of her teeth at the base of the whitest neck in Sulaco. Giselle cried out. But she had her share of the Viola heroism. Ready to faint with terror, she only said, in a lazy voice, "Madre de Dios! Are you going to eat me alive, Linda?" And this outburst passed off leaving no trace upon the situation. "She knows nothing. She cannot know any thing," reflected Giselle. "Perhaps it is not true. It cannot be true," Linda tried to persuade herself.

But when she saw Captain Fidanza for the first time after her meeting with the distracted Ramirez, the certitude of her misfortune returned. She watched him from the doorway go away to his boat, asking herself stoically, "Will they meet to-night?" She made up her mind not to leave the tower for a second. When he had disappeared she came out and sat down by her father.

The venerable Garibaldino felt, in his own words, "a young man yet." In one way or another a good deal of talk about Ramirez had reached him of late; and his contempt and dislike of that man who obviously was not what his son would have been, had made him restless. He slept very little now; but for several nights past instead of reading — or only sitting, with Mrs. Gould's silver spectacles on his nose, before the open Bible, he had been prowling actively all about the island with his old gun, on watch over his honour.

Linda, laying her thin brown hand on his knee, tried to soothe his excitement. Ramirez was not in Sulaco. Nobody knew where he was. He was gone. His talk of what he would do meant nothing.

"No," the old man interrupted. "But son Gian' Battista told me — quite of himself — that the cowardly esclavo was drinking and gambling with the rascals of Zapiga, over there on the north side of the gulf. He may get some of the worst scoundrels of that scoundrelly town of negroes to help him in his attempt upon the little one. . . . But I am not so old. No!"

She argued earnestly against the probability of any attempt being made; and at last the old man fell silent, chewing his white moustache. Women had their obstinate notions which must be humoured — his poor wife was like that, and Linda resembled her mother. It was not seemly for a man to argue. "May be. May be," he mumbled.

She was by no means easy in her mind. She loved Nostromo. She turned her eyes upon Giselle, sitting at a distance, with something of maternal tenderness, and the jealous anguish of a rival outraged in her defeat. Then she rose and walked over to her.

"Listen — you," she said, roughly.

The invincible candour of the gaze, raised up all violet and dew, excited her rage and admiration. She had beautiful eyes — the Chica — this vile thing of white flesh and black deception. She did not know whether she wanted to tear them out with shouts of vengeance or cover up their mysterious and shameless innocence with kisses of pity and love. And suddenly they became empty, gazing blankly at her, except for a little fear not quite buried deep enough with all the other emotions in Giselle's heart.

Linda said, "Ramirez is boasting in town that he will carry you off from the island."

"What folly!" answered the other, and in a perversity born of long restraint, she added: "He is not the man," in a jesting tone with a trembling audacity.

"No?" said Linda, through her clenched teeth. "Is he not? Well, then, look to it; because father has been walking about with a loaded gun at night."

"It is not good for him. You must tell him not to, Linda. He will not listen to me."

"I shall say nothing — never any more — to anybody," cried Linda, passionately.

This could not last, thought Giselle. Giovanni must take her away soon — the very next time he came. She would not suffer these terrors for ever so much silver. To speak with her sister made her ill. But she was not uneasy at her father's watchfulness. She had begged Nostromo not to come to the window that night. He had promised to keep away for this once. And she did not know, could not guess or imagine, that he had another reason for coming on the island.

Linda had gone straight to the tower. It was time to light up. She unlocked the little door, and went heavily up the spiral staircase, carrying her love for the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores like an ever-increasing load of shameful fetters. No; she could not throw it off. No; let Heaven dispose of these two. And moving about the lantern, filled with twilight and the sheen of the moon, with careful movements she lighted the lamp. Then her arms fell along her body.

"And with our mother looking on," she murmured. "My own sister — the Chica!"

The whole refracting apparatus, with its brass fittings and rings of prisms, glittered and sparkled like a domeshaped shrine of diamonds, containing not a lamp, but some sacred flame, dominating the sea. And Linda, the keeper, in black, with a pale face, drooped low in a wooden chair, alone with her jealousy, far above the shames and passions of the earth. A strange, dragging pain as if somebody were pulling her about brutally by her dark hair with bronze glints, made her put her hands up to her temples. They would meet. They would meet. And she knew where, too. At the window. The sweat of torture fell in drops on her cheeks, while the moonlight in the offing closed as if with a colossal bar of silver the entrance of the Placid Gulf — the sombre cavern of clouds and stillness in the surf-fretted seaboard.

Linda Viola stood up suddenly with a finger on her lip. He loved neither her nor her sister. The whole thing seemed so objectless as to frighten her, and also give her some hope. Why did he not carry her off? What prevented him? He was incomprehensible. What were they waiting for? For what end were these two lying and deceiving? Not for the ends of their love. There was no such thing. The hope of regaining him for herself made her break her vow of not leaving the tower that night. She must talk at once to

her father, who was wise, and would understand. She ran down the spiral stairs. At the moment of opening the door at the bottom she heard the sound of the first shot ever fired on the Great Isabel.

She felt a shock, as though the bullet had struck her breast. She ran on without pausing. The cottage was dark. She cried at the door, "Giselle! Giselle!" then dashed round the corner and screamed her sister's name at the open window, without getting an answer; but as she was rushing, distracted, round the house, Giselle came out of the door, and darted past her, running silently, her hair loose, and her eyes staring straight ahead. She seemed to skim along the grass as if on tiptoe, and vanished.

Linda walked on slowly, with her arms stretched out before her. All was still on the island; she did not know where she was going. The tree under which Martin Decoud spent his last days, beholding life like a succession of senseless images, threw a large blotch of black shade upon the grass. Suddenly she saw her father, standing quietly all alone in the moonlight.

The Garibaldino — big, erect, with his snow-white hair and beard — had a monumental repose in his immobility, leaning upon a rifle. She put her hand upon his arm lightly. He never stirred.

"What have you done?" she asked, in her ordinary voice.

"I have shot Ramirez — infame!" he answered, with his eyes directed to where the shade was blackest. "Like a thief he came, and like a thief he fell. The child had to be protected."

He did not offer to move an inch, to advance a single step. He stood there, rugged and unshrinking, like a statue of an old man guarding the honour of his house. Linda removed her trembling hand from his arm, firm and steady like an arm of stone, and, without a word, entered the blackness of the shade. She saw a stir of formless shapes on the ground, and stopped short. A murmur of despair and tears grew louder to her strained hearing.

"I entreated you not to come to-night. Oh, my Giovanni! And you promised. Oh! Why — why did you come, Giovanni?"

It was her sister's voice. It broke on a heartrending sob. And the voice of the resourceful Capataz de Cargadores, master and slave of the San Tome treasure, who had been caught unawares by old Giorgio while stealing across the open towards the ravine to get some more silver, answered careless and cool, but sounding startlingly weak from the ground.

"It seemed as though I could not live through the night without seeing thee once more — my star, my little flower."

The brilliant tertulia was just over, the last guests had departed, and the Senor Administrador had gone to his room already, when Dr. Monygham, who had been expected in the evening but had not turned up, arrived driving along the wood-block pavement under the electric-lamps of the deserted Calle de la Constitucion, and found the great gateway of the Casa still open.

He limped in, stumped up the stairs, and found the fat and sleek Basilio on the point of turning off the lights in the sala. The prosperous majordomo remained open-mouthed at this late invasion.

“Don’t put out the lights,” commanded the doctor. “I want to see the senora.”

“The senora is in the Senor Administrador’s cancellaria,” said Basilio, in an unctuous voice. “The Senor Administrador starts for the mountain in an hour. There is some trouble with the workmen to be feared, it appears. A shameless people without reason and decency. And idle, senor. Idle.”

“You are shamelessly lazy and imbecile yourself,” said the doctor, with that faculty for exasperation which made him so generally beloved. “Don’t put the lights out.”

Basilio retired with dignity. Dr. Monygham, waiting in the brilliantly lighted sala, heard presently a door close at the further end of the house. A jingle of spurs died out. The Senor Administrador was off to the mountain.

With a measured swish of her long train, flashing with jewels and the shimmer of silk, her delicate head bowed as if under the weight of a mass of fair hair, in which the silver threads were lost, the “first lady of Sulaco,” as Captain Mitchell used to describe her, moved along the lighted corredor, wealthy beyond great dreams of wealth, considered, loved, respected, honoured, and as solitary as any human being had ever been, perhaps, on this earth.

The doctor’s “Mrs. Gould! One minute!” stopped her with a start at the door of the lighted and empty sala. From the similarity of mood and circumstance, the sight of the doctor, standing there all alone amongst the groups of furniture, recalled to her emotional memory her unexpected meeting with Martin Decoud; she seemed to hear in the silence the voice of that man, dead miserably so many years ago, pronounce the words, “Antonia left her fan here.” But it was the doctor’s voice that spoke, a little altered by his excitement. She remarked his shining eyes.

“Mrs. Gould, you are wanted. Do you know what has happened? You remember what I told you yesterday about Nostromo. Well, it seems that a lancha, a decked boat, coming from Zapiga, with four negroes in her, passing close to the Great Isabel, was hailed from the cliff by a woman’s voice — Linda’s, as a matter of fact — commanding them (it’s a moonlight night) to go round to the beach and take up a wounded man to the town. The patron (from whom I’ve heard all this), of course, did so at once. He told me that when they got round to the low side of the Great Isabel, they found Linda Viola waiting for them. They followed her: she led them under a tree not far from the cottage. There they found Nostromo lying on the ground with his head in the younger girl’s lap, and father Viola standing some distance off leaning on his gun. Under Linda’s direction they got a table out of the cottage for a stretcher, after breaking off the legs. They are here, Mrs. Gould. I mean Nostromo and — and Giselle. The negroes brought him in to the first-aid hospital near the harbour. He made the attendant send for me. But it was not me he wanted to see — it was you, Mrs. Gould! It was you.”

“Me?” whispered Mrs. Gould, shrinking a little.

“Yes, you!” the doctor burst out. “He begged me — his enemy, as he thinks — to bring you to him at once. It seems he has something to say to you alone.”

“Impossible!” murmured Mrs. Gould.

“He said to me, ‘Remind her that I have done something to keep a roof over her head.’ . . . Mrs. Gould,” the doctor pursued, in the greatest excitement. “Do you remember the silver? The silver in the lighter — that was lost?”

Mrs. Gould remembered. But she did not say she hated the mere mention of that silver. Frankness personified, she remembered with an exaggerated horror that for the first and last time of her life she had concealed the truth from her husband about that very silver. She had been corrupted by her fears at that time, and she had never forgiven herself. Moreover, that silver, which would never have come down if her husband had been made acquainted with the news brought by Decoud, had been in a roundabout way nearly the cause of Dr. Monygham’s death. And these things appeared to her very dreadful.

“Was it lost, though?” the doctor exclaimed. “I’ve always felt that there was a mystery about our Nostromo ever since. I do believe he wants now, at the point of death — — ”

“The point of death?” repeated Mrs. Gould.

“Yes. Yes. . . . He wants perhaps to tell you something concerning that silver which — — ”

“Oh, no! No!” exclaimed Mrs. Gould, in a low voice. “Isn’t it lost and done with? Isn’t there enough treasure without it to make everybody in the world miserable?”

The doctor remained still, in a submissive, disappointed silence. At last he ventured, very low —

“And there is that Viola girl, Giselle. What are we to do? It looks as though father and sister had — — ”

Mrs. Gould admitted that she felt in duty bound to do her best for these girls.

“I have a volante here,” the doctor said. “If you don’t mind getting into that — — ”

He waited, all impatience, till Mrs. Gould reappeared, having thrown over her dress a grey cloak with a deep hood.

It was thus that, cloaked and monastically hooded over her evening costume, this woman, full of endurance and compassion, stood by the side of the bed on which the splendid Capataz de Cargadores lay stretched out motionless on his back. The whiteness of sheets and pillows gave a sombre and energetic relief to his bronzed face, to the dark, nervous hands, so good on a tiller, upon a bridle and on a trigger, lying open and idle upon a white coverlet.

“She is innocent,” the Capataz was saying in a deep and level voice, as though afraid that a louder word would break the slender hold his spirit still kept upon his body. “She is innocent. It is I alone. But no matter. For these things I would answer to no man or woman alive.”

He paused. Mrs. Gould’s face, very white within the shadow of the hood, bent over him with an invincible and dreary sadness. And the low sobs of Giselle Viola, kneeling

at the end of the bed, her gold hair with coppery gleams loose and scattered over the Capataz's feet, hardly troubled the silence of the room.

"Ha! Old Giorgio — the guardian of thine honour! Fancy the Vecchio coming upon me so light of foot, so steady of aim. I myself could have done no better. But the price of a charge of powder might have been saved. The honour was safe. . . . Senora, she would have followed to the end of the world Nostromo the thief. . . . I have said the word. The spell is broken!"

A low moan from the girl made him cast his eyes down.

"I cannot see her. . . . No matter," he went on, with the shadow of the old magnificent carelessness in his voice. "One kiss is enough, if there is no time for more. An airy soul, senora! Bright and warm, like sunshine — soon clouded, and soon serene. They would crush it there between them. Senora, cast on her the eye of your compassion, as famed from one end of the land to the other as the courage and daring of the man who speaks to you. She will console herself in time. And even Ramirez is not a bad fellow. I am not angry. No! It is not Ramirez who overcame the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores." He paused, made an effort, and in louder voice, a little wildly, declared —

"I die betrayed — betrayed by — — "

But he did not say by whom or by what he was dying betrayed.

"She would not have betrayed me," he began again, opening his eyes very wide. "She was faithful. We were going very far — very soon. I could have torn myself away from that accursed treasure for her. For that child I would have left boxes and boxes of it — full. And Decoud took four. Four ingots. Why? Picardia! To betray me? How could I give back the treasure with four ingots missing? They would have said I had purloined them. The doctor would have said that. Alas! it holds me yet!"

Mrs. Gould bent low, fascinated — cold with apprehension.

"What became of Don Martin on that night, Nostromo?"

"Who knows? I wondered what would become of me. Now I know. Death was to come upon me unawares. He went away! He betrayed me. And you think I have killed him! You are all alike, you fine people. The silver has killed me. It has held me. It holds me yet. Nobody knows where it is. But you are the wife of Don Carlos, who put it into my hands and said, 'Save it on your life.' And when I returned, and you all thought it was lost, what do I hear? 'It was nothing of importance. Let it go. Up, Nostromo, the faithful, and ride away to save us, for dear life!'"

"Nostromo!" Mrs. Gould whispered, bending very low. "I, too, have hated the idea of that silver from the bottom of my heart."

"Marvellous! — that one of you should hate the wealth that you know so well how to take from the hands of the poor. The world rests upon the poor, as old Giorgio says. You have been always good to the poor. But there is something accursed in wealth. Senora, shall I tell you where the treasure is? To you alone. . . . Shining! Incorruptible!"

A pained, involuntary reluctance lingered in his tone, in his eyes, plain to the woman with the genius of sympathetic intuition. She averted her glance from the miserable subjection of the dying man, appalled, wishing to hear no more of the silver.

"No, Capataz," she said. "No one misses it now. Let it be lost for ever."

After hearing these words, Nostromo closed his eyes, uttered no word, made no movement. Outside the door of the sick-room Dr. Monygham, excited to the highest pitch, his eyes shining with eagerness, came up to the two women.

"Now, Mrs. Gould," he said, almost brutally in his impatience, "tell me, was I right? There is a mystery. You have got the word of it, have you not? He told you — —"

"He told me nothing," said Mrs. Gould, steadily.

The light of his temperamental enmity to Nostromo went out of Dr. Monygham's eyes. He stepped back submissively. He did not believe Mrs. Gould. But her word was law. He accepted her denial like an inexplicable fatality affirming the victory of Nostromo's genius over his own. Even before that woman, whom he loved with secret devotion, he had been defeated by the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, the man who had lived his own life on the assumption of unbroken fidelity, rectitude, and courage!

"Pray send at once somebody for my carriage," spoke Mrs. Gould from within her hood. Then, turning to Giselle Viola, "Come nearer me, child; come closer. We will wait here."

Giselle Viola, heartbroken and childlike, her face veiled in her falling hair, crept up to her side. Mrs. Gould slipped her hand through the arm of the unworthy daughter of old Viola, the immaculate republican, the hero without a stain. Slowly, gradually, as a withered flower droops, the head of the girl, who would have followed a thief to the end of the world, rested on the shoulder of Dona Emilia, the first lady of Sulaco, the wife of the Senor Administrador of the San Tome mine. And Mrs. Gould, feeling her suppressed sobbing, nervous and excited, had the first and only moment of bitterness in her life. It was worthy of Dr. Monygham himself.

"Console yourself, child. Very soon he would have forgotten you for his treasure."

"Senora, he loved me. He loved me," Giselle whispered, despairingly. "He loved me as no one had ever been loved before."

"I have been loved, too," Mrs. Gould said in a severe tone.

Giselle clung to her convulsively. "Oh, senora, but you shall live adored to the end of your life," she sobbed out.

Mrs. Gould kept an unbroken silence till the carriage arrived. She helped in the half-fainting girl. After the doctor had shut the door of the landau, she leaned over to him.

"You can do nothing?" she whispered.

"No, Mrs. Gould. Moreover, he won't let us touch him. It does not matter. I just had one look. . . . Useless."

But he promised to see old Viola and the other girl that very night. He could get the police-boat to take him off to the island. He remained in the street, looking after the landau rolling away slowly behind the white mules.

The rumour of some accident — an accident to Captain Fianza — had been spreading along the new quays with their rows of lamps and the dark shapes of towering

cranes. A knot of night prowlers — the poorest of the poor — hung about the door of the first-aid hospital, whispering in the moonlight of the empty street.

There was no one with the wounded man but the pale photographer, small, frail, bloodthirsty, the hater of capitalists, perched on a high stool near the head of the bed with his knees up and his chin in his hands. He had been fetched by a comrade who, working late on the wharf, had heard from a negro belonging to a lancha, that Captain Fidanza had been brought ashore mortally wounded.

“Have you any dispositions to make, comrade?” he asked, anxiously. “Do not forget that we want money for our work. The rich must be fought with their own weapons.”

Nostromo made no answer. The other did not insist, remaining huddled up on the stool, shock-headed, wildly hairy, like a hunchbacked monkey. Then, after a long silence —

“Comrade Fidanza,” he began, solemnly, “you have refused all aid from that doctor. Is he really a dangerous enemy of the people?”

In the dimly lit room Nostromo rolled his head slowly on the pillow and opened his eyes, directing at the weird figure perched by his bedside a glance of enigmatic and profound inquiry. Then his head rolled back, his eyelids fell, and the Capataz de Cargadores died without a word or moan after an hour of immobility, broken by short shudders testifying to the most atrocious sufferings.

Dr. Monygham, going out in the police-galley to the islands, beheld the glitter of the moon upon the gulf and the high black shape of the Great Isabel sending a shaft of light afar, from under the canopy of clouds.

“Pull easy,” he said, wondering what he would find there. He tried to imagine Linda and her father, and discovered a strange reluctance within himself. “Pull easy,” he repeated.

* * * * *

From the moment he fired at the thief of his honour, Giorgio Viola had not stirred from the spot. He stood, his old gun grounded, his hand grasping the barrel near the muzzle. After the lancha carrying off Nostromo for ever from her had left the shore, Linda, coming up, stopped before him. He did not seem to be aware of her presence, but when, losing her forced calmness, she cried out —

“Do you know whom you have killed?” he answered —

“Ramirez the vagabond.”

White, and staring insanely at her father, Linda laughed in his face. After a time he joined her faintly in a deep-toned and distant echo of her peals. Then she stopped, and the old man spoke as if startled —

“He cried out in son Gian’ Battista’s voice.”

The gun fell from his opened hand, but the arm remained extended for a moment as if still supported. Linda seized it roughly.

“You are too old to understand. Come into the house.”

He let her lead him. On the threshold he stumbled heavily, nearly coming to the ground together with his daughter. His excitement, his activity of the last few days, had been like the flare of a dying lamp. He caught at the back of his chair.

“In son Gian’ Battista’s voice,” he repeated in a severe tone. “I heard him — Ramirez — the miserable — — ”

Linda helped him into the chair, and, bending low, hissed into his ear —

“You have killed Gian’ Battista.”

The old man smiled under his thick moustache. Women had strange fancies.

“Where is the child?” he asked, surprised at the penetrating chilliness of the air and the unwonted dimness of the lamp by which he used to sit up half the night with the open Bible before him.

Linda hesitated a moment, then averted her eyes.

“She is asleep,” she said. “We shall talk of her tomorrow.”

She could not bear to look at him. He filled her with terror and with an almost unbearable feeling of pity. She had observed the change that came over him. He would never understand what he had done; and even to her the whole thing remained incomprehensible. He said with difficulty —

“Give me the book.”

Linda laid on the table the closed volume in its worn leather cover, the Bible given him ages ago by an Englishman in Palermo.

“The child had to be protected,” he said, in a strange, mournful voice.

Behind his chair Linda wrung her hands, crying without noise. Suddenly she started for the door. He heard her move.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To the light,” she answered, turning round to look at him balefully.

“The light! Si — duty.”

Very upright, white-haired, leonine, heroic in his absorbed quietness, he felt in the pocket of his red shirt for the spectacles given him by Dona Emilia. He put them on. After a long period of immobility he opened the book, and from on high looked through the glasses at the small print in double columns. A rigid, stern expression settled upon his features with a slight frown, as if in response to some gloomy thought or unpleasant sensation. But he never detached his eyes from the book while he swayed forward, gently, gradually, till his snow-white head rested upon the open pages. A wooden clock ticked methodically on the white-washed wall, and growing slowly cold the Garibaldino lay alone, rugged, undecayed, like an old oak uprooted by a treacherous gust of wind.

The light of the Great Isabel burned unflinching above the lost treasure of the San Tome mine. Into the bluish sheen of a night without stars the lantern sent out a yellow beam towards the far horizon. Like a black speck upon the shining panes, Linda, crouching in the outer gallery, rested her head on the rail. The moon, drooping in the western board, looked at her radiantly.

Below, at the foot of the cliff, the regular splash of oars from a passing boat ceased, and Dr. Monygham stood up in the stern sheets.

“Linda!” he shouted, throwing back his head. “Linda!”

Linda stood up. She had recognized the voice.

“Is he dead?” she cried, bending over.

“Yes, my poor girl. I am coming round,” the doctor answered from below. “Pull to the beach,” he said to the rowers.

Linda’s black figure detached itself upright on the light of the lantern with her arms raised above her head as though she were going to throw herself over.

“It is I who loved you,” she whispered, with a face as set and white as marble in the moonlight. “I! Only I! She will forget thee, killed miserably for her pretty face. I cannot understand. I cannot understand. But I shall never forget thee. Never!”

She stood silent and still, collecting her strength to throw all her fidelity, her pain, bewilderment, and despair into one great cry.

“Never! Gian’ Battista!”

Dr. Monygham, pulling round in the police-galley, heard the name pass over his head. It was another of Nostromo’s triumphs, the greatest, the most enviable, the most sinister of all. In that true cry of undying passion that seemed to ring aloud from Punta Mala to Azuera and away to the bright line of the horizon, overhung by a big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver, the genius of the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores dominated the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love.

The Secret Agent

A SIMPLE TALE

First published in 1907, this novel is set in London in 1886 and concerns the life of Mr. Verloc and his job as a spy. *The Secret Agent* is notable as a political novel, moving away from Conrad's typical tales of seafaring. The novel also deals broadly with the notions of anarchism, espionage and terrorism.

To

H. G. Wells

The Chronicler of Mr Lewisham's Love

The Biographer of Kipps and the

Historian of the Ages to Come

This Simple Tale of the Xix Century

Is Affectionately Offered

The first edition

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Conrad with his son at Pent Farm, Ashford. It was in this home that Conrad wrote 'The Secret Agent'

Chapter 1

Mr Verloc, going out in the morning, left his shop nominally in charge of his brother-in-law. It could be done, because there was very little business at any time, and practically none at all before the evening. Mr Verloc cared but little about his ostensible business. And, moreover, his wife was in charge of his brother-in-law.

The shop was small, and so was the house. It was one of those grimy brick houses which existed in large quantities before the era of reconstruction dawned upon London. The shop was a square box of a place, with the front glazed in small panes. In the daytime the door remained closed; in the evening it stood discreetly but suspiciously ajar.

The window contained photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls; nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy, and marked two-and-six in heavy black figures; a few numbers of ancient French comic publications hung across a string as if to dry; a dingy blue china bowl, a casket of black wood, bottles of marking ink, and rubber stamps; a few books, with titles hinting at impropriety; a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like *The Torch*, *The Gong* — rousing titles. And the two gas jets inside the panes were always turned low, either for economy's sake or for the sake of the customers.

These customers were either very young men, who hung about the window for a time before slipping in suddenly; or men of a more mature age, but looking generally as if they were not in funds. Some of that last kind had the collars of their overcoats turned right up to their moustaches, and traces of mud on the bottom of their nether garments, which had the appearance of being much worn and not very valuable. And the legs inside them did not, as a general rule, seem of much account either. With their hands plunged deep in the side pockets of their coats, they dodged in sideways, one shoulder first, as if afraid to start the bell going.

The bell, hung on the door by means of a curved ribbon of steel, was difficult to circumvent. It was hopelessly cracked; but of an evening, at the slightest provocation, it clattered behind the customer with impudent virulence.

It clattered; and at that signal, through the dusty glass door behind the painted deal counter, Mr Verloc would issue hastily from the parlour at the back. His eyes were naturally heavy; he had an air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed. Another man would have felt such an appearance a distinct disadvantage. In a commercial transaction of the retail order much depends on the seller's engaging and amiable aspect. But Mr Verloc knew his business, and remained undisturbed by

any sort of æsthetic doubt about his appearance. With a firm, steady-eyed impudence, which seemed to hold back the threat of some abominable menace, he would proceed to sell over the counter some object looking obviously and scandalously not worth the money which passed in the transaction: a small cardboard box with apparently nothing inside, for instance, or one of those carefully closed yellow flimsy envelopes, or a soiled volume in paper covers with a promising title. Now and then it happened that one of the faded, yellow dancing girls would get sold to an amateur, as though she had been alive and young.

Sometimes it was Mrs Verloc who would appear at the call of the cracked bell. Winnie Verloc was a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips. Her hair was very tidy. Steady-eyed like her husband, she preserved an air of unfathomable indifference behind the rampart of the counter. Then the customer of comparatively tender years would get suddenly disconcerted at having to deal with a woman, and with rage in his heart would proffer a request for a bottle of marking ink, retail value sixpence (price in Verloc's shop one-and-sixpence), which, once outside, he would drop stealthily into the gutter.

The evening visitors — the men with collars turned up and soft hats rammed down — nodded familiarly to Mrs Verloc, and with a muttered greeting, lifted up the flap at the end of the counter in order to pass into the back parlour, which gave access to a passage and to a steep flight of stairs. The door of the shop was the only means of entrance to the house in which Mr Verloc carried on his business of a seller of shady wares, exercised his vocation of a protector of society, and cultivated his domestic virtues. These last were pronounced. He was thoroughly domesticated. Neither his spiritual, nor his mental, nor his physical needs were of the kind to take him much abroad. He found at home the ease of his body and the peace of his conscience, together with Mrs Verloc's wifely attentions and Mrs Verloc's mother's deferential regard.

Winnie's mother was a stout, wheezy woman, with a large brown face. She wore a black wig under a white cap. Her swollen legs rendered her inactive. She considered herself to be of French descent, which might have been true; and after a good many years of married life with a licensed victualler of the more common sort, she provided for the years of widowhood by letting furnished apartments for gentlemen near Vauxhall Bridge Road in a square once of some splendour and still included in the district of Belgravia. This topographical fact was of some advantage in advertising her rooms; but the patrons of the worthy widow were not exactly of the fashionable kind. Such as they were, her daughter Winnie helped to look after them. Traces of the French descent which the widow boasted of were apparent in Winnie too. They were apparent in the extremely neat and artistic arrangement of her glossy dark hair. Winnie had also other charms: her youth; her full, rounded form; her clear complexion; the provocation of her unfathomable reserve, which never went so far as to prevent conversation, carried on on the lodgers' part with animation, and on hers with an equable amiability. It must be that Mr Verloc was susceptible to these fascinations. Mr Verloc was an intermittent patron. He came and went without any very apparent reason. He generally arrived

in London (like the influenza) from the Continent, only he arrived unheralded by the Press; and his visitations set in with great severity. He breakfasted in bed, and remained wallowing there with an air of quiet enjoyment till noon every day — and sometimes even to a later hour. But when he went out he seemed to experience a great difficulty in finding his way back to his temporary home in the Belgravian square. He left it late, and returned to it early — as early as three or four in the morning; and on waking up at ten addressed Winnie, bringing in the breakfast tray, with jocular, exhausted civility, in the hoarse, failing tones of a man who had been talking vehemently for many hours together. His prominent, heavy-lidded eyes rolled sideways amorously and languidly, the bedclothes were pulled up to his chin, and his dark smooth moustache covered his thick lips capable of much honeyed banter.

In Winnie's mother's opinion Mr Verloc was a very nice gentleman. From her life's experience gathered in various "business houses" the good woman had taken into her retirement an ideal of gentlemanliness as exhibited by the patrons of private-saloon bars. Mr Verloc approached that ideal; he attained it, in fact.

"Of course, we'll take over your furniture, mother," Winnie had remarked.

The lodging-house was to be given up. It seems it would not answer to carry it on. It would have been too much trouble for Mr Verloc. It would not have been convenient for his other business. What his business was he did not say; but after his engagement to Winnie he took the trouble to get up before noon, and descending the basement stairs, make himself pleasant to Winnie's mother in the breakfast-room downstairs where she had her motionless being. He stroked the cat, poked the fire, had his lunch served to him there. He left its slightly stuffy cosiness with evident reluctance, but, all the same, remained out till the night was far advanced. He never offered to take Winnie to theatres, as such a nice gentleman ought to have done. His evenings were occupied. His work was in a way political, he told Winnie once. She would have, he warned her, to be very nice to his political friends.

And with her straight, unfathomable glance she answered that she would be so, of course.

How much more he told her as to his occupation it was impossible for Winnie's mother to discover. The married couple took her over with the furniture. The mean aspect of the shop surprised her. The change from the Belgravian square to the narrow street in Soho affected her legs adversely. They became of an enormous size. On the other hand, she experienced a complete relief from material cares. Her son-in-law's heavy good nature inspired her with a sense of absolute safety. Her daughter's future was obviously assured, and even as to her son Stevie she need have no anxiety. She had not been able to conceal from herself that he was a terrible encumbrance, that poor Stevie. But in view of Winnie's fondness for her delicate brother, and of Mr Verloc's kind and generous disposition, she felt that the poor boy was pretty safe in this rough world. And in her heart of hearts she was not perhaps displeased that the Verlocs had no children. As that circumstance seemed perfectly indifferent to Mr Verloc, and as

Winnie found an object of quasi-maternal affection in her brother, perhaps this was just as well for poor Stevie.

For he was difficult to dispose of, that boy. He was delicate and, in a frail way, good-looking too, except for the vacant droop of his lower lip. Under our excellent system of compulsory education he had learned to read and write, notwithstanding the unfavourable aspect of the lower lip. But as errand-boy he did not turn out a great success. He forgot his messages; he was easily diverted from the straight path of duty by the attractions of stray cats and dogs, which he followed down narrow alleys into unsavoury courts; by the comedies of the streets, which he contemplated open-mouthed, to the detriment of his employer's interests; or by the dramas of fallen horses, whose pathos and violence induced him sometimes to shriek piercingly in a crowd, which disliked to be disturbed by sounds of distress in its quiet enjoyment of the national spectacle. When led away by a grave and protecting policeman, it would often become apparent that poor Stevie had forgotten his address — at least for a time. A brusque question caused him to stutter to the point of suffocation. When startled by anything perplexing he used to squint horribly. However, he never had any fits (which was encouraging); and before the natural outbursts of impatience on the part of his father he could always, in his childhood's days, run for protection behind the short skirts of his sister Winnie. On the other hand, he might have been suspected of hiding a fund of reckless naughtiness. When he had reached the age of fourteen a friend of his late father, an agent for a foreign preserved milk firm, having given him an opening as office-boy, he was discovered one foggy afternoon, in his chief's absence, busy letting off fireworks on the staircase. He touched off in quick succession a set of fierce rockets, angry catherine wheels, loudly exploding squibs — and the matter might have turned out very serious. An awful panic spread through the whole building. Wild-eyed, choking clerks stampeded through the passages full of smoke, silk hats and elderly business men could be seen rolling independently down the stairs. Stevie did not seem to derive any personal gratification from what he had done. His motives for this stroke of originality were difficult to discover. It was only later on that Winnie obtained from him a misty and confused confession. It seems that two other office-boys in the building had worked upon his feelings by tales of injustice and oppression till they had wrought his compassion to the pitch of that frenzy. But his father's friend, of course, dismissed him summarily as likely to ruin his business. After that altruistic exploit Stevie was put to help wash the dishes in the basement kitchen, and to black the boots of the gentlemen patronising the Belgravian mansion. There was obviously no future in such work. The gentlemen tipped him a shilling now and then. Mr Verloc showed himself the most generous of lodgers. But altogether all that did not amount to much either in the way of gain or prospects; so that when Winnie announced her engagement to Mr Verloc her mother could not help wondering, with a sigh and a glance towards the scullery, what would become of poor Stephen now.

It appeared that Mr Verloc was ready to take him over together with his wife's mother and with the furniture, which was the whole visible fortune of the family. Mr

Verloc gathered everything as it came to his broad, good-natured breast. The furniture was disposed to the best advantage all over the house, but Mrs Verloc's mother was confined to two back rooms on the first floor. The luckless Stevie slept in one of them. By this time a growth of thin fluffy hair had come to blur, like a golden mist, the sharp line of his small lower jaw. He helped his sister with blind love and docility in her household duties. Mr Verloc thought that some occupation would be good for him. His spare time he occupied by drawing circles with compass and pencil on a piece of paper. He applied himself to that pastime with great industry, with his elbows spread out and bowed low over the kitchen table. Through the open door of the parlour at the back of the shop Winnie, his sister, glanced at him from time to time with maternal vigilance.

Chapter 2

Such was the house, the household, and the business Mr Verloc left behind him on his way westward at the hour of half-past ten in the morning. It was unusually early for him; his whole person exhaled the charm of almost dewy freshness; he wore his blue cloth overcoat unbuttoned; his boots were shiny; his cheeks, freshly shaven, had a sort of gloss; and even his heavy-lidded eyes, refreshed by a night of peaceful slumber, sent out glances of comparative alertness. Through the park railings these glances beheld men and women riding in the Row, couples cantering past harmoniously, others advancing sedately at a walk, loitering groups of three or four, solitary horsemen looking unsociable, and solitary women followed at a long distance by a groom with a cockade to his hat and a leather belt over his tight-fitting coat. Carriages went bowling by, mostly two-horse broughams, with here and there a victoria with the skin of some wild beast inside and a woman's face and hat emerging above the folded hood. And a peculiarly London sun — against which nothing could be said except that it looked bloodshot — glorified all this by its stare. It hung at a moderate elevation above Hyde Park Corner with an air of punctual and benign vigilance. The very pavement under Mr Verloc's feet had an old-gold tinge in that diffused light, in which neither wall, nor tree, nor beast, nor man cast a shadow. Mr Verloc was going westward through a town without shadows in an atmosphere of powdered old gold. There were red, coppery gleams on the roofs of houses, on the corners of walls, on the panels of carriages, on the very coats of the horses, and on the broad back of Mr Verloc's overcoat, where they produced a dull effect of rustiness. But Mr Verloc was not in the least conscious of having got rusty. He surveyed through the park railings the evidences of the town's opulence and luxury with an approving eye. All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury. They had to be protected; and their horses, carriages, houses, servants had to be protected; and the source of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city and the heart of the country; the whole social order favourable to their hygienic idleness had to be protected against the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labour. It had to — and Mr Verloc would have rubbed his hands with satisfaction had he not been constitutionally averse from every superfluous exertion. His idleness was not hygienic, but it suited him very well. He was in a manner devoted to it with a sort of inert fanaticism, or perhaps rather with a fanatical inertness. Born of industrious parents for a life of toil, he had embraced indolence from an impulse as profound as inexplicable and as imperious as the impulse which directs a man's preference for one particular woman in a given thousand. He was too lazy even for a mere demagogue, for a workman orator, for a leader of labour. It

was too much trouble. He required a more perfect form of ease; or it might have been that he was the victim of a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort. Such a form of indolence requires, implies, a certain amount of intelligence. Mr Verloc was not devoid of intelligence — and at the notion of a menaced social order he would perhaps have winked to himself if there had not been an effort to make in that sign of scepticism. His big, prominent eyes were not well adapted to winking. They were rather of the sort that closes solemnly in slumber with majestic effect.

Undemonstrative and burly in a fat-pig style, Mr Verloc, without either rubbing his hands with satisfaction or winking sceptically at his thoughts, proceeded on his way. He trod the pavement heavily with his shiny boots, and his general get-up was that of a well-to-do mechanic in business for himself. He might have been anything from a picture-frame maker to a lock-smith; an employer of labour in a small way. But there was also about him an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired in the practice of his handicraft however dishonestly exercised: the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism common to keepers of gambling hells and disorderly houses; to private detectives and inquiry agents; to drink sellers and, I should say, to the sellers of invigorating electric belts and to the inventors of patent medicines. But of that last I am not sure, not having carried my investigations so far into the depths. For all I know, the expression of these last may be perfectly diabolic. I shouldn't be surprised. What I want to affirm is that Mr Verloc's expression was by no means diabolic.

Before reaching Knightsbridge, Mr Verloc took a turn to the left out of the busy main thoroughfare, uproarious with the traffic of swaying omnibuses and trotting vans, in the almost silent, swift flow of hansoms. Under his hat, worn with a slight backward tilt, his hair had been carefully brushed into respectful sleekness; for his business was with an Embassy. And Mr Verloc, steady like a rock — a soft kind of rock — marched now along a street which could with every propriety be described as private. In its breadth, emptiness, and extent it had the majesty of inorganic nature, of matter that never dies. The only reminder of mortality was a doctor's brougham arrested in august solitude close to the curbstone. The polished knockers of the doors gleamed as far as the eye could reach, the clean windows shone with a dark opaque lustre. And all was still. But a milk cart rattled noisily across the distant perspective; a butcher boy, driving with the noble recklessness of a charioteer at Olympic Games, dashed round the corner sitting high above a pair of red wheels. A guilty-looking cat issuing from under the stones ran for a while in front of Mr Verloc, then dived into another basement; and a thick police constable, looking a stranger to every emotion, as if he too were part of inorganic nature, surging apparently out of a lamp-post, took not the slightest notice of Mr Verloc. With a turn to the left Mr Verloc pursued his way along a narrow street by the side of a yellow wall which, for some inscrutable reason, had No. 1 Chesham Square written on it in black letters. Chesham Square was at least sixty yards away, and Mr Verloc, cosmopolitan enough not to be deceived by London's topographical mysteries, held on steadily, without a sign of surprise or indignation.

At last, with business-like persistency, he reached the Square, and made diagonally for the number 10. This belonged to an imposing carriage gate in a high, clean wall between two houses, of which one rationally enough bore the number 9 and the other was numbered 37; but the fact that this last belonged to Porthill Street, a street well known in the neighbourhood, was proclaimed by an inscription placed above the ground-floor windows by whatever highly efficient authority is charged with the duty of keeping track of London's strayed houses. Why powers are not asked of Parliament (a short act would do) for compelling those edifices to return where they belong is one of the mysteries of municipal administration. Mr Verloc did not trouble his head about it, his mission in life being the protection of the social mechanism, not its perfectionment or even its criticism.

It was so early that the porter of the Embassy issued hurriedly out of his lodge still struggling with the left sleeve of his livery coat. His waistcoat was red, and he wore knee-breeches, but his aspect was flustered. Mr Verloc, aware of the rush on his flank, drove it off by simply holding out an envelope stamped with the arms of the Embassy, and passed on. He produced the same talisman also to the footman who opened the door, and stood back to let him enter the hall.

A clear fire burned in a tall fireplace, and an elderly man standing with his back to it, in evening dress and with a chain round his neck, glanced up from the newspaper he was holding spread out in both hands before his calm and severe face. He didn't move; but another lackey, in brown trousers and claw-hammer coat edged with thin yellow cord, approaching Mr Verloc listened to the murmur of his name, and turning round on his heel in silence, began to walk, without looking back once. Mr Verloc, thus led along a ground-floor passage to the left of the great carpeted staircase, was suddenly motioned to enter a quite small room furnished with a heavy writing-table and a few chairs. The servant shut the door, and Mr Verloc remained alone. He did not take a seat. With his hat and stick held in one hand he glanced about, passing his other podgy hand over his uncovered sleek head.

Another door opened noiselessly, and Mr Verloc immobilising his glance in that direction saw at first only black clothes, the bald top of a head, and a drooping dark grey whisker on each side of a pair of wrinkled hands. The person who had entered was holding a batch of papers before his eyes and walked up to the table with a rather mincing step, turning the papers over the while. Privy Councillor Wurmt, Chancelier d'Ambassade, was rather short-sighted. This meritorious official laying the papers on the table, disclosed a face of pasty complexion and of melancholy ugliness surrounded by a lot of fine, long dark grey hairs, barred heavily by thick and bushy eyebrows. He put on a black-framed pince-nez upon a blunt and shapeless nose, and seemed struck by Mr Verloc's appearance. Under the enormous eyebrows his weak eyes blinked pathetically through the glasses.

He made no sign of greeting; neither did Mr Verloc, who certainly knew his place; but a subtle change about the general outlines of his shoulders and back suggested a

slight bending of Mr Verloc's spine under the vast surface of his overcoat. The effect was of unobtrusive deference.

"I have here some of your reports," said the bureaucrat in an unexpectedly soft and weary voice, and pressing the tip of his forefinger on the papers with force. He paused; and Mr Verloc, who had recognised his own handwriting very well, waited in an almost breathless silence. "We are not very satisfied with the attitude of the police here," the other continued, with every appearance of mental fatigue.

The shoulders of Mr Verloc, without actually moving, suggested a shrug. And for the first time since he left his home that morning his lips opened.

"Every country has its police," he said philosophically. But as the official of the Embassy went on blinking at him steadily he felt constrained to add: "Allow me to observe that I have no means of action upon the police here."

"What is desired," said the man of papers, "is the occurrence of something definite which should stimulate their vigilance. That is within your province — is it not so?"

Mr Verloc made no answer except by a sigh, which escaped him involuntarily, for instantly he tried to give his face a cheerful expression. The official blinked doubtfully, as if affected by the dim light of the room. He repeated vaguely.

"The vigilance of the police — and the severity of the magistrates. The general leniency of the judicial procedure here, and the utter absence of all repressive measures, are a scandal to Europe. What is wished for just now is the accentuation of the unrest — of the fermentation which undoubtedly exists — "

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," broke in Mr Verloc in a deep deferential bass of an oratorical quality, so utterly different from the tone in which he had spoken before that his interlocutor remained profoundly surprised. "It exists to a dangerous degree. My reports for the last twelve months make it sufficiently clear."

"Your reports for the last twelve months," State Councillor Wurmt began in his gentle and dispassionate tone, "have been read by me. I failed to discover why you wrote them at all."

A sad silence reigned for a time. Mr Verloc seemed to have swallowed his tongue, and the other gazed at the papers on the table fixedly. At last he gave them a slight push.

"The state of affairs you expose there is assumed to exist as the first condition of your employment. What is required at present is not writing, but the bringing to light of a distinct, significant fact — I would almost say of an alarming fact."

"I need not say that all my endeavours shall be directed to that end," Mr Verloc said, with convinced modulations in his conversational husky tone. But the sense of being blinked at watchfully behind the blind glitter of these eye-glasses on the other side of the table disconcerted him. He stopped short with a gesture of absolute devotion. The useful, hard-working, if obscure member of the Embassy had an air of being impressed by some newly-born thought.

"You are very corpulent," he said.

This observation, really of a psychological nature, and advanced with the modest hesitation of an officeman more familiar with ink and paper than with the requirements of active life, stung Mr Verloc in the manner of a rude personal remark. He stepped back a pace.

“Eh? What were you pleased to say?” he exclaimed, with husky resentment.

The Chancelier d’Ambassade entrusted with the conduct of this interview seemed to find it too much for him.

“I think,” he said, “that you had better see Mr Vladimir. Yes, decidedly I think you ought to see Mr Vladimir. Be good enough to wait here,” he added, and went out with mincing steps.

At once Mr Verloc passed his hand over his hair. A slight perspiration had broken out on his forehead. He let the air escape from his pursed-up lips like a man blowing at a spoonful of hot soup. But when the servant in brown appeared at the door silently, Mr Verloc had not moved an inch from the place he had occupied throughout the interview. He had remained motionless, as if feeling himself surrounded by pitfalls.

He walked along a passage lighted by a lonely gas-jet, then up a flight of winding stairs, and through a glazed and cheerful corridor on the first floor. The footman threw open a door, and stood aside. The feet of Mr Verloc felt a thick carpet. The room was large, with three windows; and a young man with a shaven, big face, sitting in a roomy arm-chair before a vast mahogany writing-table, said in French to the Chancelier d’Ambassade, who was going out with the papers in his hand:

“You are quite right, *mon cher*. He’s fat — the animal.”

Mr Vladimir, First Secretary, had a drawing-room reputation as an agreeable and entertaining man. He was something of a favourite in society. His wit consisted in discovering droll connections between incongruous ideas; and when talking in that strain he sat well forward of his seat, with his left hand raised, as if exhibiting his funny demonstrations between the thumb and forefinger, while his round and clean-shaven face wore an expression of merry perplexity.

But there was no trace of merriment or perplexity in the way he looked at Mr Verloc. Lying far back in the deep arm-chair, with squarely spread elbows, and throwing one leg over a thick knee, he had with his smooth and rosy countenance the air of a preternaturally thriving baby that will not stand nonsense from anybody.

“You understand French, I suppose?” he said.

Mr Verloc stated huskily that he did. His whole vast bulk had a forward inclination. He stood on the carpet in the middle of the room, clutching his hat and stick in one hand; the other hung lifelessly by his side. He muttered unobtrusively somewhere deep down in his throat something about having done his military service in the French artillery. At once, with contemptuous perversity, Mr Vladimir changed the language, and began to speak idiomatic English without the slightest trace of a foreign accent.

“Ah! Yes. Of course. Let’s see. How much did you get for obtaining the design of the improved breech-block of their new field-gun?”

"Five years' rigorous confinement in a fortress," Mr Verloc answered unexpectedly, but without any sign of feeling.

"You got off easily," was Mr Vladimir's comment. "And, anyhow, it served you right for letting yourself get caught. What made you go in for that sort of thing — eh?"

Mr Verloc's husky conversational voice was heard speaking of youth, of a fatal infatuation for an unworthy —

"Aha! *Cherchez la femme*," Mr Vladimir deigned to interrupt, unbending, but without affability; there was, on the contrary, a touch of grimness in his condescension. "How long have you been employed by the Embassy here?" he asked.

"Ever since the time of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim," Mr Verloc answered in subdued tones, and protruding his lips sadly, in sign of sorrow for the deceased diplomat. The First Secretary observed this play of physiognomy steadily.

"Ah! ever since. Well! What have you got to say for yourself?" he asked sharply.

Mr Verloc answered with some surprise that he was not aware of having anything special to say. He had been summoned by a letter — And he plunged his hand busily into the side pocket of his overcoat, but before the mocking, cynical watchfulness of Mr Vladimir, concluded to leave it there.

"Bah!" said that latter. "What do you mean by getting out of condition like this? You haven't got even the physique of your profession. You — a member of a starving proletariat — never! You — a desperate socialist or anarchist — which is it?"

"Anarchist," stated Mr Verloc in a deadened tone.

"Bosh!" went on Mr Vladimir, without raising his voice. "You startled old Wurmt himself. You wouldn't deceive an idiot. They all are that by-the-by, but you seem to me simply impossible. So you began your connection with us by stealing the French gun designs. And you got yourself caught. That must have been very disagreeable to our Government. You don't seem to be very smart."

Mr Verloc tried to exculpate himself huskily.

"As I've had occasion to observe before, a fatal infatuation for an unworthy — "

Mr Vladimir raised a large white, plump hand. "Ah, yes. The unlucky attachment — of your youth. She got hold of the money, and then sold you to the police — eh?"

The doleful change in Mr Verloc's physiognomy, the momentary drooping of his whole person, confessed that such was the regrettable case. Mr Vladimir's hand clasped the ankle reposing on his knee. The sock was of dark blue silk.

"You see, that was not very clever of you. Perhaps you are too susceptible."

Mr Verloc intimated in a throaty, veiled murmur that he was no longer young.

"Oh! That's a failing which age does not cure," Mr Vladimir remarked, with sinister familiarity. "But no! You are too fat for that. You could not have come to look like this if you had been at all susceptible. I'll tell you what I think is the matter: you are a lazy fellow. How long have you been drawing pay from this Embassy?"

"Eleven years," was the answer, after a moment of sulky hesitation. "I've been charged with several missions to London while His Excellency Baron Stott-Wartenheim

was still Ambassador in Paris. Then by his Excellency's instructions I settled down in London. I am English."

"You are! Are you? Eh?"

"A natural-born British subject," Mr Verloc said stolidly. "But my father was French, and so —"

"Never mind explaining," interrupted the other. "I daresay you could have been legally a Marshal of France and a Member of Parliament in England — and then, indeed, you would have been of some use to our Embassy."

This flight of fancy provoked something like a faint smile on Mr Verloc's face. Mr Vladimir retained an imperturbable gravity.

"But, as I've said, you are a lazy fellow; you don't use your opportunities. In the time of Baron Stott-Wartenheim we had a lot of soft-headed people running this Embassy. They caused fellows of your sort to form a false conception of the nature of a secret service fund. It is my business to correct this misapprehension by telling you what the secret service is not. It is not a philanthropic institution. I've had you called here on purpose to tell you this."

Mr Vladimir observed the forced expression of bewilderment on Verloc's face, and smiled sarcastically.

"I see that you understand me perfectly. I daresay you are intelligent enough for your work. What we want now is activity — activity."

On repeating this last word Mr Vladimir laid a long white forefinger on the edge of the desk. Every trace of huskiness disappeared from Verloc's voice. The nape of his gross neck became crimson above the velvet collar of his overcoat. His lips quivered before they came widely open.

"If you'll only be good enough to look up my record," he boomed out in his great, clear oratorical bass, "you'll see I gave a warning only three months ago, on the occasion of the Grand Duke Romuald's visit to Paris, which was telegraphed from here to the French police, and —"

"Tut, tut!" broke out Mr Vladimir, with a frowning grimace. "The French police had no use for your warning. Don't roar like this. What the devil do you mean?"

With a note of proud humility Mr Verloc apologised for forgetting himself. His voice, — famous for years at open-air meetings and at workmen's assemblies in large halls, had contributed, he said, to his reputation of a good and trustworthy comrade. It was, therefore, a part of his usefulness. It had inspired confidence in his principles. "I was always put up to speak by the leaders at a critical moment," Mr Verloc declared, with obvious satisfaction. There was no uproar above which he could not make himself heard, he added; and suddenly he made a demonstration.

"Allow me," he said. With lowered forehead, without looking up, swiftly and ponderously he crossed the room to one of the French windows. As if giving way to an uncontrollable impulse, he opened it a little. Mr Vladimir, jumping up amazed from the depths of the arm-chair, looked over his shoulder; and below, across the courtyard of the Embassy, well beyond the open gate, could be seen the broad back of a po-

liceman watching idly the gorgeous perambulator of a wealthy baby being wheeled in state across the Square.

“Constable!” said Mr Verloc, with no more effort than if he were whispering; and Mr Vladimir burst into a laugh on seeing the policeman spin round as if prodded by a sharp instrument. Mr Verloc shut the window quietly, and returned to the middle of the room.

“With a voice like that,” he said, putting on the husky conversational pedal, “I was naturally trusted. And I knew what to say, too.”

Mr Vladimir, arranging his cravat, observed him in the glass over the mantelpiece.

“I daresay you have the social revolutionary jargon by heart well enough,” he said contemptuously. “Vox et. . . You haven’t ever studied Latin — have you?”

“No,” growled Mr Verloc. “You did not expect me to know it. I belong to the million. Who knows Latin? Only a few hundred imbeciles who aren’t fit to take care of themselves.”

For some thirty seconds longer Mr Vladimir studied in the mirror the fleshy profile, the gross bulk, of the man behind him. And at the same time he had the advantage of seeing his own face, clean-shaved and round, rosy about the gills, and with the thin sensitive lips formed exactly for the utterance of those delicate witticisms which had made him such a favourite in the very highest society. Then he turned, and advanced into the room with such determination that the very ends of his quaintly old-fashioned bow necktie seemed to bristle with unspeakable menaces. The movement was so swift and fierce that Mr Verloc, casting an oblique glance, quailed inwardly.

“Aha! You dare be impudent,” Mr Vladimir began, with an amazingly guttural intonation not only utterly un-English, but absolutely un-European, and startling even to Mr Verloc’s experience of cosmopolitan slums. “You dare! Well, I am going to speak plain English to you. Voice won’t do. We have no use for your voice. We don’t want a voice. We want facts — startling facts — damn you,” he added, with a sort of ferocious discretion, right into Mr Verloc’s face.

“Don’t you try to come over me with your Hyperborean manners,” Mr Verloc defended himself huskily, looking at the carpet. At this his interlocutor, smiling mockingly above the bristling bow of his necktie, switched the conversation into French.

“You give yourself for an ‘agent provocateur.’ The proper business of an ‘agent provocateur’ is to provoke. As far as I can judge from your record kept here, you have done nothing to earn your money for the last three years.”

“Nothing!” exclaimed Verloc, stirring not a limb, and not raising his eyes, but with the note of sincere feeling in his tone. “I have several times prevented what might have been — ”

“There is a proverb in this country which says prevention is better than cure,” interrupted Mr Vladimir, throwing himself into the arm-chair. “It is stupid in a general way. There is no end to prevention. But it is characteristic. They dislike finality in this country. Don’t you be too English. And in this particular instance, don’t be absurd. The evil is already here. We don’t want prevention — we want cure.”

He paused, turned to the desk, and turning over some papers lying there, spoke in a changed business-like tone, without looking at Mr Verloc.

“You know, of course, of the International Conference assembled in Milan?”

Mr Verloc intimated hoarsely that he was in the habit of reading the daily papers. To a further question his answer was that, of course, he understood what he read. At this Mr Vladimir, smiling faintly at the documents he was still scanning one after another, murmured “As long as it is not written in Latin, I suppose.”

“Or Chinese,” added Mr Verloc stolidly.

“H’m. Some of your revolutionary friends’ effusions are written in a charabia every bit as incomprehensible as Chinese — ” Mr Vladimir let fall disdainfully a grey sheet of printed matter. “What are all these leaflets headed F. P., with a hammer, pen, and torch crossed? What does it mean, this F. P.?” Mr Verloc approached the imposing writing-table.

“The Future of the Proletariat. It’s a society,” he explained, standing ponderously by the side of the arm-chair, “not anarchist in principle, but open to all shades of revolutionary opinion.”

“Are you in it?”

“One of the Vice-Presidents,” Mr Verloc breathed out heavily; and the First Secretary of the Embassy raised his head to look at him.

“Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself,” he said incisively. “Isn’t your society capable of anything else but printing this prophetic bosh in blunt type on this filthy paper eh? Why don’t you do something? Look here. I’ve this matter in hand now, and I tell you plainly that you will have to earn your money. The good old Stott-Wartenheim times are over. No work, no pay.”

Mr Verloc felt a queer sensation of faintness in his stout legs. He stepped back one pace, and blew his nose loudly.

He was, in truth, startled and alarmed. The rusty London sunshine struggling clear of the London mist shed a lukewarm brightness into the First Secretary’s private room; and in the silence Mr Verloc heard against a window-pane the faint buzzing of a fly — his first fly of the year — heralding better than any number of swallows the approach of spring. The useless fussing of that tiny energetic organism affected unpleasantly this big man threatened in his indolence.

In the pause Mr Vladimir formulated in his mind a series of disparaging remarks concerning Mr Verloc’s face and figure. The fellow was unexpectedly vulgar, heavy, and impudently unintelligent. He looked uncommonly like a master plumber come to present his bill. The First Secretary of the Embassy, from his occasional excursions into the field of American humour, had formed a special notion of that class of mechanic as the embodiment of fraudulent laziness and incompetency.

This was then the famous and trusty secret agent, so secret that he was never designated otherwise but by the symbol [delta] in the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim’s official, semi-official, and confidential correspondence; the celebrated agent [delta], whose warnings had the power to change the schemes and the dates of royal, imperial, grand ducal

journeys, and sometimes caused them to be put off altogether! This fellow! And Mr Vladimir indulged mentally in an enormous and derisive fit of merriment, partly at his own astonishment, which he judged naive, but mostly at the expense of the universally regretted Baron Stott-Wartenheim. His late Excellency, whom the august favour of his Imperial master had imposed as Ambassador upon several reluctant Ministers of Foreign Affairs, had enjoyed in his lifetime a fame for an owlish, pessimistic gullibility. His Excellency had the social revolution on the brain. He imagined himself to be a diplomatist set apart by a special dispensation to watch the end of diplomacy, and pretty nearly the end of the world, in a horrid democratic upheaval. His prophetic and doleful despatches had been for years the joke of Foreign Offices. He was said to have exclaimed on his deathbed (visited by his Imperial friend and master): "Unhappy Europe! Thou shalt perish by the moral insanity of thy children!" He was fated to be the victim of the first humbugging rascal that came along, thought Mr Vladimir, smiling vaguely at Mr Verloc.

"You ought to venerate the memory of Baron Stott-Wartenheim," he exclaimed suddenly.

The lowered physiognomy of Mr Verloc expressed a sombre and weary annoyance.

"Permit me to observe to you," he said, "that I came here because I was summoned by a peremptory letter. I have been here only twice before in the last eleven years, and certainly never at eleven in the morning. It isn't very wise to call me up like this. There is just a chance of being seen. And that would be no joke for me."

Mr Vladimir shrugged his shoulders.

"It would destroy my usefulness," continued the other hotly.

"That's your affair," murmured Mr Vladimir, with soft brutality. "When you cease to be useful you shall cease to be employed. Yes. Right off. Cut short. You shall — " Mr Vladimir, frowning, paused, at a loss for a sufficiently idiomatic expression, and instantly brightened up, with a grin of beautifully white teeth. "You shall be chucked," he brought out ferociously.

Once more Mr Verloc had to react with all the force of his will against that sensation of faintness running down one's legs which once upon a time had inspired some poor devil with the felicitous expression: "My heart went down into my boots." Mr Verloc, aware of the sensation, raised his head bravely.

Mr Vladimir bore the look of heavy inquiry with perfect serenity.

"What we want is to administer a tonic to the Conference in Milan," he said airily. "Its deliberations upon international action for the suppression of political crime don't seem to get anywhere. England lags. This country is absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty. It's intolerable to think that all your friends have got only to come over to — "

"In that way I have them all under my eye," Mr Verloc interrupted huskily.

"It would be much more to the point to have them all under lock and key. England must be brought into line. The imbecile bourgeoisie of this country make themselves the accomplices of the very people whose aim is to drive them out of their houses to

starve in ditches. And they have the political power still, if they only had the sense to use it for their preservation. I suppose you agree that the middle classes are stupid?"

Mr Verloc agreed hoarsely.

"They are."

"They have no imagination. They are blinded by an idiotic vanity. What they want just now is a jolly good scare. This is the psychological moment to set your friends to work. I have had you called here to develop to you my idea."

And Mr Vladimir developed his idea from on high, with scorn and condescension, displaying at the same time an amount of ignorance as to the real aims, thoughts, and methods of the revolutionary world which filled the silent Mr Verloc with inward consternation. He confounded causes with effects more than was excusable; the most distinguished propagandists with impulsive bomb throwers; assumed organisation where in the nature of things it could not exist; spoke of the social revolutionary party one moment as of a perfectly disciplined army, where the word of chiefs was supreme, and at another as if it had been the loosest association of desperate brigands that ever camped in a mountain gorge. Once Mr Verloc had opened his mouth for a protest, but the raising of a shapely, large white hand arrested him. Very soon he became too appalled to even try to protest. He listened in a stillness of dread which resembled the immobility of profound attention.

"A series of outrages," Mr Vladimir continued calmly, "executed here in this country; not only planned here — that would not do — they would not mind. Your friends could set half the Continent on fire without influencing the public opinion here in favour of a universal repressive legislation. They will not look outside their backyard here."

Mr Verloc cleared his throat, but his heart failed him, and he said nothing.

"These outrages need not be especially sanguinary," Mr Vladimir went on, as if delivering a scientific lecture, "but they must be sufficiently startling — effective. Let them be directed against buildings, for instance. What is the fetish of the hour that all the bourgeoisie recognise — eh, Mr Verloc?"

Mr Verloc opened his hands and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"You are too lazy to think," was Mr Vladimir's comment upon that gesture. "Pay attention to what I say. The fetish of to-day is neither royalty nor religion. Therefore the palace and the church should be left alone. You understand what I mean, Mr Verloc?"

The dismay and the scorn of Mr Verloc found vent in an attempt at levity.

"Perfectly. But what of the Embassies? A series of attacks on the various Embassies," he began; but he could not withstand the cold, watchful stare of the First Secretary.

"You can be facetious, I see," the latter observed carelessly. "That's all right. It may enliven your oratory at socialistic congresses. But this room is no place for it. It would be infinitely safer for you to follow carefully what I am saying. As you are being called upon to furnish facts instead of cock-and-bull stories, you had better try to make your profit off what I am taking the trouble to explain to you. The sacrosanct fetish of to-day is science. Why don't you get some of your friends to go for that wooden-faced

panjandrum — eh? Is it not part of these institutions which must be swept away before the F. P. comes along?”

Mr Verloc said nothing. He was afraid to open his lips lest a groan should escape him.

“This is what you should try for. An attempt upon a crowned head or on a president is sensational enough in a way, but not so much as it used to be. It has entered into the general conception of the existence of all chiefs of state. It’s almost conventional — especially since so many presidents have been assassinated. Now let us take an outrage upon — say a church. Horrible enough at first sight, no doubt, and yet not so effective as a person of an ordinary mind might think. No matter how revolutionary and anarchist in inception, there would be fools enough to give such an outrage the character of a religious manifestation. And that would detract from the especial alarming significance we wish to give to the act. A murderous attempt on a restaurant or a theatre would suffer in the same way from the suggestion of non-political passion: the exasperation of a hungry man, an act of social revenge. All this is used up; it is no longer instructive as an object lesson in revolutionary anarchism. Every newspaper has ready-made phrases to explain such manifestations away. I am about to give you the philosophy of bomb throwing from my point of view; from the point of view you pretend to have been serving for the last eleven years. I will try not to talk above your head. The sensibilities of the class you are attacking are soon blunted. Property seems to them an indestructible thing. You can’t count upon their emotions either of pity or fear for very long. A bomb outrage to have any influence on public opinion now must go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive. It must be that, and only that, beyond the faintest suspicion of any other object. You anarchists should make it clear that you are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation. But how to get that appallingly absurd notion into the heads of the middle classes so that there should be no mistake? That’s the question. By directing your blows at something outside the ordinary passions of humanity is the answer. Of course, there is art. A bomb in the National Gallery would make some noise. But it would not be serious enough. Art has never been their fetish. It’s like breaking a few back windows in a man’s house; whereas, if you want to make him really sit up, you must try at least to raise the roof. There would be some screaming of course, but from whom? Artists — art critics and such like — people of no account. Nobody minds what they say. But there is learning — science. Any imbecile that has got an income believes in that. He does not know why, but he believes it matters somehow. It is the sacrosanct fetish. All the damned professors are radicals at heart. Let them know that their great panjandrum has got to go too, to make room for the Future of the Proletariat. A howl from all these intellectual idiots is bound to help forward the labours of the Milan Conference. They will be writing to the papers. Their indignation would be above suspicion, no material interests being openly at stake, and it will alarm every selfishness of the class which should be impressed. They believe that in some mysterious way science is at the source of their material prosperity. They do. And

the absurd ferocity of such a demonstration will affect them more profoundly than the mangling of a whole street — or theatre — full of their own kind. To that last they can always say: ‘Oh! it’s mere class hate.’ But what is one to say to an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad? Madness alone is truly terrifying, inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion, or bribes. Moreover, I am a civilised man. I would never dream of directing you to organise a mere butchery, even if I expected the best results from it. But I wouldn’t expect from a butchery the result I want. Murder is always with us. It is almost an institution. The demonstration must be against learning — science. But not every science will do. The attack must have all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy. Since bombs are your means of expression, it would be really telling if one could throw a bomb into pure mathematics. But that is impossible. I have been trying to educate you; I have expounded to you the higher philosophy of your usefulness, and suggested to you some serviceable arguments. The practical application of my teaching interests you mostly. But from the moment I have undertaken to interview you I have also given some attention to the practical aspect of the question. What do you think of having a go at astronomy?”

For sometime already Mr Verloc’s immobility by the side of the arm-chair resembled a state of collapsed coma — a sort of passive insensibility interrupted by slight convulsive starts, such as may be observed in the domestic dog having a nightmare on the hearthrug. And it was in an uneasy doglike growl that he repeated the word:

“Astronomy.”

He had not recovered thoroughly as yet from that state of bewilderment brought about by the effort to follow Mr Vladimir’s rapid incisive utterance. It had overcome his power of assimilation. It had made him angry. This anger was complicated by incredulity. And suddenly it dawned upon him that all this was an elaborate joke. Mr Vladimir exhibited his white teeth in a smile, with dimples on his round, full face posed with a complacent inclination above the bristling bow of his neck-tie. The favourite of intelligent society women had assumed his drawing-room attitude accompanying the delivery of delicate witticisms. Sitting well forward, his white hand upraised, he seemed to hold delicately between his thumb and forefinger the subtlety of his suggestion.

“There could be nothing better. Such an outrage combines the greatest possible regard for humanity with the most alarming display of ferocious imbecility. I defy the ingenuity of journalists to persuade their public that any given member of the proletariat can have a personal grievance against astronomy. Starvation itself could hardly be dragged in there — eh? And there are other advantages. The whole civilised world has heard of Greenwich. The very boot-blacks in the basement of Charing Cross Station know something of it. See?”

The features of Mr Vladimir, so well known in the best society by their humorous urbanity, beamed with cynical self-satisfaction, which would have astonished the intelligent women his wit entertained so exquisitely. “Yes,” he continued, with a con-

temptuous smile, "the blowing up of the first meridian is bound to raise a howl of execration."

"A difficult business," Mr Verloc mumbled, feeling that this was the only safe thing to say.

"What is the matter? Haven't you the whole gang under your hand? The very pick of the basket? That old terrorist Yundt is here. I see him walking about Piccadilly in his green havelock almost every day. And Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle — you don't mean to say you don't know where he is? Because if you don't, I can tell you," Mr Vladimir went on menacingly. "If you imagine that you are the only one on the secret fund list, you are mistaken."

This perfectly gratuitous suggestion caused Mr Verloc to shuffle his feet slightly.

"And the whole Lausanne lot — eh? Haven't they been flocking over here at the first hint of the Milan Conference? This is an absurd country."

"It will cost money," Mr Verloc said, by a sort of instinct.

"That cock won't fight," Mr Vladimir retorted, with an amazingly genuine English accent. "You'll get your screw every month, and no more till something happens. And if nothing happens very soon you won't get even that. What's your ostensible occupation? What are you supposed to live by?"

"I keep a shop," answered Mr Verloc.

"A shop! What sort of shop?"

"Stationery, newspapers. My wife — "

"Your what?" interrupted Mr Vladimir in his guttural Central Asian tones.

"My wife." Mr Verloc raised his husky voice slightly. "I am married."

"That be damned for a yarn," exclaimed the other in unfeigned astonishment. "Married! And you a professed anarchist, too! What is this confounded nonsense? But I suppose it's merely a manner of speaking. Anarchists don't marry. It's well known. They can't. It would be apostasy."

"My wife isn't one," Mr Verloc mumbled sulkily. "Moreover, it's no concern of yours."

"Oh yes, it is," snapped Mr Vladimir. "I am beginning to be convinced that you are not at all the man for the work you've been employed on. Why, you must have discredited yourself completely in your own world by your marriage. Couldn't you have managed without? This is your virtuous attachment — eh? What with one sort of attachment and another you are doing away with your usefulness."

Mr Verloc, puffing out his cheeks, let the air escape violently, and that was all. He had armed himself with patience. It was not to be tried much longer. The First Secretary became suddenly very curt, detached, final.

"You may go now," he said. "A dynamite outrage must be provoked. I give you a month. The sittings of the Conference are suspended. Before it reassembles again something must have happened here, or your connection with us ceases."

He changed the note once more with an unprincipled versatility.

"Think over my philosophy, Mr — Mr — Verloc," he said, with a sort of chaffing condescension, waving his hand towards the door. "Go for the first meridian. You don't

know the middle classes as well as I do. Their sensibilities are jaded. The first meridian. Nothing better, and nothing easier, I should think.”

He had got up, and with his thin sensitive lips twitching humorously, watched in the glass over the mantelpiece Mr Verloc backing out of the room heavily, hat and stick in hand. The door closed.

The footman in trousers, appearing suddenly in the corridor, let Mr Verloc another way out and through a small door in the corner of the courtyard. The porter standing at the gate ignored his exit completely; and Mr Verloc retraced the path of his morning's pilgrimage as if in a dream — an angry dream. This detachment from the material world was so complete that, though the mortal envelope of Mr Verloc had not hastened unduly along the streets, that part of him to which it would be unwarrantably rude to refuse immortality, found itself at the shop door all at once, as if borne from west to east on the wings of a great wind. He walked straight behind the counter, and sat down on a wooden chair that stood there. No one appeared to disturb his solitude. Stevie, put into a green baize apron, was now sweeping and dusting upstairs, intent and conscientious, as though he were playing at it; and Mrs Verloc, warned in the kitchen by the clatter of the cracked bell, had merely come to the glazed door of the parlour, and putting the curtain aside a little, had peered into the dim shop. Seeing her husband sitting there shadowy and bulky, with his hat tilted far back on his head, she had at once returned to her stove. An hour or more later she took the green baize apron off her brother Stevie, and instructed him to wash his hands and face in the peremptory tone she had used in that connection for fifteen years or so — ever since she had, in fact, ceased to attend to the boy's hands and face herself. She spared presently a glance away from her dishing-up for the inspection of that face and those hands which Stevie, approaching the kitchen table, offered for her approval with an air of self-assurance hiding a perpetual residue of anxiety. Formerly the anger of the father was the supremely effective sanction of these rites, but Mr Verloc's placidity in domestic life would have made all mention of anger incredible even to poor Stevie's nervousness. The theory was that Mr Verloc would have been inexpressibly pained and shocked by any deficiency of cleanliness at meal times. Winnie after the death of her father found considerable consolation in the feeling that she need no longer tremble for poor Stevie. She could not bear to see the boy hurt. It maddened her. As a little girl she had often faced with blazing eyes the irascible licensed victualler in defence of her brother. Nothing now in Mrs Verloc's appearance could lead one to suppose that she was capable of a passionate demonstration.

She finished her dishing-up. The table was laid in the parlour. Going to the foot of the stairs, she screamed out “Mother!” Then opening the glazed door leading to the shop, she said quietly “Adolf!” Mr Verloc had not changed his position; he had not apparently stirred a limb for an hour and a half. He got up heavily, and came to his dinner in his overcoat and with his hat on, without uttering a word. His silence in itself had nothing startlingly unusual in this household, hidden in the shades of the sordid street seldom touched by the sun, behind the dim shop with its wares of disreputable

rubbish. Only that day Mr Verloc's taciturnity was so obviously thoughtful that the two women were impressed by it. They sat silent themselves, keeping a watchful eye on poor Stevie, lest he should break out into one of his fits of loquacity. He faced Mr Verloc across the table, and remained very good and quiet, staring vacantly. The endeavour to keep him from making himself objectionable in any way to the master of the house put no inconsiderable anxiety into these two women's lives. "That boy," as they alluded to him softly between themselves, had been a source of that sort of anxiety almost from the very day of his birth. The late licensed victualler's humiliation at having such a very peculiar boy for a son manifested itself by a propensity to brutal treatment; for he was a person of fine sensibilities, and his sufferings as a man and a father were perfectly genuine. Afterwards Stevie had to be kept from making himself a nuisance to the single gentlemen lodgers, who are themselves a queer lot, and are easily aggrieved. And there was always the anxiety of his mere existence to face. Visions of a workhouse infirmary for her child had haunted the old woman in the basement breakfast-room of the decayed Belgravian house. "If you had not found such a good husband, my dear," she used to say to her daughter, "I don't know what would have become of that poor boy."

Mr Verloc extended as much recognition to Stevie as a man not particularly fond of animals may give to his wife's beloved cat; and this recognition, benevolent and perfunctory, was essentially of the same quality. Both women admitted to themselves that not much more could be reasonably expected. It was enough to earn for Mr Verloc the old woman's reverential gratitude. In the early days, made sceptical by the trials of friendless life, she used sometimes to ask anxiously: "You don't think, my dear, that Mr Verloc is getting tired of seeing Stevie about?" To this Winnie replied habitually by a slight toss of her head. Once, however, she retorted, with a rather grim pertness: "He'll have to get tired of me first." A long silence ensued. The mother, with her feet propped up on a stool, seemed to be trying to get to the bottom of that answer, whose feminine profundity had struck her all of a heap. She had never really understood why Winnie had married Mr Verloc. It was very sensible of her, and evidently had turned out for the best, but her girl might have naturally hoped to find somebody of a more suitable age. There had been a steady young fellow, only son of a butcher in the next street, helping his father in business, with whom Winnie had been walking out with obvious gusto. He was dependent on his father, it is true; but the business was good, and his prospects excellent. He took her girl to the theatre on several evenings. Then just as she began to dread to hear of their engagement (for what could she have done with that big house alone, with Stevie on her hands), that romance came to an abrupt end, and Winnie went about looking very dull. But Mr Verloc, turning up providentially to occupy the first-floor front bedroom, there had been no more question of the young butcher. It was clearly providential.

Chapter 3

“ . . . All idealisation makes life poorer. To beautify it is to take away its character of complexity — it is to destroy it. Leave that to the moralists, my boy. History is made by men, but they do not make it in their heads. The ideas that are born in their consciousness play an insignificant part in the march of events. History is dominated and determined by the tool and the production — by the force of economic conditions. Capitalism has made socialism, and the laws made by the capitalism for the protection of property are responsible for anarchism. No one can tell what form the social organisation may take in the future. Then why indulge in prophetic phantasies? At best they can only interpret the mind of the prophet, and can have no objective value. Leave that pastime to the moralists, my boy.”

Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle, was speaking in an even voice, a voice that wheezed as if deadened and oppressed by the layer of fat on his chest. He had come out of a highly hygienic prison round like a tub, with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks of a pale, semi-transparent complexion, as though for fifteen years the servants of an outraged society had made a point of stuffing him with fattening foods in a damp and lightless cellar. And ever since he had never managed to get his weight down as much as an ounce.

It was said that for three seasons running a very wealthy old lady had sent him for a cure to Marienbad — where he was about to share the public curiosity once with a crowned head — but the police on that occasion ordered him to leave within twelve hours. His martyrdom was continued by forbidding him all access to the healing waters. But he was resigned now.

With his elbow presenting no appearance of a joint, but more like a bend in a dummy's limb, thrown over the back of a chair, he leaned forward slightly over his short and enormous thighs to spit into the grate.

“Yes! I had the time to think things out a little,” he added without emphasis. “Society has given me plenty of time for meditation.”

On the other side of the fireplace, in the horse-hair arm-chair where Mrs Verloc's mother was generally privileged to sit, Karl Yundt giggled grimly, with a faint black grimace of a toothless mouth. The terrorist, as he called himself, was old and bald, with a narrow, snow-white wisp of a goatee hanging limply from his chin. An extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence survived in his extinguished eyes. When he rose painfully the thrusting forward of a skinny groping hand deformed by gouty swellings suggested the effort of a moribund murderer summoning all his remaining strength for a last stab. He leaned on a thick stick, which trembled under his other hand.

“I have always dreamed,” he mouthed fiercely, “of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity — that’s what I would have liked to see.”

His little bald head quivered, imparting a comical vibration to the wisp of white goatee. His enunciation would have been almost totally unintelligible to a stranger. His worn-out passion, resembling in its impotent fierceness the excitement of a senile sensualist, was badly served by a dried throat and toothless gums which seemed to catch the tip of his tongue. Mr Verloc, established in the corner of the sofa at the other end of the room, emitted two hearty grunts of assent.

The old terrorist turned slowly his head on his skinny neck from side to side.

“And I could never get as many as three such men together. So much for your rotten pessimism,” he snarled at Michaelis, who uncrossed his thick legs, similar to bolsters, and slid his feet abruptly under his chair in sign of exasperation.

He a pessimist! Preposterous! He cried out that the charge was outrageous. He was so far from pessimism that he saw already the end of all private property coming along logically, unavoidably, by the mere development of its inherent viciousness. The possessors of property had not only to face the awakened proletariat, but they had also to fight amongst themselves. Yes. Struggle, warfare, was the condition of private ownership. It was fatal. Ah! he did not depend upon emotional excitement to keep up his belief, no declamations, no anger, no visions of blood-red flags waving, or metaphorical lurid suns of vengeance rising above the horizon of a doomed society. Not he! Cold reason, he boasted, was the basis of his optimism. Yes, optimism —

His laborious wheezing stopped, then, after a gasp or two, he added:

“Don’t you think that, if I had not been the optimist I am, I could not have found in fifteen years some means to cut my throat? And, in the last instance, there were always the walls of my cell to dash my head against.”

The shortness of breath took all fire, all animation out of his voice; his great, pale cheeks hung like filled pouches, motionless, without a quiver; but in his blue eyes, narrowed as if peering, there was the same look of confident shrewdness, a little crazy in its fixity, they must have had while the indomitable optimist sat thinking at night in his cell. Before him, Karl Yundt remained standing, one wing of his faded greenish havelock thrown back cavalierly over his shoulder. Seated in front of the fireplace, Comrade Ossipon, ex-medical student, the principal writer of the F. P. leaflets, stretched out his robust legs, keeping the soles of his boots turned up to the glow in the grate. A bush of crinkly yellow hair topped his red, freckled face, with a flattened nose and prominent mouth cast in the rough mould of the negro type. His almond-shaped eyes leered languidly over the high cheek-bones. He wore a grey flannel shirt, the loose ends of a black silk tie hung down the buttoned breast of his serge coat; and his head resting

on the back of his chair, his throat largely exposed, he raised to his lips a cigarette in a long wooden tube, puffing jets of smoke straight up at the ceiling.

Michaelis pursued his idea — the idea of his solitary reclusion — the thought vouchsafed to his captivity and growing like a faith revealed in visions. He talked to himself, indifferent to the sympathy or hostility of his hearers, indifferent indeed to their presence, from the habit he had acquired of thinking aloud hopefully in the solitude of the four whitewashed walls of his cell, in the sepulchral silence of the great blind pile of bricks near a river, sinister and ugly like a colossal mortuary for the socially drowned.

He was no good in discussion, not because any amount of argument could shake his faith, but because the mere fact of hearing another voice disconcerted him painfully, confusing his thoughts at once — these thoughts that for so many years, in a mental solitude more barren than a waterless desert, no living voice had ever combatted, commented, or approved.

No one interrupted him now, and he made again the confession of his faith, mastering him irresistible and complete like an act of grace: the secret of fate discovered in the material side of life; the economic condition of the world responsible for the past and shaping the future; the source of all history, of all ideas, guiding the mental development of mankind and the very impulses of their passion —

A harsh laugh from Comrade Ossipon cut the tirade dead short in a sudden faltering of the tongue and a bewildered unsteadiness of the apostle's mildly exalted eyes. He closed them slowly for a moment, as if to collect his routed thoughts. A silence fell; but what with the two gas-jets over the table and the glowing grate the little parlour behind Mr Verloc's shop had become frightfully hot. Mr Verloc, getting off the sofa with ponderous reluctance, opened the door leading into the kitchen to get more air, and thus disclosed the innocent Stevie, seated very good and quiet at a deal table, drawing circles, circles, circles; innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos, the symbolism of a mad art attempting the inconceivable. The artist never turned his head; and in all his soul's application to the task his back quivered, his thin neck, sunk into a deep hollow at the base of the skull, seemed ready to snap.

Mr Verloc, after a grunt of disapproving surprise, returned to the sofa. Alexander Ossipon got up, tall in his threadbare blue serge suit under the low ceiling, shook off the stiffness of long immobility, and strolled away into the kitchen (down two steps) to look over Stevie's shoulder. He came back, pronouncing oracularly: "Very good. Very characteristic, perfectly typical."

"What's very good?" grunted inquiringly Mr Verloc, settled again in the corner of the sofa. The other explained his meaning negligently, with a shade of condescension and a toss of his head towards the kitchen:

"Typical of this form of degeneracy — these drawings, I mean."

"You would call that lad a degenerate, would you?" mumbled Mr Verloc.

Comrade Alexander Ossipon — nicknamed the Doctor, ex-medical student without a degree; afterwards wandering lecturer to working-men's associations upon the socialistic aspects of hygiene; author of a popular quasi-medical study (in the form of a cheap pamphlet seized promptly by the police) entitled "The Corroding Vices of the Middle Classes"; special delegate of the more or less mysterious Red Committee, together with Karl Yundt and Michaelis for the work of literary propaganda — turned upon the obscure familiar of at least two Embassies that glance of insufferable, hopelessly dense sufficiency which nothing but the frequentation of science can give to the dulness of common mortals.

"That's what he may be called scientifically. Very good type too, altogether, of that sort of degenerate. It's enough to glance at the lobes of his ears. If you read Lombroso — "

Mr Verloc, moody and spread largely on the sofa, continued to look down the row of his waistcoat buttons; but his cheeks became tinged by a faint blush. Of late even the merest derivative of the word science (a term in itself inoffensive and of indefinite meaning) had the curious power of evoking a definitely offensive mental vision of Mr Vladimir, in his body as he lived, with an almost supernatural clearness. And this phenomenon, deserving justly to be classed amongst the marvels of science, induced in Mr Verloc an emotional state of dread and exasperation tending to express itself in violent swearing. But he said nothing. It was Karl Yundt who was heard, implacable to his last breath.

"Lombroso is an ass."

Comrade Ossipon met the shock of this blasphemy by an awful, vacant stare. And the other, his extinguished eyes without gleams blackening the deep shadows under the great, bony forehead, mumbled, catching the tip of his tongue between his lips at every second word as though he were chewing it angrily:

"Did you ever see such an idiot? For him the criminal is the prisoner. Simple, is it not? What about those who shut him up there — forced him in there? Exactly. Forced him in there. And what is crime? Does he know that, this imbecile who has made his way in this world of gorged fools by looking at the ears and teeth of a lot of poor, luckless devils? Teeth and ears mark the criminal? Do they? And what about the law that marks him still better — the pretty branding instrument invented by the overfed to protect themselves against the hungry? Red-hot applications on their vile skins — hey? Can't you smell and hear from here the thick hide of the people burn and sizzle? That's how criminals are made for your Lombrosos to write their silly stuff about."

The knob of his stick and his legs shook together with passion, whilst the trunk, draped in the wings of the havelock, preserved his historic attitude of defiance. He seemed to sniff the tainted air of social cruelty, to strain his ear for its atrocious sounds. There was an extraordinary force of suggestion in this posturing. The all but moribund veteran of dynamite wars had been a great actor in his time — actor on platforms, in secret assemblies, in private interviews. The famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice. He

was no man of action; he was not even an orator of torrential eloquence, sweeping the masses along in the rushing noise and foam of a great enthusiasm. With a more subtle intention, he took the part of an insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses which lurk in the blind envy and exasperated vanity of ignorance, in the suffering and misery of poverty, in all the hopeful and noble illusions of righteous anger, pity, and revolt. The shadow of his evil gift clung to him yet like the smell of a deadly drug in an old vial of poison, emptied now, useless, ready to be thrown away upon the rubbish-heap of things that had served their time.

Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle, smiled vaguely with his glued lips; his pasty moon face drooped under the weight of melancholy assent. He had been a prisoner himself. His own skin had sizzled under the red-hot brand, he murmured softly. But Comrade Ossipon, nicknamed the Doctor, had got over the shock by that time.

“You don’t understand,” he began disdainfully, but stopped short, intimidated by the dead blackness of the cavernous eyes in the face turned slowly towards him with a blind stare, as if guided only by the sound. He gave the discussion up, with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

Stevie, accustomed to move about disregarded, had got up from the kitchen table, carrying off his drawing to bed with him. He had reached the parlour door in time to receive in full the shock of Karl Yundt’s eloquent imagery. The sheet of paper covered with circles dropped out of his fingers, and he remained staring at the old terrorist, as if rooted suddenly to the spot by his morbid horror and dread of physical pain. Stevie knew very well that hot iron applied to one’s skin hurt very much. His scared eyes blazed with indignation: it would hurt terribly. His mouth dropped open.

Michaelis by staring unwinkingly at the fire had regained that sentiment of isolation necessary for the continuity of his thought. His optimism had begun to flow from his lips. He saw Capitalism doomed in its cradle, born with the poison of the principle of competition in its system. The great capitalists devouring the little capitalists, concentrating the power and the tools of production in great masses, perfecting industrial processes, and in the madness of self-aggrandisement only preparing, organising, enriching, making ready the lawful inheritance of the suffering proletariat. Michaelis pronounced the great word “Patience” — and his clear blue glance, raised to the low ceiling of Mr Verloc’s parlour, had a character of seraphic trustfulness. In the doorway Stevie, calmed, seemed sunk in hebetude.

Comrade Ossipon’s face twitched with exasperation.

“Then it’s no use doing anything — no use whatever.”

“I don’t say that,” protested Michaelis gently. His vision of truth had grown so intense that the sound of a strange voice failed to rout it this time. He continued to look down at the red coals. Preparation for the future was necessary, and he was willing to admit that the great change would perhaps come in the upheaval of a revolution. But he argued that revolutionary propaganda was a delicate work of high conscience. It was the education of the masters of the world. It should be as careful as the education given to kings. He would have it advance its tenets cautiously, even timidly, in our

ignorance of the effect that may be produced by any given economic change upon the happiness, the morals, the intellect, the history of mankind. For history is made with tools, not with ideas; and everything is changed by economic conditions — art, philosophy, love, virtue — truth itself!

The coals in the grate settled down with a slight crash; and Michaelis, the hermit of visions in the desert of a penitentiary, got up impetuously. Round like a distended balloon, he opened his short, thick arms, as if in a pathetically hopeless attempt to embrace and hug to his breast a self-regenerated universe. He gasped with ardour.

“The future is as certain as the past — slavery, feudalism, individualism, collectivism. This is the statement of a law, not an empty prophecy.”

The disdainful pout of Comrade Ossipon’s thick lips accentuated the negro type of his face.

“Nonsense,” he said calmly enough. “There is no law and no certainty. The teaching propaganda be hanged. What the people knows does not matter, were its knowledge ever so accurate. The only thing that matters to us is the emotional state of the masses. Without emotion there is no action.”

He paused, then added with modest firmness:

“I am speaking now to you scientifically — scientifically — Eh? What did you say, Verloc?”

“Nothing,” growled from the sofa Mr Verloc, who, provoked by the abhorrent sound, had merely muttered a “Damn.”

The venomous spluttering of the old terrorist without teeth was heard.

“Do you know how I would call the nature of the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic. That’s what it is! They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people — nothing else.”

Stevie swallowed the terrifying statement with an audible gulp, and at once, as though it had been swift poison, sank limply in a sitting posture on the steps of the kitchen door.

Michaelis gave no sign of having heard anything. His lips seemed glued together for good; not a quiver passed over his heavy cheeks. With troubled eyes he looked for his round, hard hat, and put it on his round head. His round and obese body seemed to float low between the chairs under the sharp elbow of Karl Yundt. The old terrorist, raising an uncertain and clawlike hand, gave a swaggering tilt to a black felt sombrero shading the hollows and ridges of his wasted face. He got in motion slowly, striking the floor with his stick at every step. It was rather an affair to get him out of the house because, now and then, he would stop, as if to think, and did not offer to move again till impelled forward by Michaelis. The gentle apostle grasped his arm with brotherly care; and behind them, his hands in his pockets, the robust Ossipon yawned vaguely. A blue cap with a patent leather peak set well at the back of his yellow bush of hair gave him the aspect of a Norwegian sailor bored with the world after a thundering spree. Mr Verloc saw his guests off the premises, attending them bareheaded, his heavy overcoat hanging open, his eyes on the ground.

He closed the door behind their backs with restrained violence, turned the key, shot the bolt. He was not satisfied with his friends. In the light of Mr Vladimir's philosophy of bomb throwing they appeared hopelessly futile. The part of Mr Verloc in revolutionary politics having been to observe, he could not all at once, either in his own home or in larger assemblies, take the initiative of action. He had to be cautious. Moved by the just indignation of a man well over forty, menaced in what is dearest to him — his repose and his security — he asked himself scornfully what else could have been expected from such a lot, this Karl Yundt, this Michaelis — this Ossipon.

Pausing in his intention to turn off the gas burning in the middle of the shop, Mr Verloc descended into the abyss of moral reflections. With the insight of a kindred temperament he pronounced his verdict. A lazy lot — this Karl Yundt, nursed by a bleary-eyed old woman, a woman he had years ago enticed away from a friend, and afterwards had tried more than once to shake off into the gutter. Jolly lucky for Yundt that she had persisted in coming up time after time, or else there would have been no one now to help him out of the 'bus by the Green Park railings, where that spectre took its constitutional crawl every fine morning. When that indomitable snarling old witch died the swaggering spectre would have to vanish too — there would be an end to fiery Karl Yundt. And Mr Verloc's morality was offended also by the optimism of Michaelis, annexed by his wealthy old lady, who had taken lately to sending him to a cottage she had in the country. The ex-prisoner could moon about the shady lanes for days together in a delicious and humanitarian idleness. As to Ossipon, that beggar was sure to want for nothing as long as there were silly girls with savings-bank books in the world. And Mr Verloc, temperamentally identical with his associates, drew fine distinctions in his mind on the strength of insignificant differences. He drew them with a certain complacency, because the instinct of conventional respectability was strong within him, being only overcome by his dislike of all kinds of recognised labour — a temperamental defect which he shared with a large proportion of revolutionary reformers of a given social state. For obviously one does not revolt against the advantages and opportunities of that state, but against the price which must be paid for the same in the coin of accepted morality, self-restraint, and toil. The majority of revolutionists are the enemies of discipline and fatigue mostly. There are natures too, to whose sense of justice the price exacted looms up monstrously enormous, odious, oppressive, worrying, humiliating, extortionate, intolerable. Those are the fanatics. The remaining portion of social rebels is accounted for by vanity, the mother of all noble and vile illusions, the companion of poets, reformers, charlatans, prophets, and incendiaries.

Lost for a whole minute in the abyss of meditation, Mr Verloc did not reach the depth of these abstract considerations. Perhaps he was not able. In any case he had not the time. He was pulled up painfully by the sudden recollection of Mr Vladimir, another of his associates, whom in virtue of subtle moral affinities he was capable of judging correctly. He considered him as dangerous. A shade of envy crept into his thoughts. Loafing was all very well for these fellows, who knew not Mr Vladimir, and had women to fall back upon; whereas he had a woman to provide for —

At this point, by a simple association of ideas, Mr Verloc was brought face to face with the necessity of going to bed some time or other that evening. Then why not go now — at once? He sighed. The necessity was not so normally pleasurable as it ought to have been for a man of his age and temperament. He dreaded the demon of sleeplessness, which he felt had marked him for its own. He raised his arm, and turned off the flaring gas-jet above his head.

A bright band of light fell through the parlour door into the part of the shop behind the counter. It enabled Mr Verloc to ascertain at a glance the number of silver coins in the till. These were but few; and for the first time since he opened his shop he took a commercial survey of its value. This survey was unfavourable. He had gone into trade for no commercial reasons. He had been guided in the selection of this peculiar line of business by an instinctive leaning towards shady transactions, where money is picked up easily. Moreover, it did not take him out of his own sphere — the sphere which is watched by the police. On the contrary, it gave him a publicly confessed standing in that sphere, and as Mr Verloc had unconfessed relations which made him familiar with yet careless of the police, there was a distinct advantage in such a situation. But as a means of livelihood it was by itself insufficient.

He took the cash-box out of the drawer, and turning to leave the shop, became aware that Stevie was still downstairs.

What on earth is he doing there? Mr Verloc asked himself. What's the meaning of these antics? He looked dubiously at his brother-in-law, but he did not ask him for information. Mr Verloc's intercourse with Stevie was limited to the casual mutter of a morning, after breakfast, "My boots," and even that was more a communication at large of a need than a direct order or request. Mr Verloc perceived with some surprise that he did not know really what to say to Stevie. He stood still in the middle of the parlour, and looked into the kitchen in silence. Nor yet did he know what would happen if he did say anything. And this appeared very queer to Mr Verloc in view of the fact, borne upon him suddenly, that he had to provide for this fellow too. He had never given a moment's thought till then to that aspect of Stevie's existence.

Positively he did not know how to speak to the lad. He watched him gesticulating and murmuring in the kitchen. Stevie prowled round the table like an excited animal in a cage. A tentative "Hadn't you better go to bed now?" produced no effect whatever; and Mr Verloc, abandoning the stony contemplation of his brother-in-law's behaviour, crossed the parlour wearily, cash-box in hand. The cause of the general lassitude he felt while climbing the stairs being purely mental, he became alarmed by its inexplicable character. He hoped he was not sickening for anything. He stopped on the dark landing to examine his sensations. But a slight and continuous sound of snoring pervading the obscurity interfered with their clearness. The sound came from his mother-in-law's room. Another one to provide for, he thought — and on this thought walked into the bedroom.

Mrs Verloc had fallen asleep with the lamp (no gas was laid upstairs) turned up full on the table by the side of the bed. The light thrown down by the shade fell dazzlingly

on the white pillow sunk by the weight of her head reposing with closed eyes and dark hair done up in several plaits for the night. She woke up with the sound of her name in her ears, and saw her husband standing over her.

“Winnie! Winnie!”

At first she did not stir, lying very quiet and looking at the cash-box in Mr Verloc’s hand. But when she understood that her brother was “capering all over the place downstairs” she swung out in one sudden movement on to the edge of the bed. Her bare feet, as if poked through the bottom of an unadorned, sleeved calico sack buttoned tightly at neck and wrists, felt over the rug for the slippers while she looked upward into her husband’s face.

“I don’t know how to manage him,” Mr Verloc explained peevishly. “Won’t do to leave him downstairs alone with the lights.”

She said nothing, glided across the room swiftly, and the door closed upon her white form.

Mr Verloc deposited the cash-box on the night table, and began the operation of undressing by flinging his overcoat on to a distant chair. His coat and waistcoat followed. He walked about the room in his stockinged feet, and his burly figure, with the hands worrying nervously at his throat, passed and repassed across the long strip of looking-glass in the door of his wife’s wardrobe. Then after slipping his braces off his shoulders he pulled up violently the venetian blind, and leaned his forehead against the cold window-pane — a fragile film of glass stretched between him and the enormity of cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man.

Mr Verloc felt the latent unfriendliness of all out of doors with a force approaching to positive bodily anguish. There is no occupation that fails a man more completely than that of a secret agent of police. It’s like your horse suddenly falling dead under you in the midst of an uninhabited and thirsty plain. The comparison occurred to Mr Verloc because he had sat astride various army horses in his time, and had now the sensation of an incipient fall. The prospect was as black as the window-pane against which he was leaning his forehead. And suddenly the face of Mr Vladimir, clean-shaved and witty, appeared enhaloed in the glow of its rosy complexion like a sort of pink seal, impressed on the fatal darkness.

This luminous and mutilated vision was so ghastly physically that Mr Verloc started away from the window, letting down the venetian blind with a great rattle. Discomposed and speechless with the apprehension of more such visions, he beheld his wife re-enter the room and get into bed in a calm business-like manner which made him feel hopelessly lonely in the world. Mrs Verloc expressed her surprise at seeing him up yet.

“I don’t feel very well,” he muttered, passing his hands over his moist brow.

“Giddiness?”

“Yes. Not at all well.”

Mrs Verloc, with all the placidity of an experienced wife, expressed a confident opinion as to the cause, and suggested the usual remedies; but her husband, rooted in the middle of the room, shook his lowered head sadly.

"You'll catch cold standing there," she observed.

Mr Verloc made an effort, finished undressing, and got into bed. Down below in the quiet, narrow street measured footsteps approached the house, then died away unhurried and firm, as if the passer-by had started to pace out all eternity, from gas-lamp to gas-lamp in a night without end; and the drowsy ticking of the old clock on the landing became distinctly audible in the bedroom.

Mrs Verloc, on her back, and staring at the ceiling, made a remark.

"Takings very small to-day."

Mr Verloc, in the same position, cleared his throat as if for an important statement, but merely inquired:

"Did you turn off the gas downstairs?"

"Yes; I did," answered Mrs Verloc conscientiously. "That poor boy is in a very excited state to-night," she murmured, after a pause which lasted for three ticks of the clock.

Mr Verloc cared nothing for Stevie's excitement, but he felt horribly wakeful, and dreaded facing the darkness and silence that would follow the extinguishing of the lamp. This dread led him to make the remark that Stevie had disregarded his suggestion to go to bed. Mrs Verloc, falling into the trap, started to demonstrate at length to her husband that this was not "impudence" of any sort, but simply "excitement." There was no young man of his age in London more willing and docile than Stephen, she affirmed; none more affectionate and ready to please, and even useful, as long as people did not upset his poor head. Mrs Verloc, turning towards her recumbent husband, raised herself on her elbow, and hung over him in her anxiety that he should believe Stevie to be a useful member of the family. That ardour of protecting compassion exalted morbidly in her childhood by the misery of another child tinged her sallow cheeks with a faint dusky blush, made her big eyes gleam under the dark lids. Mrs Verloc then looked younger; she looked as young as Winnie used to look, and much more animated than the Winnie of the Belgravian mansion days had ever allowed herself to appear to gentlemen lodgers. Mr Verloc's anxieties had prevented him from attaching any sense to what his wife was saying. It was as if her voice were talking on the other side of a very thick wall. It was her aspect that recalled him to himself.

He appreciated this woman, and the sentiment of this appreciation, stirred by a display of something resembling emotion, only added another pang to his mental anguish. When her voice ceased he moved uneasily, and said:

"I haven't been feeling well for the last few days."

He might have meant this as an opening to a complete confidence; but Mrs Verloc laid her head on the pillow again, and staring upward, went on:

"That boy hears too much of what is talked about here. If I had known they were coming to-night I would have seen to it that he went to bed at the same time I did."

He was out of his mind with something he overheard about eating people's flesh and drinking blood. What's the good of talking like that?"

There was a note of indignant scorn in her voice. Mr Verloc was fully responsive now.

"Ask Karl Yundt," he growled savagely.

Mrs Verloc, with great decision, pronounced Karl Yundt "a disgusting old man." She declared openly her affection for Michaelis. Of the robust Ossipon, in whose presence she always felt uneasy behind an attitude of stony reserve, she said nothing whatever. And continuing to talk of that brother, who had been for so many years an object of care and fears:

"He isn't fit to hear what's said here. He believes it's all true. He knows no better. He gets into his passions over it."

Mr Verloc made no comment.

"He glared at me, as if he didn't know who I was, when I went downstairs. His heart was going like a hammer. He can't help being excitable. I woke mother up, and asked her to sit with him till he went to sleep. It isn't his fault. He's no trouble when he's left alone."

Mr Verloc made no comment.

"I wish he had never been to school," Mrs Verloc began again brusquely. "He's always taking away those newspapers from the window to read. He gets a red face poring over them. We don't get rid of a dozen numbers in a month. They only take up room in the front window. And Mr Ossipon brings every week a pile of these F. P. tracts to sell at a halfpenny each. I wouldn't give a halfpenny for the whole lot. It's silly reading — that's what it is. There's no sale for it. The other day Stevie got hold of one, and there was a story in it of a German soldier officer tearing half-off the ear of a recruit, and nothing was done to him for it. The brute! I couldn't do anything with Stevie that afternoon. The story was enough, too, to make one's blood boil. But what's the use of printing things like that? We aren't German slaves here, thank God. It's not our business — is it?"

Mr Verloc made no reply.

"I had to take the carving knife from the boy," Mrs Verloc continued, a little sleepily now. "He was shouting and stamping and sobbing. He can't stand the notion of any cruelty. He would have stuck that officer like a pig if he had seen him then. It's true, too! Some people don't deserve much mercy." Mrs Verloc's voice ceased, and the expression of her motionless eyes became more and more contemplative and veiled during the long pause. "Comfortable, dear?" she asked in a faint, far-away voice. "Shall I put out the light now?"

The dreary conviction that there was no sleep for him held Mr Verloc mute and hopelessly inert in his fear of darkness. He made a great effort.

"Yes. Put it out," he said at last in a hollow tone.

Chapter 4

Most of the thirty or so little tables covered by red cloths with a white design stood ranged at right angles to the deep brown wainscoting of the underground hall. Bronze chandeliers with many globes depended from the low, slightly vaulted ceiling, and the fresco paintings ran flat and dull all round the walls without windows, representing scenes of the chase and of outdoor revelry in mediæval costumes. Varlets in green jerkins brandished hunting knives and raised on high tankards of foaming beer.

“Unless I am very much mistaken, you are the man who would know the inside of this confounded affair,” said the robust Ossipon, leaning over, his elbows far out on the table and his feet tucked back completely under his chair. His eyes stared with wild eagerness.

An upright semi-grand piano near the door, flanked by two palms in pots, executed suddenly all by itself a valse tune with aggressive virtuosity. The din it raised was deafening. When it ceased, as abruptly as it had started, the be-spectacled, dingy little man who faced Ossipon behind a heavy glass mug full of beer emitted calmly what had the sound of a general proposition.

“In principle what one of us may or may not know as to any given fact can’t be a matter for inquiry to the others.”

“Certainly not,” Comrade Ossipon agreed in a quiet undertone. “In principle.”

With his big florid face held between his hands he continued to stare hard, while the dingy little man in spectacles coolly took a drink of beer and stood the glass mug back on the table. His flat, large ears departed widely from the sides of his skull, which looked frail enough for Ossipon to crush between thumb and forefinger; the dome of the forehead seemed to rest on the rim of the spectacles; the flat cheeks, of a greasy, unhealthy complexion, were merely smudged by the miserable poverty of a thin dark whisker. The lamentable inferiority of the whole physique was made ludicrous by the supremely self-confident bearing of the individual. His speech was curt, and he had a particularly impressive manner of keeping silent.

Ossipon spoke again from between his hands in a mutter.

“Have you been out much to-day?”

“No. I stayed in bed all the morning,” answered the other. “Why?”

“Oh! Nothing,” said Ossipon, gazing earnestly and quivering inwardly with the desire to find out something, but obviously intimidated by the little man’s overwhelming air of unconcern. When talking with this comrade — which happened but rarely — the big Ossipon suffered from a sense of moral and even physical insignificance. However, he ventured another question. “Did you walk down here?”

“No; omnibus,” the little man answered readily enough. He lived far away in Islington, in a small house down a shabby street, littered with straw and dirty paper, where out of school hours a troop of assorted children ran and squabbled with a shrill, joyless, rowdy clamour. His single back room, remarkable for having an extremely large cupboard, he rented furnished from two elderly spinsters, dressmakers in a humble way with a clientele of servant girls mostly. He had a heavy padlock put on the cupboard, but otherwise he was a model lodger, giving no trouble, and requiring practically no attendance. His oddities were that he insisted on being present when his room was being swept, and that when he went out he locked his door, and took the key away with him.

Ossipon had a vision of these round black-rimmed spectacles progressing along the streets on the top of an omnibus, their self-confident glitter falling here and there on the walls of houses or lowered upon the heads of the unconscious stream of people on the pavements. The ghost of a sickly smile altered the set of Ossipon’s thick lips at the thought of the walls nodding, of people running for life at the sight of those spectacles. If they had only known! What a panic! He murmured interrogatively: “Been sitting long here?”

“An hour or more,” answered the other negligently, and took a pull at the dark beer. All his movements — the way he grasped the mug, the act of drinking, the way he set the heavy glass down and folded his arms — had a firmness, an assured precision which made the big and muscular Ossipon, leaning forward with staring eyes and protruding lips, look the picture of eager indecision.

“An hour,” he said. “Then it may be you haven’t heard yet the news I’ve heard just now — in the street. Have you?”

The little man shook his head negatively the least bit. But as he gave no indication of curiosity Ossipon ventured to add that he had heard it just outside the place. A newspaper boy had yelled the thing under his very nose, and not being prepared for anything of that sort, he was very much startled and upset. He had to come in there with a dry mouth. “I never thought of finding you here,” he added, murmuring steadily, with his elbows planted on the table.

“I come here sometimes,” said the other, preserving his provoking coolness of demeanour.

“It’s wonderful that you of all people should have heard nothing of it,” the big Ossipon continued. His eyelids snapped nervously upon the shining eyes. “You of all people,” he repeated tentatively. This obvious restraint argued an incredible and inexplicable timidity of the big fellow before the calm little man, who again lifted the glass mug, drank, and put it down with brusque and assured movements. And that was all.

Ossipon after waiting for something, word or sign, that did not come, made an effort to assume a sort of indifference.

“Do you,” he said, deadening his voice still more, “give your stuff to anybody who’s up to asking you for it?”

“My absolute rule is never to refuse anybody — as long as I have a pinch by me,” answered the little man with decision.

“That’s a principle?” commented Ossipon.

“It’s a principle.”

“And you think it’s sound?”

The large round spectacles, which gave a look of staring self-confidence to the sallow face, confronted Ossipon like sleepless, unwinking orbs flashing a cold fire.

“Perfectly. Always. Under every circumstance. What could stop me? Why should I not? Why should I think twice about it?”

Ossipon gasped, as it were, discreetly.

“Do you mean to say you would hand it over to a ‘teck’ if one came to ask you for your wares?”

The other smiled faintly.

“Let them come and try it on, and you will see,” he said. “They know me, but I know also every one of them. They won’t come near me — not they.”

His thin livid lips snapped together firmly. Ossipon began to argue.

“But they could send someone — rig a plant on you. Don’t you see? Get the stuff from you in that way, and then arrest you with the proof in their hands.”

“Proof of what? Dealing in explosives without a licence perhaps.” This was meant for a contemptuous jeer, though the expression of the thin, sickly face remained unchanged, and the utterance was negligent. “I don’t think there’s one of them anxious to make that arrest. I don’t think they could get one of them to apply for a warrant. I mean one of the best. Not one.”

“Why?” Ossipon asked.

“Because they know very well I take care never to part with the last handful of my wares. I’ve it always by me.” He touched the breast of his coat lightly. “In a thick glass flask,” he added.

“So I have been told,” said Ossipon, with a shade of wonder in his voice. “But I didn’t know if — ”

“They know,” interrupted the little man crisply, leaning against the straight chair back, which rose higher than his fragile head. “I shall never be arrested. The game isn’t good enough for any policeman of them all. To deal with a man like me you require sheer, naked, inglorious heroism.” Again his lips closed with a self-confident snap. Ossipon repressed a movement of impatience.

“Or recklessness — or simply ignorance,” he retorted. “They’ve only to get somebody for the job who does not know you carry enough stuff in your pocket to blow yourself and everything within sixty yards of you to pieces.”

“I never affirmed I could not be eliminated,” rejoined the other. “But that wouldn’t be an arrest. Moreover, it’s not so easy as it looks.”

“Bah!” Ossipon contradicted. “Don’t be too sure of that. What’s to prevent half-a-dozen of them jumping upon you from behind in the street? With your arms pinned to your sides you could do nothing — could you?”

“Yes; I could. I am seldom out in the streets after dark,” said the little man impassively, “and never very late. I walk always with my right hand closed round the india-rubber ball which I have in my trouser pocket. The pressing of this ball actuates a detonator inside the flask I carry in my pocket. It’s the principle of the pneumatic instantaneous shutter for a camera lens. The tube leads up — ”

With a swift disclosing gesture he gave Ossipon a glimpse of an india-rubber tube, resembling a slender brown worm, issuing from the armhole of his waistcoat and plunging into the inner breast pocket of his jacket. His clothes, of a nondescript brown mixture, were threadbare and marked with stains, dusty in the folds, with ragged button-holes. “The detonator is partly mechanical, partly chemical,” he explained, with casual condescension.

“It is instantaneous, of course?” murmured Ossipon, with a slight shudder.

“Far from it,” confessed the other, with a reluctance which seemed to twist his mouth dolorously. “A full twenty seconds must elapse from the moment I press the ball till the explosion takes place.”

“Phew!” whistled Ossipon, completely appalled. “Twenty seconds! Horrors! You mean to say that you could face that? I should go crazy — ”

“Wouldn’t matter if you did. Of course, it’s the weak point of this special system, which is only for my own use. The worst is that the manner of exploding is always the weak point with us. I am trying to invent a detonator that would adjust itself to all conditions of action, and even to unexpected changes of conditions. A variable and yet perfectly precise mechanism. A really intelligent detonator.”

“Twenty seconds,” muttered Ossipon again. “Ough! And then — ”

With a slight turn of the head the glitter of the spectacles seemed to gauge the size of the beer saloon in the basement of the renowned Silenus Restaurant.

“Nobody in this room could hope to escape,” was the verdict of that survey. “Nor yet this couple going up the stairs now.”

The piano at the foot of the staircase clanged through a mazurka with brazen impetuosity, as though a vulgar and impudent ghost were showing off. The keys sank and rose mysteriously. Then all became still. For a moment Ossipon imagined the overlighted place changed into a dreadful black hole belching horrible fumes choked with ghastly rubbish of smashed brickwork and mutilated corpses. He had such a distinct perception of ruin and death that he shuddered again. The other observed, with an air of calm sufficiency:

“In the last instance it is character alone that makes for one’s safety. There are very few people in the world whose character is as well established as mine.”

“I wonder how you managed it,” growled Ossipon.

“Force of personality,” said the other, without raising his voice; and coming from the mouth of that obviously miserable organism the assertion caused the robust Ossipon to bite his lower lip. “Force of personality,” he repeated, with ostentatious calm. “I have the means to make myself deadly, but that by itself, you understand, is absolutely nothing in the way of protection. What is effective is the belief those people have

in my will to use the means. That's their impression. It is absolute. Therefore I am deadly."

"There are individuals of character amongst that lot too," muttered Ossipon ominously.

"Possibly. But it is a matter of degree obviously, since, for instance, I am not impressed by them. Therefore they are inferior. They cannot be otherwise. Their character is built upon conventional morality. It leans on the social order. Mine stands free from everything artificial. They are bound in all sorts of conventions. They depend on life, which, in this connection, is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex organised fact open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident."

"This is a transcendental way of putting it," said Ossipon, watching the cold glitter of the round spectacles. "I've heard Karl Yundt say much the same thing not very long ago."

"Karl Yundt," mumbled the other contemptuously, "the delegate of the International Red Committee, has been a posturing shadow all his life. There are three of you delegates, aren't there? I won't define the other two, as you are one of them. But what you say means nothing. You are the worthy delegates for revolutionary propaganda, but the trouble is not only that you are as unable to think independently as any respectable grocer or journalist of them all, but that you have no character whatever."

Ossipon could not restrain a start of indignation.

"But what do you want from us?" he exclaimed in a deadened voice. "What is it you are after yourself?"

"A perfect detonator," was the peremptory answer. "What are you making that face for? You see, you can't even bear the mention of something conclusive."

"I am not making a face," growled the annoyed Ossipon bearishly.

"You revolutionists," the other continued, with leisurely self-confidence, "are the slaves of the social convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police that stands up in the defence of that convention. Clearly you are, since you want to revolutionise it. It governs your thought, of course, and your action too, and thus neither your thought nor your action can ever be conclusive." He paused, tranquil, with that air of close, endless silence, then almost immediately went on. "You are not a bit better than the forces arrayed against you — than the police, for instance. The other day I came suddenly upon Chief Inspector Heat at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. He looked at me very steadily. But I did not look at him. Why should I give him more than a glance? He was thinking of many things — of his superiors, of his reputation, of the law courts, of his salary, of newspapers — of a hundred things. But I was thinking of my perfect detonator only. He meant nothing to me. He was as insignificant as — I can't call to mind anything insignificant enough to compare him with — except Karl Yundt perhaps. Like to like. The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality — counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at

bottom identical. He plays his little game — so do you propagandists. But I don't play; I work fourteen hours a day, and go hungry sometimes. My experiments cost money now and again, and then I must do without food for a day or two. You're looking at my beer. Yes. I have had two glasses already, and shall have another presently. This is a little holiday, and I celebrate it alone. Why not? I've the grit to work alone, quite alone, absolutely alone. I've worked alone for years."

Ossipon's face had turned dusky red.

"At the perfect detonator — eh?" he sneered, very low.

"Yes," retorted the other. "It is a good definition. You couldn't find anything half so precise to define the nature of your activity with all your committees and delegations. It is I who am the true propagandist."

"We won't discuss that point," said Ossipon, with an air of rising above personal considerations. "I am afraid I'll have to spoil your holiday for you, though. There's a man blown up in Greenwich Park this morning."

"How do you know?"

"They have been yelling the news in the streets since two o'clock. I bought the paper, and just ran in here. Then I saw you sitting at this table. I've got it in my pocket now."

He pulled the newspaper out. It was a good-sized rosy sheet, as if flushed by the warmth of its own convictions, which were optimistic. He scanned the pages rapidly.

"Ah! Here it is. Bomb in Greenwich Park. There isn't much so far. Half-past eleven. Foggy morning. Effects of explosion felt as far as Romney Road and Park Place. Enormous hole in the ground under a tree filled with smashed roots and broken branches. All round fragments of a man's body blown to pieces. That's all. The rest's mere newspaper gup. No doubt a wicked attempt to blow up the Observatory, they say. H'm. That's hardly credible."

He looked at the paper for a while longer in silence, then passed it to the other, who after gazing abstractedly at the print laid it down without comment.

It was Ossipon who spoke first — still resentful.

"The fragments of only one man, you note. Ergo: blew himself up. That spoils your day off for you — don't it? Were you expecting that sort of move? I hadn't the slightest idea — not the ghost of a notion of anything of the sort being planned to come off here — in this country. Under the present circumstances it's nothing short of criminal."

The little man lifted his thin black eyebrows with dispassionate scorn.

"Criminal! What is that? What is crime? What can be the meaning of such an assertion?"

"How am I to express myself? One must use the current words," said Ossipon impatiently. "The meaning of this assertion is that this business may affect our position very adversely in this country. Isn't that crime enough for you? I am convinced you have been giving away some of your stuff lately."

Ossipon stared hard. The other, without flinching, lowered and raised his head slowly.

"You have!" burst out the editor of the F. P. leaflets in an intense whisper. "No! And are you really handing it over at large like this, for the asking, to the first fool that comes along?"

"Just so! The condemned social order has not been built up on paper and ink, and I don't fancy that a combination of paper and ink will ever put an end to it, whatever you may think. Yes, I would give the stuff with both hands to every man, woman, or fool that likes to come along. I know what you are thinking about. But I am not taking my cue from the Red Committee. I would see you all hounded out of here, or arrested — or beheaded for that matter — without turning a hair. What happens to us as individuals is not of the least consequence."

He spoke carelessly, without heat, almost without feeling, and Ossipon, secretly much affected, tried to copy this detachment.

"If the police here knew their business they would shoot you full of holes with revolvers, or else try to sand-bag you from behind in broad daylight."

The little man seemed already to have considered that point of view in his dispassionate self-confident manner.

"Yes," he assented with the utmost readiness. "But for that they would have to face their own institutions. Do you see? That requires uncommon grit. Grit of a special kind."

Ossipon blinked.

"I fancy that's exactly what would happen to you if you were to set up your laboratory in the States. They don't stand on ceremony with their institutions there."

"I am not likely to go and see. Otherwise your remark is just," admitted the other. "They have more character over there, and their character is essentially anarchistic. Fertile ground for us, the States — very good ground. The great Republic has the root of the destructive matter in her. The collective temperament is lawless. Excellent. They may shoot us down, but — "

"You are too transcendental for me," growled Ossipon, with moody concern.

"Logical," protested the other. "There are several kinds of logic. This is the enlightened kind. America is all right. It is this country that is dangerous, with her idealistic conception of legality. The social spirit of this people is wrapped up in scrupulous prejudices, and that is fatal to our work. You talk of England being our only refuge! So much the worse. Capua! What do we want with refuges? Here you talk, print, plot, and do nothing. I daresay it's very convenient for such Karl Yundts."

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, then added with the same leisurely assurance: "To break up the superstition and worship of legality should be our aim. Nothing would please me more than to see Inspector Heat and his likes take to shooting us down in broad daylight with the approval of the public. Half our battle would be won then; the disintegration of the old morality would have set in in its very temple. That is what you ought to aim at. But you revolutionists will never understand that. You plan the future, you lose yourselves in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas what's wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life.

That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it. Therefore I would shovel my stuff in heaps at the corners of the streets if I had enough for that; and as I haven't, I do my best by perfecting a really dependable detonator."

Ossipon, who had been mentally swimming in deep waters, seized upon the last word as if it were a saving plank.

"Yes. Your detonators. I shouldn't wonder if it weren't one of your detonators that made a clean sweep of the man in the park."

A shade of vexation darkened the determined sallow face confronting Ossipon.

"My difficulty consists precisely in experimenting practically with the various kinds. They must be tried after all. Besides — "

Ossipon interrupted.

"Who could that fellow be? I assure you that we in London had no knowledge — Couldn't you describe the person you gave the stuff to?"

The other turned his spectacles upon Ossipon like a pair of searchlights.

"Describe him," he repeated slowly. "I don't think there can be the slightest objection now. I will describe him to you in one word — Verloc."

Ossipon, whom curiosity had lifted a few inches off his seat, dropped back, as if hit in the face.

"Verloc! Impossible."

The self-possessed little man nodded slightly once.

"Yes. He's the person. You can't say that in this case I was giving my stuff to the first fool that came along. He was a prominent member of the group as far as I understand."

"Yes," said Ossipon. "Prominent. No, not exactly. He was the centre for general intelligence, and usually received comrades coming over here. More useful than important. Man of no ideas. Years ago he used to speak at meetings — in France, I believe. Not very well, though. He was trusted by such men as Latorre, Moser and all that old lot. The only talent he showed really was his ability to elude the attentions of the police somehow. Here, for instance, he did not seem to be looked after very closely. He was regularly married, you know. I suppose it's with her money that he started that shop. Seemed to make it pay, too."

Ossipon paused abruptly, muttered to himself "I wonder what that woman will do now?" and fell into thought.

The other waited with ostentatious indifference. His parentage was obscure, and he was generally known only by his nickname of Professor. His title to that designation consisted in his having been once assistant demonstrator in chemistry at some technical institute. He quarrelled with the authorities upon a question of unfair treatment. Afterwards he obtained a post in the laboratory of a manufactory of dyes. There too he had been treated with revolting injustice. His struggles, his privations, his hard work to raise himself in the social scale, had filled him with such an exalted conviction of his merits that it was extremely difficult for the world to treat him with justice — the standard of that notion depending so much upon the patience of the individual. The Professor had genius, but lacked the great social virtue of resignation.

“Intellectually a nonentity,” Ossipon pronounced aloud, abandoning suddenly the inward contemplation of Mrs Verloc’s bereaved person and business. “Quite an ordinary personality. You are wrong in not keeping more in touch with the comrades, Professor,” he added in a reproving tone. “Did he say anything to you — give you some idea of his intentions? I hadn’t seen him for a month. It seems impossible that he should be gone.”

“He told me it was going to be a demonstration against a building,” said the Professor. “I had to know that much to prepare the missile. I pointed out to him that I had hardly a sufficient quantity for a completely destructive result, but he pressed me very earnestly to do my best. As he wanted something that could be carried openly in the hand, I proposed to make use of an old one-gallon copal varnish can I happened to have by me. He was pleased at the idea. It gave me some trouble, because I had to cut out the bottom first and solder it on again afterwards. When prepared for use, the can enclosed a wide-mouthed, well-corked jar of thick glass packed around with some wet clay and containing sixteen ounces of X2 green powder. The detonator was connected with the screw top of the can. It was ingenious — a combination of time and shock. I explained the system to him. It was a thin tube of tin enclosing a — ”

Ossipon’s attention had wandered.

“What do you think has happened?” he interrupted.

“Can’t tell. Screwed the top on tight, which would make the connection, and then forgot the time. It was set for twenty minutes. On the other hand, the time contact being made, a sharp shock would bring about the explosion at once. He either ran the time too close, or simply let the thing fall. The contact was made all right — that’s clear to me at any rate. The system’s worked perfectly. And yet you would think that a common fool in a hurry would be much more likely to forget to make the contact altogether. I was worrying myself about that sort of failure mostly. But there are more kinds of fools than one can guard against. You can’t expect a detonator to be absolutely fool-proof.”

He beckoned to a waiter. Ossipon sat rigid, with the abstracted gaze of mental travail. After the man had gone away with the money he roused himself, with an air of profound dissatisfaction.

“It’s extremely unpleasant for me,” he mused. “Karl has been in bed with bronchitis for a week. There’s an even chance that he will never get up again. Michaelis’s luxuriating in the country somewhere. A fashionable publisher has offered him five hundred pounds for a book. It will be a ghastly failure. He has lost the habit of consecutive thinking in prison, you know.”

The Professor on his feet, now buttoning his coat, looked about him with perfect indifference.

“What are you going to do?” asked Ossipon wearily. He dreaded the blame of the Central Red Committee, a body which had no permanent place of abode, and of whose membership he was not exactly informed. If this affair eventuated in the stoppage of

the modest subsidy allotted to the publication of the F. P. pamphlets, then indeed he would have to regret Verloc's inexplicable folly.

"Solidarity with the extremest form of action is one thing, and silly recklessness is another," he said, with a sort of moody brutality. "I don't know what came to Verloc. There's some mystery there. However, he's gone. You may take it as you like, but under the circumstances the only policy for the militant revolutionary group is to disclaim all connection with this damned freak of yours. How to make the disclaimer convincing enough is what bothers me."

The little man on his feet, buttoned up and ready to go, was no taller than the seated Ossipon. He levelled his spectacles at the latter's face point-blank.

"You might ask the police for a testimonial of good conduct. They know where every one of you slept last night. Perhaps if you asked them they would consent to publish some sort of official statement."

"No doubt they are aware well enough that we had nothing to do with this," mumbled Ossipon bitterly. "What they will say is another thing." He remained thoughtful, disregarding the short, owlsh, shabby figure standing by his side. "I must lay hands on Michaelis at once, and get him to speak from his heart at one of our gatherings. The public has a sort of sentimental regard for that fellow. His name is known. And I am in touch with a few reporters on the big dailies. What he would say would be utter bosh, but he has a turn of talk that makes it go down all the same."

"Like treacle," interjected the Professor, rather low, keeping an impassive expression.

The perplexed Ossipon went on communing with himself half audibly, after the manner of a man reflecting in perfect solitude.

"Confounded ass! To leave such an imbecile business on my hands. And I don't even know if —"

He sat with compressed lips. The idea of going for news straight to the shop lacked charm. His notion was that Verloc's shop might have been turned already into a police trap. They will be bound to make some arrests, he thought, with something resembling virtuous indignation, for the even tenor of his revolutionary life was menaced by no fault of his. And yet unless he went there he ran the risk of remaining in ignorance of what perhaps it would be very material for him to know. Then he reflected that, if the man in the park had been so very much blown to pieces as the evening papers said, he could not have been identified. And if so, the police could have no special reason for watching Verloc's shop more closely than any other place known to be frequented by marked anarchists — no more reason, in fact, than for watching the doors of the Silenus. There would be a lot of watching all round, no matter where he went. Still —

"I wonder what I had better do now?" he muttered, taking counsel with himself.

A rasping voice at his elbow said, with sedate scorn:

"Fasten yourself upon the woman for all she's worth."

After uttering these words the Professor walked away from the table. Ossipon, whom that piece of insight had taken unawares, gave one ineffectual start, and remained still, with a helpless gaze, as though nailed fast to the seat of his chair. The lonely piano,

without as much as a music stool to help it, struck a few chords courageously, and beginning a selection of national airs, played him out at last to the tune of "Blue Bells of Scotland." The painfully detached notes grew faint behind his back while he went slowly upstairs, across the hall, and into the street.

In front of the great doorway a dismal row of newspaper sellers standing clear of the pavement dealt out their wares from the gutter. It was a raw, gloomy day of the early spring; and the grimy sky, the mud of the streets, the rags of the dirty men, harmonised excellently with the eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printers' ink. The posters, maculated with filth, garnished like tapestry the sweep of the curbstone. The trade in afternoon papers was brisk, yet, in comparison with the swift, constant march of foot traffic, the effect was of indifference, of a disregarded distribution. Ossipon looked hurriedly both ways before stepping out into the cross-currents, but the Professor was already out of sight.

Chapter 5

The Professor had turned into a street to the left, and walked along, with his head carried rigidly erect, in a crowd whose every individual almost overtopped his stunted stature. It was vain to pretend to himself that he was not disappointed. But that was mere feeling; the stoicism of his thought could not be disturbed by this or any other failure. Next time, or the time after next, a telling stroke would be delivered—something really startling — a blow fit to open the first crack in the imposing front of the great edifice of legal conceptions sheltering the atrocious injustice of society. Of humble origin, and with an appearance really so mean as to stand in the way of his considerable natural abilities, his imagination had been fired early by the tales of men rising from the depths of poverty to positions of authority and affluence. The extreme, almost ascetic purity of his thought, combined with an astounding ignorance of worldly conditions, had set before him a goal of power and prestige to be attained without the medium of arts, graces, tact, wealth — by sheer weight of merit alone. On that view he considered himself entitled to undisputed success. His father, a delicate dark enthusiast with a sloping forehead, had been an itinerant and rousing preacher of some obscure but rigid Christian sect — a man supremely confident in the privileges of his righteousness. In the son, individualist by temperament, once the science of colleges had replaced thoroughly the faith of conventicles, this moral attitude translated itself into a frenzied puritanism of ambition. He nursed it as something secularly holy. To see it thwarted opened his eyes to the true nature of the world, whose morality was artificial, corrupt, and blasphemous. The way of even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds. The Professor's indignation found in itself a final cause that absolved him from the sin of turning to destruction as the agent of his ambition. To destroy public faith in legality was the imperfect formula of his pedantic fanaticism; but the subconscious conviction that the framework of an established social order cannot be effectually shattered except by some form of collective or individual violence was precise and correct. He was a moral agent — that was settled in his mind. By exercising his agency with ruthless defiance he procured for himself the appearances of power and personal prestige. That was undeniable to his vengeful bitterness. It pacified its unrest; and in their own way the most ardent of revolutionaries are perhaps doing no more but seeking for peace in common with the rest of mankind — the peace of soothed vanity, of satisfied appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience.

Lost in the crowd, miserable and undersized, he meditated confidently on his power, keeping his hand in the left pocket of his trousers, grasping lightly the india-rubber ball,

the supreme guarantee of his sinister freedom; but after a while he became disagreeably affected by the sight of the roadway thronged with vehicles and of the pavement crowded with men and women. He was in a long, straight street, peopled by a mere fraction of an immense multitude; but all round him, on and on, even to the limits of the horizon hidden by the enormous piles of bricks, he felt the mass of mankind mighty in its numbers. They swarmed numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed, impervious to sentiment, to logic, to terror too perhaps.

That was the form of doubt he feared most. Impervious to fear! Often while walking abroad, when he happened also to come out of himself, he had such moments of dreadful and sane mistrust of mankind. What if nothing could move them? Such moments come to all men whose ambition aims at a direct grasp upon humanity — to artists, politicians, thinkers, reformers, or saints. A despicable emotional state this, against which solitude fortifies a superior character; and with severe exultation the Professor thought of the refuge of his room, with its padlocked cupboard, lost in a wilderness of poor houses, the hermitage of the perfect anarchist. In order to reach sooner the point where he could take his omnibus, he turned brusquely out of the populous street into a narrow and dusky alley paved with flagstones. On one side the low brick houses had in their dusty windows the sightless, moribund look of incurable decay — empty shells awaiting demolition. From the other side life had not departed wholly as yet. Facing the only gas-lamp yawned the cavern of a second-hand furniture dealer, where, deep in the gloom of a sort of narrow avenue winding through a bizarre forest of wardrobes, with an undergrowth tangle of table legs, a tall pier-glass glimmered like a pool of water in a wood. An unhappy, homeless couch, accompanied by two unrelated chairs, stood in the open. The only human being making use of the alley besides the Professor, coming stalwart and erect from the opposite direction, checked his swinging pace suddenly.

“Hallo!” he said, and stood a little on one side watchfully.

The Professor had already stopped, with a ready half turn which brought his shoulders very near the other wall. His right hand fell lightly on the back of the outcast couch, the left remained purposefully plunged deep in the trousers pocket, and the roundness of the heavy rimmed spectacles imparted an owlish character to his moody, unperturbed face.

It was like a meeting in a side corridor of a mansion full of life. The stalwart man was buttoned up in a dark overcoat, and carried an umbrella. His hat, tilted back, uncovered a good deal of forehead, which appeared very white in the dusk. In the dark patches of the orbits the eyeballs glimmered piercingly. Long, drooping moustaches, the colour of ripe corn, framed with their points the square block of his shaved chin.

“I am not looking for you,” he said curtly.

The Professor did not stir an inch. The blended noises of the enormous town sank down to an inarticulate low murmur. Chief Inspector Heat of the Special Crimes Department changed his tone.

“Not in a hurry to get home?” he asked, with mocking simplicity.

The unwholesome-looking little moral agent of destruction exulted silently in the possession of personal prestige, keeping in check this man armed with the defensive mandate of a menaced society. More fortunate than Caligula, who wished that the Roman Senate had only one head for the better satisfaction of his cruel lust, he beheld in that one man all the forces he had set at defiance: the force of law, property, oppression, and injustice. He beheld all his enemies, and fearlessly confronted them all in a supreme satisfaction of his vanity. They stood perplexed before him as if before a dreadful portent. He gloated inwardly over the chance of this meeting affirming his superiority over all the multitude of mankind.

It was in reality a chance meeting. Chief Inspector Heat had had a disagreeably busy day since his department received the first telegram from Greenwich a little before eleven in the morning. First of all, the fact of the outrage being attempted less than a week after he had assured a high official that no outbreak of anarchist activity was to be apprehended was sufficiently annoying. If he ever thought himself safe in making a statement, it was then. He had made that statement with infinite satisfaction to himself, because it was clear that the high official desired greatly to hear that very thing. He had affirmed that nothing of the sort could even be thought of without the department being aware of it within twenty-four hours; and he had spoken thus in his consciousness of being the great expert of his department. He had gone even so far as to utter words which true wisdom would have kept back. But Chief Inspector Heat was not very wise — at least not truly so. True wisdom, which is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions, would have prevented him from attaining his present position. It would have alarmed his superiors, and done away with his chances of promotion. His promotion had been very rapid.

“There isn’t one of them, sir, that we couldn’t lay our hands on at any time of night and day. We know what each of them is doing hour by hour,” he had declared. And the high official had deigned to smile. This was so obviously the right thing to say for an officer of Chief Inspector Heat’s reputation that it was perfectly delightful. The high official believed the declaration, which chimed in with his idea of the fitness of things. His wisdom was of an official kind, or else he might have reflected upon a matter not of theory but of experience that in the close-woven stuff of relations between conspirator and police there occur unexpected solutions of continuity, sudden holes in space and time. A given anarchist may be watched inch by inch and minute by minute, but a moment always comes when somehow all sight and touch of him are lost for a few hours, during which something (generally an explosion) more or less deplorable does happen. But the high official, carried away by his sense of the fitness of things, had smiled, and now the recollection of that smile was very annoying to Chief Inspector Heat, principal expert in anarchist procedure.

This was not the only circumstance whose recollection depressed the usual serenity of the eminent specialist. There was another dating back only to that very morning. The thought that when called urgently to his Assistant Commissioner’s private room he had been unable to conceal his astonishment was distinctly vexing. His instinct of

a successful man had taught him long ago that, as a general rule, a reputation is built on manner as much as on achievement. And he felt that his manner when confronted with the telegram had not been impressive. He had opened his eyes widely, and had exclaimed "Impossible!" exposing himself thereby to the unanswerable retort of a fingertip laid forcibly on the telegram which the Assistant Commissioner, after reading it aloud, had flung on the desk. To be crushed, as it were, under the tip of a forefinger was an unpleasant experience. Very damaging, too! Furthermore, Chief Inspector Heat was conscious of not having mended matters by allowing himself to express a conviction.

"One thing I can tell you at once: none of our lot had anything to do with this."

He was strong in his integrity of a good detective, but he saw now that an impenetrably attentive reserve towards this incident would have served his reputation better. On the other hand, he admitted to himself that it was difficult to preserve one's reputation if rank outsiders were going to take a hand in the business. Outsiders are the bane of the police as of other professions. The tone of the Assistant Commissioner's remarks had been sour enough to set one's teeth on edge.

And since breakfast Chief Inspector Heat had not managed to get anything to eat.

Starting immediately to begin his investigation on the spot, he had swallowed a good deal of raw, unwholesome fog in the park. Then he had walked over to the hospital; and when the investigation in Greenwich was concluded at last he had lost his inclination for food. Not accustomed, as the doctors are, to examine closely the mangled remains of human beings, he had been shocked by the sight disclosed to his view when a waterproof sheet had been lifted off a table in a certain apartment of the hospital.

Another waterproof sheet was spread over that table in the manner of a table-cloth, with the corners turned up over a sort of mound — a heap of rags, scorched and bloodstained, half concealing what might have been an accumulation of raw material for a cannibal feast. It required considerable firmness of mind not to recoil before that sight. Chief Inspector Heat, an efficient officer of his department, stood his ground, but for a whole minute he did not advance. A local constable in uniform cast a sidelong glance, and said, with stolid simplicity:

"He's all there. Every bit of him. It was a job."

He had been the first man on the spot after the explosion. He mentioned the fact again. He had seen something like a heavy flash of lightning in the fog. At that time he was standing at the door of the King William Street Lodge talking to the keeper. The concussion made him tingle all over. He ran between the trees towards the Observatory. "As fast as my legs would carry me," he repeated twice.

Chief Inspector Heat, bending forward over the table in a gingerly and horrified manner, let him run on. The hospital porter and another man turned down the corners of the cloth, and stepped aside. The Chief Inspector's eyes searched the gruesome detail of that heap of mixed things, which seemed to have been collected in shambles and rag shops.

“You used a shovel,” he remarked, observing a sprinkling of small gravel, tiny brown bits of bark, and particles of splintered wood as fine as needles.

“Had to in one place,” said the stolid constable. “I sent a keeper to fetch a spade. When he heard me scraping the ground with it he leaned his forehead against a tree, and was as sick as a dog.”

The Chief Inspector, stooping guardedly over the table, fought down the unpleasant sensation in his throat. The shattering violence of destruction which had made of that body a heap of nameless fragments affected his feelings with a sense of ruthless cruelty, though his reason told him the effect must have been as swift as a flash of lightning. The man, whoever he was, had died instantaneously; and yet it seemed impossible to believe that a human body could have reached that state of disintegration without passing through the pangs of inconceivable agony. No physiologist, and still less of a metaphysician, Chief Inspector Heat rose by the force of sympathy, which is a form of fear, above the vulgar conception of time. Instantaneous! He remembered all he had ever read in popular publications of long and terrifying dreams dreamed in the instant of waking; of the whole past life lived with frightful intensity by a drowning man as his doomed head bobs up, streaming, for the last time. The inexplicable mysteries of conscious existence beset Chief Inspector Heat till he evolved a horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye. And meantime the Chief Inspector went on, peering at the table with a calm face and the slightly anxious attention of an indigent customer bending over what may be called the by-products of a butcher’s shop with a view to an inexpensive Sunday dinner. All the time his trained faculties of an excellent investigator, who scorns no chance of information, followed the self-satisfied, disjointed loquacity of the constable.

“A fair-haired fellow,” the last observed in a placid tone, and paused. “The old woman who spoke to the sergeant noticed a fair-haired fellow coming out of Maze Hill Station.” He paused. “And he was a fair-haired fellow. She noticed two men coming out of the station after the uptrain had gone on,” he continued slowly. “She couldn’t tell if they were together. She took no particular notice of the big one, but the other was a fair, slight chap, carrying a tin varnish can in one hand.” The constable ceased.

“Know the woman?” muttered the Chief Inspector, with his eyes fixed on the table, and a vague notion in his mind of an inquest to be held presently upon a person likely to remain for ever unknown.

“Yes. She’s housekeeper to a retired publican, and attends the chapel in Park Place sometimes,” the constable uttered weightily, and paused, with another oblique glance at the table.

Then suddenly: “Well, here he is — all of him I could see. Fair. Slight — slight enough. Look at that foot there. I picked up the legs first, one after another. He was that scattered you didn’t know where to begin.”

The constable paused; the least flicker of an innocent self-laudatory smile invested his round face with an infantile expression.

“Stumbled,” he announced positively. “I stumbled once myself, and pitched on my head too, while running up. Them roots do stick out all about the place. Stumbled against the root of a tree and fell, and that thing he was carrying must have gone off right under his chest, I expect.”

The echo of the words “Person unknown” repeating itself in his inner consciousness bothered the Chief Inspector considerably. He would have liked to trace this affair back to its mysterious origin for his own information. He was professionally curious. Before the public he would have liked to vindicate the efficiency of his department by establishing the identity of that man. He was a loyal servant. That, however, appeared impossible. The first term of the problem was unreadable — lacked all suggestion but that of atrocious cruelty.

Overcoming his physical repugnance, Chief Inspector Heat stretched out his hand without conviction for the salving of his conscience, and took up the least soiled of the rags. It was a narrow strip of velvet with a larger triangular piece of dark blue cloth hanging from it. He held it up to his eyes; and the police constable spoke.

“Velvet collar. Funny the old woman should have noticed the velvet collar. Dark blue overcoat with a velvet collar, she has told us. He was the chap she saw, and no mistake. And here he is all complete, velvet collar and all. I don’t think I missed a single piece as big as a postage stamp.”

At this point the trained faculties of the Chief Inspector ceased to hear the voice of the constable. He moved to one of the windows for better light. His face, averted from the room, expressed a startled intense interest while he examined closely the triangular piece of broad-cloth. By a sudden jerk he detached it, and only after stuffing it into his pocket turned round to the room, and flung the velvet collar back on the table —

“Cover up,” he directed the attendants curtly, without another look, and, saluted by the constable, carried off his spoil hastily.

A convenient train whirled him up to town, alone and pondering deeply, in a third-class compartment. That singed piece of cloth was incredibly valuable, and he could not defend himself from astonishment at the casual manner it had come into his possession. It was as if Fate had thrust that clue into his hands. And after the manner of the average man, whose ambition is to command events, he began to mistrust such a gratuitous and accidental success — just because it seemed forced upon him. The practical value of success depends not a little on the way you look at it. But Fate looks at nothing. It has no discretion. He no longer considered it eminently desirable all round to establish publicly the identity of the man who had blown himself up that morning with such horrible completeness. But he was not certain of the view his department would take. A department is to those it employs a complex personality with ideas and even fads of its own. It depends on the loyal devotion of its servants, and the devoted loyalty of trusted servants is associated with a certain amount of affectionate contempt, which keeps it sweet, as it were. By a benevolent provision of Nature no man is a hero to his valet, or else the heroes would have to brush their own clothes. Likewise no department appears perfectly wise to the intimacy of its workers. A department does not know so

much as some of its servants. Being a dispassionate organism, it can never be perfectly informed. It would not be good for its efficiency to know too much. Chief Inspector Heat got out of the train in a state of thoughtfulness entirely untainted with disloyalty, but not quite free of that jealous mistrust which so often springs on the ground of perfect devotion, whether to women or to institutions.

It was in this mental disposition, physically very empty, but still nauseated by what he had seen, that he had come upon the Professor. Under these conditions which make for irascibility in a sound, normal man, this meeting was specially unwelcome to Chief Inspector Heat. He had not been thinking of the Professor; he had not been thinking of any individual anarchist at all. The complexion of that case had somehow forced upon him the general idea of the absurdity of things human, which in the abstract is sufficiently annoying to an unphilosophical temperament, and in concrete instances becomes exasperating beyond endurance. At the beginning of his career Chief Inspector Heat had been concerned with the more energetic forms of thieving. He had gained his spurs in that sphere, and naturally enough had kept for it, after his promotion to another department, a feeling not very far removed from affection. Thieving was not a sheer absurdity. It was a form of human industry, perverse indeed, but still an industry exercised in an industrious world; it was work undertaken for the same reason as the work in potteries, in coal mines, in fields, in tool-grinding shops. It was labour, whose practical difference from the other forms of labour consisted in the nature of its risk, which did not lie in ankylosis, or lead poisoning, or fire-damp, or gritty dust, but in what may be briefly defined in its own special phraseology as "Seven years hard." Chief Inspector Heat was, of course, not insensible to the gravity of moral differences. But neither were the thieves he had been looking after. They submitted to the severe sanctions of a morality familiar to Chief Inspector Heat with a certain resignation.

They were his fellow-citizens gone wrong because of imperfect education, Chief Inspector Heat believed; but allowing for that difference, he could understand the mind of a burglar, because, as a matter of fact, the mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer. Both recognise the same conventions, and have a working knowledge of each other's methods and of the routine of their respective trades. They understand each other, which is advantageous to both, and establishes a sort of amenity in their relations. Products of the same machine, one classed as useful and the other as noxious, they take the machine for granted in different ways, but with a seriousness essentially the same. The mind of Chief Inspector Heat was inaccessible to ideas of revolt. But his thieves were not rebels. His bodily vigour, his cool inflexible manner, his courage and his fairness, had secured for him much respect and some adulation in the sphere of his early successes. He had felt himself revered and admired. And Chief Inspector Heat, arrested within six paces of the anarchist nick-named the Professor, gave a thought of regret to the world of thieves — sane, without morbid ideals, working by routine, respectful of constituted authorities, free from all taint of hate and despair.

After paying this tribute to what is normal in the constitution of society (for the idea of thieving appeared to his instinct as normal as the idea of property), Chief Inspector Heat felt very angry with himself for having stopped, for having spoken, for having taken that way at all on the ground of it being a short cut from the station to the headquarters. And he spoke again in his big authoritative voice, which, being moderated, had a threatening character.

“You are not wanted, I tell you,” he repeated.

The anarchist did not stir. An inward laugh of derision uncovered not only his teeth but his gums as well, shook him all over, without the slightest sound. Chief Inspector Heat was led to add, against his better judgment:

“Not yet. When I want you I will know where to find you.”

Those were perfectly proper words, within the tradition and suitable to his character of a police officer addressing one of his special flock. But the reception they got departed from tradition and propriety. It was outrageous. The stunted, weakly figure before him spoke at last.

“I’ve no doubt the papers would give you an obituary notice then. You know best what that would be worth to you. I should think you can imagine easily the sort of stuff that would be printed. But you may be exposed to the unpleasantness of being buried together with me, though I suppose your friends would make an effort to sort us out as much as possible.”

With all his healthy contempt for the spirit dictating such speeches, the atrocious allusiveness of the words had its effect on Chief Inspector Heat. He had too much insight, and too much exact information as well, to dismiss them as rot. The dusk of this narrow lane took on a sinister tint from the dark, frail little figure, its back to the wall, and speaking with a weak, self-confident voice. To the vigorous, tenacious vitality of the Chief Inspector, the physical wretchedness of that being, so obviously not fit to live, was ominous; for it seemed to him that if he had the misfortune to be such a miserable object he would not have cared how soon he died. Life had such a strong hold upon him that a fresh wave of nausea broke out in slight perspiration upon his brow. The murmur of town life, the subdued rumble of wheels in the two invisible streets to the right and left, came through the curve of the sordid lane to his ears with a precious familiarity and an appealing sweetness. He was human. But Chief Inspector Heat was also a man, and he could not let such words pass.

“All this is good to frighten children with,” he said. “I’ll have you yet.”

It was very well said, without scorn, with an almost austere quietness.

“Doubtless,” was the answer; “but there’s no time like the present, believe me. For a man of real convictions this is a fine opportunity of self-sacrifice. You may not find another so favourable, so humane. There isn’t even a cat near us, and these condemned old houses would make a good heap of bricks where you stand. You’ll never get me at so little cost to life and property, which you are paid to protect.”

“You don’t know who you’re speaking to,” said Chief Inspector Heat firmly. “If I were to lay my hands on you now I would be no better than yourself.”

“Ah! The game!”

“You may be sure our side will win in the end. It may yet be necessary to make people believe that some of you ought to be shot at sight like mad dogs. Then that will be the game. But I’ll be damned if I know what yours is. I don’t believe you know yourselves. You’ll never get anything by it.”

“Meantime it’s you who get something from it — so far. And you get it easily, too. I won’t speak of your salary, but haven’t you made your name simply by not understanding what we are after?”

“What are you after, then?” asked Chief Inspector Heat, with scornful haste, like a man in a hurry who perceives he is wasting his time.

The perfect anarchist answered by a smile which did not part his thin colourless lips; and the celebrated Chief Inspector felt a sense of superiority which induced him to raise a warning finger.

“Give it up — whatever it is,” he said in an admonishing tone, but not so kindly as if he were condescending to give good advice to a cracksman of repute. “Give it up. You’ll find we are too many for you.”

The fixed smile on the Professor’s lips wavered, as if the mocking spirit within had lost its assurance. Chief Inspector Heat went on:

“Don’t you believe me eh? Well, you’ve only got to look about you. We are. And anyway, you’re not doing it well. You’re always making a mess of it. Why, if the thieves didn’t know their work better they would starve.”

The hint of an invincible multitude behind that man’s back roused a sombre indignation in the breast of the Professor. He smiled no longer his enigmatic and mocking smile. The resisting power of numbers, the unattackable stolidity of a great multitude, was the haunting fear of his sinister loneliness. His lips trembled for some time before he managed to say in a strangled voice:

“I am doing my work better than you’re doing yours.”

“That’ll do now,” interrupted Chief Inspector Heat hurriedly; and the Professor laughed right out this time. While still laughing he moved on; but he did not laugh long. It was a sad-faced, miserable little man who emerged from the narrow passage into the bustle of the broad thoroughfare. He walked with the nerveless gait of a tramp going on, still going on, indifferent to rain or sun in a sinister detachment from the aspects of sky and earth. Chief Inspector Heat, on the other hand, after watching him for a while, stepped out with the purposeful briskness of a man disregarding indeed the inclemencies of the weather, but conscious of having an authorised mission on this earth and the moral support of his kind. All the inhabitants of the immense town, the population of the whole country, and even the teeming millions struggling upon the planet, were with him — down to the very thieves and mendicants. Yes, the thieves themselves were sure to be with him in his present work. The consciousness of universal support in his general activity heartened him to grapple with the particular problem.

The problem immediately before the Chief Inspector was that of managing the Assistant Commissioner of his department, his immediate superior. This is the perennial

problem of trusty and loyal servants; anarchism gave it its particular complexion, but nothing more. Truth to say, Chief Inspector Heat thought but little of anarchism. He did not attach undue importance to it, and could never bring himself to consider it seriously. It had more the character of disorderly conduct; disorderly without the human excuse of drunkenness, which at any rate implies good feeling and an amiable leaning towards festivity. As criminals, anarchists were distinctly no class — no class at all. And recalling the Professor, Chief Inspector Heat, without checking his swinging pace, muttered through his teeth:

“Lunatic.”

Catching thieves was another matter altogether. It had that quality of seriousness belonging to every form of open sport where the best man wins under perfectly comprehensible rules. There were no rules for dealing with anarchists. And that was distasteful to the Chief Inspector. It was all foolishness, but that foolishness excited the public mind, affected persons in high places, and touched upon international relations. A hard, merciless contempt settled rigidly on the Chief Inspector’s face as he walked on. His mind ran over all the anarchists of his flock. Not one of them had half the spunk of this or that burglar he had known. Not half — not one-tenth.

At headquarters the Chief Inspector was admitted at once to the Assistant Commissioner’s private room. He found him, pen in hand, bent over a great table bestrewn with papers, as if worshipping an enormous double inkstand of bronze and crystal. Speaking tubes resembling snakes were tied by the heads to the back of the Assistant Commissioner’s wooden arm-chair, and their gaping mouths seemed ready to bite his elbows. And in this attitude he raised only his eyes, whose lids were darker than his face and very much creased. The reports had come in: every anarchist had been exactly accounted for.

After saying this he lowered his eyes, signed rapidly two single sheets of paper, and only then laid down his pen, and sat well back, directing an inquiring gaze at his renowned subordinate. The Chief Inspector stood it well, deferential but inscrutable.

“I daresay you were right,” said the Assistant Commissioner, “in telling me at first that the London anarchists had nothing to do with this. I quite appreciate the excellent watch kept on them by your men. On the other hand, this, for the public, does not amount to more than a confession of ignorance.”

The Assistant Commissioner’s delivery was leisurely, as it were cautious. His thought seemed to rest poised on a word before passing to another, as though words had been the stepping-stones for his intellect picking its way across the waters of error. “Unless you have brought something useful from Greenwich,” he added.

The Chief Inspector began at once the account of his investigation in a clear matter-of-fact manner. His superior turning his chair a little, and crossing his thin legs, leaned sideways on his elbow, with one hand shading his eyes. His listening attitude had a sort of angular and sorrowful grace. Gleams as of highly burnished silver played on the sides of his ebony black head when he inclined it slowly at the end.

Chief Inspector Heat waited with the appearance of turning over in his mind all he had just said, but, as a matter of fact, considering the advisability of saying something more. The Assistant Commissioner cut his hesitation short.

“You believe there were two men?” he asked, without uncovering his eyes.

The Chief Inspector thought it more than probable. In his opinion, the two men had parted from each other within a hundred yards from the Observatory walls. He explained also how the other man could have got out of the park speedily without being observed. The fog, though not very dense, was in his favour. He seemed to have escorted the other to the spot, and then to have left him there to do the job single-handed. Taking the time those two were seen coming out of Maze Hill Station by the old woman, and the time when the explosion was heard, the Chief Inspector thought that the other man might have been actually at the Greenwich Park Station, ready to catch the next train up, at the moment his comrade was destroying himself so thoroughly.

“Very thoroughly — eh?” murmured the Assistant Commissioner from under the shadow of his hand.

The Chief Inspector in a few vigorous words described the aspect of the remains. “The coroner’s jury will have a treat,” he added grimly.

The Assistant Commissioner uncovered his eyes.

“We shall have nothing to tell them,” he remarked languidly.

He looked up, and for a time watched the markedly non-committal attitude of his Chief Inspector. His nature was one that is not easily accessible to illusions. He knew that a department is at the mercy of its subordinate officers, who have their own conceptions of loyalty. His career had begun in a tropical colony. He had liked his work there. It was police work. He had been very successful in tracking and breaking up certain nefarious secret societies amongst the natives. Then he took his long leave, and got married rather impulsively. It was a good match from a worldly point of view, but his wife formed an unfavourable opinion of the colonial climate on hearsay evidence. On the other hand, she had influential connections. It was an excellent match. But he did not like the work he had to do now. He felt himself dependent on too many subordinates and too many masters. The near presence of that strange emotional phenomenon called public opinion weighed upon his spirits, and alarmed him by its irrational nature. No doubt that from ignorance he exaggerated to himself its power for good and evil — especially for evil; and the rough east winds of the English spring (which agreed with his wife) augmented his general mistrust of men’s motives and of the efficiency of their organisation. The futility of office work especially appalled him on those days so trying to his sensitive liver.

He got up, unfolding himself to his full height, and with a heaviness of step remarkable in so slender a man, moved across the room to the window. The panes streamed with rain, and the short street he looked down into lay wet and empty, as if swept clear suddenly by a great flood. It was a very trying day, choked in raw fog to begin with, and now drowned in cold rain. The flickering, blurred flames of gas-lamps seemed to be

dissolving in a watery atmosphere. And the lofty pretensions of a mankind oppressed by the miserable indignities of the weather appeared as a colossal and hopeless vanity deserving of scorn, wonder, and compassion.

“Horrible, horrible!” thought the Assistant Commissioner to himself, with his face near the window-pane. “We have been having this sort of thing now for ten days; no, a fortnight — a fortnight.” He ceased to think completely for a time. That utter stillness of his brain lasted about three seconds. Then he said perfunctorily: “You have set inquiries on foot for tracing that other man up and down the line?”

He had no doubt that everything needful had been done. Chief Inspector Heat knew, of course, thoroughly the business of man-hunting. And these were the routine steps, too, that would be taken as a matter of course by the merest beginner. A few inquiries amongst the ticket collectors and the porters of the two small railway stations would give additional details as to the appearance of the two men; the inspection of the collected tickets would show at once where they came from that morning. It was elementary, and could not have been neglected. Accordingly the Chief Inspector answered that all this had been done directly the old woman had come forward with her deposition. And he mentioned the name of a station. “That’s where they came from, sir,” he went on. “The porter who took the tickets at Maze Hill remembers two chaps answering to the description passing the barrier. They seemed to him two respectable working men of a superior sort — sign painters or house decorators. The big man got out of a third-class compartment backward, with a bright tin can in his hand. On the platform he gave it to carry to the fair young fellow who followed him. All this agrees exactly with what the old woman told the police sergeant in Greenwich.”

The Assistant Commissioner, still with his face turned to the window, expressed his doubt as to these two men having had anything to do with the outrage. All this theory rested upon the utterances of an old charwoman who had been nearly knocked down by a man in a hurry. Not a very substantial authority indeed, unless on the ground of sudden inspiration, which was hardly tenable.

“Frankly now, could she have been really inspired?” he queried, with grave irony, keeping his back to the room, as if entranced by the contemplation of the town’s colossal forms half lost in the night. He did not even look round when he heard the mutter of the word “Providential” from the principal subordinate of his department, whose name, printed sometimes in the papers, was familiar to the great public as that of one of its zealous and hard-working protectors. Chief Inspector Heat raised his voice a little.

“Strips and bits of bright tin were quite visible to me,” he said. “That’s a pretty good corroboration.”

“And these men came from that little country station,” the Assistant Commissioner mused aloud, wondering. He was told that such was the name on two tickets out of three given up out of that train at Maze Hill. The third person who got out was a hawker from Gravesend well known to the porters. The Chief Inspector imparted that information in a tone of finality with some ill humour, as loyal servants will do in the

consciousness of their fidelity and with the sense of the value of their loyal exertions. And still the Assistant Commissioner did not turn away from the darkness outside, as vast as a sea.

“Two foreign anarchists coming from that place,” he said, apparently to the window-pane. “It’s rather unaccountable.”

“Yes, sir. But it would be still more unaccountable if that Michaelis weren’t staying in a cottage in the neighbourhood.”

At the sound of that name, falling unexpectedly into this annoying affair, the Assistant Commissioner dismissed brusquely the vague remembrance of his daily whist party at his club. It was the most comforting habit of his life, in a mainly successful display of his skill without the assistance of any subordinate. He entered his club to play from five to seven, before going home to dinner, forgetting for those two hours whatever was distasteful in his life, as though the game were a beneficent drug for allaying the pangs of moral discontent. His partners were the gloomily humorous editor of a celebrated magazine; a silent, elderly barrister with malicious little eyes; and a highly martial, simple-minded old Colonel with nervous brown hands. They were his club acquaintances merely. He never met them elsewhere except at the card-table. But they all seemed to approach the game in the spirit of co-sufferers, as if it were indeed a drug against the secret ills of existence; and every day as the sun declined over the countless roofs of the town, a mellow, pleasurable impatience, resembling the impulse of a sure and profound friendship, lightened his professional labours. And now this pleasurable sensation went out of him with something resembling a physical shock, and was replaced by a special kind of interest in his work of social protection — an improper sort of interest, which may be defined best as a sudden and alert mistrust of the weapon in his hand.

Chapter 6

The lady patroness of Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle of humanitarian hopes, was one of the most influential and distinguished connections of the Assistant Commissioner's wife, whom she called Annie, and treated still rather as a not very wise and utterly inexperienced young girl. But she had consented to accept him on a friendly footing, which was by no means the case with all of his wife's influential connections. Married young and splendidly at some remote epoch of the past, she had had for a time a close view of great affairs and even of some great men. She herself was a great lady. Old now in the number of her years, she had that sort of exceptional temperament which defies time with scornful disregard, as if it were a rather vulgar convention submitted to by the mass of inferior mankind. Many other conventions easier to set aside, alas! failed to obtain her recognition, also on temperamental grounds — either because they bored her, or else because they stood in the way of her scorns and sympathies. Admiration was a sentiment unknown to her (it was one of the secret griefs of her most noble husband against her) — first, as always more or less tainted with mediocrity, and next as being in a way an admission of inferiority. And both were frankly inconceivable to her nature. To be fearlessly outspoken in her opinions came easily to her, since she judged solely from the standpoint of her social position. She was equally untrammelled in her actions; and as her tactfulness proceeded from genuine humanity, her bodily vigour remained remarkable and her superiority was serene and cordial, three generations had admired her infinitely, and the last she was likely to see had pronounced her a wonderful woman. Meantime intelligent, with a sort of lofty simplicity, and curious at heart, but not like many women merely of social gossip, she amused her age by attracting within her ken through the power of her great, almost historical, social prestige everything that rose above the dead level of mankind, lawfully or unlawfully, by position, wit, audacity, fortune or misfortune. Royal Highnesses, artists, men of science, young statesmen, and charlatans of all ages and conditions, who, unsubstantial and light, bobbing up like corks, show best the direction of the surface currents, had been welcomed in that house, listened to, penetrated, understood, appraised, for her own edification. In her own words, she liked to watch what the world was coming to. And as she had a practical mind her judgment of men and things, though based on special prejudices, was seldom totally wrong, and almost never wrong-headed. Her drawing-room was probably the only place in the wide world where an Assistant Commissioner of Police could meet a convict liberated on a ticket-of-leave on other than professional and official ground. Who had brought Michaelis there one afternoon the Assistant Commissioner did not remember very well. He had a notion it must have

been a certain Member of Parliament of illustrious parentage and unconventional sympathies, which were the standing joke of the comic papers. The notabilities and even the simple notorieties of the day brought each other freely to that temple of an old woman's not ignoble curiosity. You never could guess whom you were likely to come upon being received in semi-privacy within the faded blue silk and gilt frame screen, making a cosy nook for a couch and a few arm-chairs in the great drawing-room, with its hum of voices and the groups of people seated or standing in the light of six tall windows.

Michaelis had been the object of a revulsion of popular sentiment, the same sentiment which years ago had applauded the ferocity of the life sentence passed upon him for complicity in a rather mad attempt to rescue some prisoners from a police van. The plan of the conspirators had been to shoot down the horses and overpower the escort. Unfortunately, one of the police constables got shot too. He left a wife and three small children, and the death of that man aroused through the length and breadth of a realm for whose defence, welfare, and glory men die every day as matter of duty, an outburst of furious indignation, of a raging implacable pity for the victim. Three ring-leaders got hanged. Michaelis, young and slim, locksmith by trade, and great frequenter of evening schools, did not even know that anybody had been killed, his part with a few others being to force open the door at the back of the special conveyance. When arrested he had a bunch of skeleton keys in one pocket a heavy chisel in another, and a short crowbar in his hand: neither more nor less than a burglar. But no burglar would have received such a heavy sentence. The death of the constable had made him miserable at heart, but the failure of the plot also. He did not conceal either of these sentiments from his empanelled countrymen, and that sort of compunction appeared shockingly imperfect to the crammed court. The judge on passing sentence commented feelingly upon the depravity and callousness of the young prisoner.

That made the groundless fame of his condemnation; the fame of his release was made for him on no better grounds by people who wished to exploit the sentimental aspect of his imprisonment either for purposes of their own or for no intelligible purpose. He let them do so in the innocence of his heart and the simplicity of his mind. Nothing that happened to him individually had any importance. He was like those saintly men whose personality is lost in the contemplation of their faith. His ideas were not in the nature of convictions. They were inaccessible to reasoning. They formed in all their contradictions and obscurities an invincible and humanitarian creed, which he confessed rather than preached, with an obstinate gentleness, a smile of pacific assurance on his lips, and his candid blue eyes cast down because the sight of faces troubled his inspiration developed in solitude. In that characteristic attitude, pathetic in his grotesque and incurable obesity which he had to drag like a galley slave's bullet to the end of his days, the Assistant Commissioner of Police beheld the ticket-of-leave apostle filling a privileged arm-chair within the screen. He sat there by the head of the old lady's couch, mild-voiced and quiet, with no more self-consciousness than a very small child, and with something of a child's charm — the appealing charm of

trustfulness. Confident of the future, whose secret ways had been revealed to him within the four walls of a well-known penitentiary, he had no reason to look with suspicion upon anybody. If he could not give the great and curious lady a very definite idea as to what the world was coming to, he had managed without effort to impress her by his unembittered faith, by the sterling quality of his optimism.

A certain simplicity of thought is common to serene souls at both ends of the social scale. The great lady was simple in her own way. His views and beliefs had nothing in them to shock or startle her, since she judged them from the standpoint of her lofty position. Indeed, her sympathies were easily accessible to a man of that sort. She was not an exploiting capitalist herself; she was, as it were, above the play of economic conditions. And she had a great capacity of pity for the more obvious forms of common human miseries, precisely because she was such a complete stranger to them that she had to translate her conception into terms of mental suffering before she could grasp the notion of their cruelty. The Assistant Commissioner remembered very well the conversation between these two. He had listened in silence. It was something as exciting in a way, and even touching in its foredoomed futility, as the efforts at moral intercourse between the inhabitants of remote planets. But this grotesque incarnation of humanitarian passion appealed somehow, to one's imagination. At last Michaelis rose, and taking the great lady's extended hand, shook it, retained it for a moment in his great cushioned palm with unembarrassed friendliness, and turned upon the semi-private nook of the drawing-room his back, vast and square, and as if distended under the short tweed jacket. Glancing about in serene benevolence, he waddled along to the distant door between the knots of other visitors. The murmur of conversations paused on his passage. He smiled innocently at a tall, brilliant girl, whose eyes met his accidentally, and went out unconscious of the glances following him across the room. Michaelis' first appearance in the world was a success — a success of esteem unmarred by a single murmur of derision. The interrupted conversations were resumed in their proper tone, grave or light. Only a well-set-up, long-limbed, active-looking man of forty talking with two ladies near a window remarked aloud, with an unexpected depth of feeling: "Eighteen stone, I should say, and not five foot six. Poor fellow! It's terrible — terrible."

The lady of the house, gazing absently at the Assistant Commissioner, left alone with her on the private side of the screen, seemed to be rearranging her mental impressions behind her thoughtful immobility of a handsome old face. Men with grey moustaches and full, healthy, vaguely smiling countenances approached, circling round the screen; two mature women with a matronly air of gracious resolution; a clean-shaved individual with sunken cheeks, and dangling a gold-mounted eyeglass on a broad black ribbon with an old-world, dandified effect. A silence deferential, but full of reserves, reigned for a moment, and then the great lady exclaimed, not with resentment, but with a sort of protesting indignation:

"And that officially is supposed to be a revolutionist! What nonsense." She looked hard at the Assistant Commissioner, who murmured apologetically:

“Not a dangerous one perhaps.”

“Not dangerous — I should think not indeed. He is a mere believer. It’s the temperament of a saint,” declared the great lady in a firm tone. “And they kept him shut up for twenty years. One shudders at the stupidity of it. And now they have let him out everybody belonging to him is gone away somewhere or dead. His parents are dead; the girl he was to marry has died while he was in prison; he has lost the skill necessary for his manual occupation. He told me all this himself with the sweetest patience; but then, he said, he had had plenty of time to think out things for himself. A pretty compensation! If that’s the stuff revolutionists are made of some of us may well go on their knees to them,” she continued in a slightly bantering voice, while the banal society smiles hardened on the worldly faces turned towards her with conventional deference. “The poor creature is obviously no longer in a position to take care of himself. Somebody will have to look after him a little.”

“He should be recommended to follow a treatment of some sort,” the soldierly voice of the active-looking man was heard advising earnestly from a distance. He was in the pink of condition for his age, and even the texture of his long frock coat had a character of elastic soundness, as if it were a living tissue. “The man is virtually a cripple,” he added with unmistakable feeling.

Other voices, as if glad of the opening, murmured hasty compassion. “Quite startling,” “Monstrous,” “Most painful to see.” The lank man, with the eyeglass on a broad ribbon, pronounced mincingly the word “Grotesque,” whose justness was appreciated by those standing near him. They smiled at each other.

The Assistant Commissioner had expressed no opinion either then or later, his position making it impossible for him to ventilate any independent view of a ticket-of-leave convict. But, in truth, he shared the view of his wife’s friend and patron that Michaelis was a humanitarian sentimentalist, a little mad, but upon the whole incapable of hurting a fly intentionally. So when that name cropped up suddenly in this vexing bomb affair he realised all the danger of it for the ticket-of-leave apostle, and his mind reverted at once to the old lady’s well-established infatuation. Her arbitrary kindness would not brook patiently any interference with Michaelis’ freedom. It was a deep, calm, convinced infatuation. She had not only felt him to be inoffensive, but she had said so, which last by a confusion of her absolutist mind became a sort of incontrovertible demonstration. It was as if the monstrosity of the man, with his candid infant’s eyes and a fat angelic smile, had fascinated her. She had come to believe almost his theory of the future, since it was not repugnant to her prejudices. She disliked the new element of plutocracy in the social compound, and industrialism as a method of human development appeared to her singularly repulsive in its mechanical and unfeeling character. The humanitarian hopes of the mild Michaelis tended not towards utter destruction, but merely towards the complete economic ruin of the system. And she did not really see where was the moral harm of it. It would do away with all the multitude of the “parvenus,” whom she disliked and mistrusted, not because they had arrived anywhere (she denied that), but because of their profound unintelligence of the

world, which was the primary cause of the crudity of their perceptions and the aridity of their hearts. With the annihilation of all capital they would vanish too; but universal ruin (providing it was universal, as it was revealed to Michaelis) would leave the social values untouched. The disappearance of the last piece of money could not affect people of position. She could not conceive how it could affect her position, for instance. She had developed these discoveries to the Assistant Commissioner with all the serene fearlessness of an old woman who had escaped the blight of indifference. He had made for himself the rule to receive everything of that sort in a silence which he took care from policy and inclination not to make offensive. He had an affection for the aged disciple of Michaelis, a complex sentiment depending a little on her prestige, on her personality, but most of all on the instinct of flattered gratitude. He felt himself really liked in her house. She was kindness personified. And she was practically wise too, after the manner of experienced women. She made his married life much easier than it would have been without her generously full recognition of his rights as Annie's husband. Her influence upon his wife, a woman devoured by all sorts of small selfishnesses, small envies, small jealousies, was excellent. Unfortunately, both her kindness and her wisdom were of unreasonable complexion, distinctly feminine, and difficult to deal with. She remained a perfect woman all along her full tale of years, and not as some of them do become — a sort of slippery, pestilential old man in petticoats. And it was as of a woman that he thought of her — the specially choice incarnation of the feminine, wherein is recruited the tender, ingenuous, and fierce bodyguard for all sorts of men who talk under the influence of an emotion, true or fraudulent; for preachers, seers, prophets, or reformers.

Appreciating the distinguished and good friend of his wife, and himself, in that way, the Assistant Commissioner became alarmed at the convict Michaelis' possible fate. Once arrested on suspicion of being in some way, however remote, a party to this outrage, the man could hardly escape being sent back to finish his sentence at least. And that would kill him; he would never come out alive. The Assistant Commissioner made a reflection extremely unbecoming his official position without being really creditable to his humanity.

“If the fellow is laid hold of again,” he thought, “she will never forgive me.”

The frankness of such a secretly outspoken thought could not go without some derisive self-criticism. No man engaged in a work he does not like can preserve many saving illusions about himself. The distaste, the absence of glamour, extend from the occupation to the personality. It is only when our appointed activities seem by a lucky accident to obey the particular earnestness of our temperament that we can taste the comfort of complete self-deception. The Assistant Commissioner did not like his work at home. The police work he had been engaged on in a distant part of the globe had the saving character of an irregular sort of warfare or at least the risk and excitement of open-air sport. His real abilities, which were mainly of an administrative order, were combined with an adventurous disposition. Chained to a desk in the thick of four millions of men, he considered himself the victim of an ironic fate — the same, no doubt, which had brought about his marriage with a woman exceptionally sensitive

in the matter of colonial climate, besides other limitations testifying to the delicacy of her nature — and her tastes. Though he judged his alarm sardonically he did not dismiss the improper thought from his mind. The instinct of self-preservation was strong within him. On the contrary, he repeated it mentally with profane emphasis and a fuller precision: “Damn it! If that infernal Heat has his way the fellow’ll die in prison smothered in his fat, and she’ll never forgive me.”

His black, narrow figure, with the white band of the collar under the silvery gleams on the close-cropped hair at the back of the head, remained motionless. The silence had lasted such a long time that Chief Inspector Heat ventured to clear his throat. This noise produced its effect. The zealous and intelligent officer was asked by his superior, whose back remained turned to him immovably:

“You connect Michaelis with this affair?”

Chief Inspector Heat was very positive, but cautious.

“Well, sir,” he said, “we have enough to go upon. A man like that has no business to be at large, anyhow.”

“You will want some conclusive evidence,” came the observation in a murmur.

Chief Inspector Heat raised his eyebrows at the black, narrow back, which remained obstinately presented to his intelligence and his zeal.

“There will be no difficulty in getting up sufficient evidence against him,” he said, with virtuous complacency. “You may trust me for that, sir,” he added, quite unnecessarily, out of the fulness of his heart; for it seemed to him an excellent thing to have that man in hand to be thrown down to the public should it think fit to roar with any special indignation in this case. It was impossible to say yet whether it would roar or not. That in the last instance depended, of course, on the newspaper press. But in any case, Chief Inspector Heat, purveyor of prisons by trade, and a man of legal instincts, did logically believe that incarceration was the proper fate for every declared enemy of the law. In the strength of that conviction he committed a fault of tact. He allowed himself a little conceited laugh, and repeated:

“Trust me for that, sir.”

This was too much for the forced calmness under which the Assistant Commissioner had for upwards of eighteen months concealed his irritation with the system and the subordinates of his office. A square peg forced into a round hole, he had felt like a daily outrage that long established smooth roundness into which a man of less sharply angular shape would have fitted himself, with voluptuous acquiescence, after a shrug or two. What he resented most was just the necessity of taking so much on trust. At the little laugh of Chief Inspector Heat’s he spun swiftly on his heels, as if whirled away from the window-pane by an electric shock. He caught on the latter’s face not only the complacency proper to the occasion lurking under the moustache, but the vestiges of experimental watchfulness in the round eyes, which had been, no doubt, fastened on his back, and now met his glance for a second before the intent character of their stare had the time to change to a merely startled appearance.

The Assistant Commissioner of Police had really some qualifications for his post. Suddenly his suspicion was awakened. It is but fair to say that his suspicions of the police methods (unless the police happened to be a semi-military body organised by himself) was not difficult to arouse. If it ever slumbered from sheer weariness, it was but lightly; and his appreciation of Chief Inspector Heat's zeal and ability, moderate in itself, excluded all notion of moral confidence. "He's up to something," he exclaimed mentally, and at once became angry. Crossing over to his desk with headlong strides, he sat down violently. "Here I am stuck in a litter of paper," he reflected, with unreasonable resentment, "supposed to hold all the threads in my hands, and yet I can but hold what is put in my hand, and nothing else. And they can fasten the other ends of the threads where they please."

He raised his head, and turned towards his subordinate a long, meagre face with the accentuated features of an energetic Don Quixote.

"Now what is it you've got up your sleeve?"

The other stared. He stared without winking in a perfect immobility of his round eyes, as he was used to stare at the various members of the criminal class when, after being duly cautioned, they made their statements in the tones of injured innocence, or false simplicity, or sullen resignation. But behind that professional and stony fixity there was some surprise too, for in such a tone, combining nicely the note of contempt and impatience, Chief Inspector Heat, the right-hand man of the department, was not used to be addressed. He began in a procrastinating manner, like a man taken unawares by a new and unexpected experience.

"What I've got against that man Michaelis you mean, sir?"

The Assistant Commissioner watched the bullet head; the points of that Norse rover's moustache, falling below the line of the heavy jaw; the whole full and pale physiognomy, whose determined character was marred by too much flesh; at the cunning wrinkles radiating from the outer corners of the eyes — and in that purposeful contemplation of the valuable and trusted officer he drew a conviction so sudden that it moved him like an inspiration.

"I have reason to think that when you came into this room," he said in measured tones, "it was not Michaelis who was in your mind; not principally — perhaps not at all."

"You have reason to think, sir?" muttered Chief Inspector Heat, with every appearance of astonishment, which up to a certain point was genuine enough. He had discovered in this affair a delicate and perplexing side, forcing upon the discoverer a certain amount of insincerity — that sort of insincerity which, under the names of skill, prudence, discretion, turns up at one point or another in most human affairs. He felt at the moment like a tight-rope artist might feel if suddenly, in the middle of the performance, the manager of the Music Hall were to rush out of the proper managerial seclusion and begin to shake the rope. Indignation, the sense of moral insecurity engendered by such a treacherous proceeding joined to the immediate apprehension of a broken neck, would, in the colloquial phrase, put him in a state. And there would be

also some scandalised concern for his art too, since a man must identify himself with something more tangible than his own personality, and establish his pride somewhere, either in his social position, or in the quality of the work he is obliged to do, or simply in the superiority of the idleness he may be fortunate enough to enjoy.

“Yes,” said the Assistant Commissioner; “I have. I do not mean to say that you have not thought of Michaelis at all. But you are giving the fact you’ve mentioned a prominence which strikes me as not quite candid, Inspector Heat. If that is really the track of discovery, why haven’t you followed it up at once, either personally or by sending one of your men to that village?”

“Do you think, sir, I have failed in my duty there?” the Chief Inspector asked, in a tone which he sought to make simply reflective. Forced unexpectedly to concentrate his faculties upon the task of preserving his balance, he had seized upon that point, and exposed himself to a rebuke; for, the Assistant Commissioner frowning slightly, observed that this was a very improper remark to make.

“But since you’ve made it,” he continued coldly, “I’ll tell you that this is not my meaning.”

He paused, with a straight glance of his sunken eyes which was a full equivalent of the unspoken termination “and you know it.” The head of the so-called Special Crimes Department debarred by his position from going out of doors personally in quest of secrets locked up in guilty breasts, had a propensity to exercise his considerable gifts for the detection of incriminating truth upon his own subordinates. That peculiar instinct could hardly be called a weakness. It was natural. He was a born detective. It had unconsciously governed his choice of a career, and if it ever failed him in life it was perhaps in the one exceptional circumstance of his marriage — which was also natural. It fed, since it could not roam abroad, upon the human material which was brought to it in its official seclusion. We can never cease to be ourselves.

His elbow on the desk, his thin legs crossed, and nursing his cheek in the palm of his meagre hand, the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the Special Crimes branch was getting hold of the case with growing interest. His Chief Inspector, if not an absolutely worthy foeman of his penetration, was at any rate the most worthy of all within his reach. A mistrust of established reputations was strictly in character with the Assistant Commissioner’s ability as detector. His memory evoked a certain old fat and wealthy native chief in the distant colony whom it was a tradition for the successive Colonial Governors to trust and make much of as a firm friend and supporter of the order and legality established by white men; whereas, when examined sceptically, he was found out to be principally his own good friend, and nobody else’s. Not precisely a traitor, but still a man of many dangerous reservations in his fidelity, caused by a due regard for his own advantage, comfort, and safety. A fellow of some innocence in his naive duplicity, but none the less dangerous. He took some finding out. He was physically a big man, too, and (allowing for the difference of colour, of course) Chief Inspector Heat’s appearance recalled him to the memory of his superior. It was not the eyes nor yet the lips exactly. It was bizarre. But does not Alfred Wallace relate in his famous

book on the Malay Archipelago how, amongst the Aru Islanders, he discovered in an old and naked savage with a sooty skin a peculiar resemblance to a dear friend at home?

For the first time since he took up his appointment the Assistant Commissioner felt as if he were going to do some real work for his salary. And that was a pleasurable sensation. "I'll turn him inside out like an old glove," thought the Assistant Commissioner, with his eyes resting pensively upon Chief Inspector Heat.

"No, that was not my thought," he began again. "There is no doubt about you knowing your business — no doubt at all; and that's precisely why I — " He stopped short, and changing his tone: "What could you bring up against Michaelis of a definite nature? I mean apart from the fact that the two men under suspicion — you're certain there were two of them — came last from a railway station within three miles of the village where Michaelis is living now."

"This by itself is enough for us to go upon, sir, with that sort of man," said the Chief Inspector, with returning composure. The slight approving movement of the Assistant Commissioner's head went far to pacify the resentful astonishment of the renowned officer. For Chief Inspector Heat was a kind man, an excellent husband, a devoted father; and the public and departmental confidence he enjoyed acting favourably upon an amiable nature, disposed him to feel friendly towards the successive Assistant Commissioners he had seen pass through that very room. There had been three in his time. The first one, a soldierly, abrupt, red-faced person, with white eyebrows and an explosive temper, could be managed with a silken thread. He left on reaching the age limit. The second, a perfect gentleman, knowing his own and everybody else's place to a nicety, on resigning to take up a higher appointment out of England got decorated for (really) Inspector Heat's services. To work with him had been a pride and a pleasure. The third, a bit of a dark horse from the first, was at the end of eighteen months something of a dark horse still to the department. Upon the whole Chief Inspector Heat believed him to be in the main harmless — odd-looking, but harmless. He was speaking now, and the Chief Inspector listened with outward deference (which means nothing, being a matter of duty) and inwardly with benevolent toleration.

"Michaelis reported himself before leaving London for the country?"

"Yes, sir. He did."

"And what may he be doing there?" continued the Assistant Commissioner, who was perfectly informed on that point. Fitted with painful tightness into an old wooden arm-chair, before a worm-eaten oak table in an upstairs room of a four-roomed cottage with a roof of moss-grown tiles, Michaelis was writing night and day in a shaky, slanting hand that "Autobiography of a Prisoner" which was to be like a book of Revelation in the history of mankind. The conditions of confined space, seclusion, and solitude in a small four-roomed cottage were favourable to his inspiration. It was like being in prison, except that one was never disturbed for the odious purpose of taking exercise according to the tyrannical regulations of his old home in the penitentiary. He could not tell whether the sun still shone on the earth or not. The perspiration of the literary

labour dropped from his brow. A delightful enthusiasm urged him on. It was the liberation of his inner life, the letting out of his soul into the wide world. And the zeal of his guileless vanity (first awakened by the offer of five hundred pounds from a publisher) seemed something predestined and holy.

"It would be, of course, most desirable to be informed exactly," insisted the Assistant Commissioner uncandidly.

Chief Inspector Heat, conscious of renewed irritation at this display of scrupulousness, said that the county police had been notified from the first of Michaelis' arrival, and that a full report could be obtained in a few hours. A wire to the superintendent

Thus he spoke, rather slowly, while his mind seemed already to be weighing the consequences. A slight knitting of the brow was the outward sign of this. But he was interrupted by a question.

"You've sent that wire already?"

"No, sir," he answered, as if surprised.

The Assistant Commissioner uncrossed his legs suddenly. The briskness of that movement contrasted with the casual way in which he threw out a suggestion.

"Would you think that Michaelis had anything to do with the preparation of that bomb, for instance?"

The Chief Inspector assumed a reflective manner.

"I wouldn't say so. There's no necessity to say anything at present. He associates with men who are classed as dangerous. He was made a delegate of the Red Committee less than a year after his release on licence. A sort of compliment, I suppose."

And the Chief Inspector laughed a little angrily, a little scornfully. With a man of that sort scrupulousness was a misplaced and even an illegal sentiment. The celebrity bestowed upon Michaelis on his release two years ago by some emotional journalists in want of special copy had rankled ever since in his breast. It was perfectly legal to arrest that man on the barest suspicion. It was legal and expedient on the face of it. His two former chiefs would have seen the point at once; whereas this one, without saying either yes or no, sat there, as if lost in a dream. Moreover, besides being legal and expedient, the arrest of Michaelis solved a little personal difficulty which worried Chief Inspector Heat somewhat. This difficulty had its bearing upon his reputation, upon his comfort, and even upon the efficient performance of his duties. For, if Michaelis no doubt knew something about this outrage, the Chief Inspector was fairly certain that he did not know too much. This was just as well. He knew much less — the Chief Inspector was positive — than certain other individuals he had in his mind, but whose arrest seemed to him inexpedient, besides being a more complicated matter, on account of the rules of the game. The rules of the game did not protect so much Michaelis, who was an ex-convict. It would be stupid not to take advantage of legal facilities, and the journalists who had written him up with emotional gush would be ready to write him down with emotional indignation.

This prospect, viewed with confidence, had the attraction of a personal triumph for Chief Inspector Heat. And deep down in his blameless bosom of an average married citizen, almost unconscious but potent nevertheless, the dislike of being compelled by events to meddle with the desperate ferocity of the Professor had its say. This dislike had been strengthened by the chance meeting in the lane. The encounter did not leave behind with Chief Inspector Heat that satisfactory sense of superiority the members of the police force get from the unofficial but intimate side of their intercourse with the criminal classes, by which the vanity of power is soothed, and the vulgar love of domination over our fellow-creatures is flattered as worthily as it deserves.

The perfect anarchist was not recognised as a fellow-creature by Chief Inspector Heat. He was impossible — a mad dog to be left alone. Not that the Chief Inspector was afraid of him; on the contrary, he meant to have him some day. But not yet; he meant to get hold of him in his own time, properly and effectively according to the rules of the game. The present was not the right time for attempting that feat, not the right time for many reasons, personal and of public service. This being the strong feeling of Inspector Heat, it appeared to him just and proper that this affair should be shunted off its obscure and inconvenient track, leading goodness knows where, into a quiet (and lawful) siding called Michaelis. And he repeated, as if reconsidering the suggestion conscientiously:

“The bomb. No, I would not say that exactly. We may never find that out. But it’s clear that he is connected with this in some way, which we can find out without much trouble.”

His countenance had that look of grave, overbearing indifference once well known and much dreaded by the better sort of thieves. Chief Inspector Heat, though what is called a man, was not a smiling animal. But his inward state was that of satisfaction at the passively receptive attitude of the Assistant Commissioner, who murmured gently:

“And you really think that the investigation should be made in that direction?”

“I do, sir.”

“Quite convinced?”

“I am, sir. That’s the true line for us to take.”

The Assistant Commissioner withdrew the support of his hand from his reclining head with a suddenness that, considering his languid attitude, seemed to menace his whole person with collapse. But, on the contrary, he sat up, extremely alert, behind the great writing-table on which his hand had fallen with the sound of a sharp blow.

“What I want to know is what put it out of your head till now.”

“Put it out of my head,” repeated the Chief Inspector very slowly.

“Yes. Till you were called into this room — you know.”

The Chief Inspector felt as if the air between his clothing and his skin had become unpleasantly hot. It was the sensation of an unprecedented and incredible experience.

“Of course,” he said, exaggerating the deliberation of his utterance to the utmost limits of possibility, “if there is a reason, of which I know nothing, for not interfering

with the convict Michaelis, perhaps it's just as well I didn't start the county police after him."

This took such a long time to say that the unflagging attention of the Assistant Commissioner seemed a wonderful feat of endurance. His retort came without delay.

"No reason whatever that I know of. Come, Chief Inspector, this finessing with me is highly improper on your part — highly improper. And it's also unfair, you know. You shouldn't leave me to puzzle things out for myself like this. Really, I am surprised."

He paused, then added smoothly: "I need scarcely tell you that this conversation is altogether unofficial."

These words were far from pacifying the Chief Inspector. The indignation of a betrayed tight-rope performer was strong within him. In his pride of a trusted servant he was affected by the assurance that the rope was not shaken for the purpose of breaking his neck, as by an exhibition of impudence. As if anybody were afraid! Assistant Commissioners come and go, but a valuable Chief Inspector is not an ephemeral office phenomenon. He was not afraid of getting a broken neck. To have his performance spoiled was more than enough to account for the glow of honest indignation. And as thought is no respecter of persons, the thought of Chief Inspector Heat took a threatening and prophetic shape. "You, my boy," he said to himself, keeping his round and habitually roving eyes fastened upon the Assistant Commissioner's face — "you, my boy, you don't know your place, and your place won't know you very long either, I bet."

As if in provoking answer to that thought, something like the ghost of an amiable smile passed on the lips of the Assistant Commissioner. His manner was easy and business-like while he persisted in administering another shake to the tight rope.

"Let us come now to what you have discovered on the spot, Chief Inspector," he said.

"A fool and his job are soon parted," went on the train of prophetic thought in Chief Inspector Heat's head. But it was immediately followed by the reflection that a higher official, even when "fired out" (this was the precise image), has still the time as he flies through the door to launch a nasty kick at the shin-bones of a subordinate. Without softening very much the basilisk nature of his stare, he said impassively:

"We are coming to that part of my investigation, sir."

"That's right. Well, what have you brought away from it?"

The Chief Inspector, who had made up his mind to jump off the rope, came to the ground with gloomy frankness.

"I've brought away an address," he said, pulling out of his pocket without haste a singed rag of dark blue cloth. "This belongs to the overcoat the fellow who got himself blown to pieces was wearing. Of course, the overcoat may not have been his, and may even have been stolen. But that's not at all probable if you look at this."

The Chief Inspector, stepping up to the table, smoothed out carefully the rag of blue cloth. He had picked it up from the repulsive heap in the mortuary, because a tailor's name is found sometimes under the collar. It is not often of much use, but still

— He only half expected to find anything useful, but certainly he did not expect to find — not under the collar at all, but stitched carefully on the under side of the lapel — a square piece of calico with an address written on it in marking ink.

The Chief Inspector removed his smoothing hand.

“I carried it off with me without anybody taking notice,” he said. “I thought it best. It can always be produced if required.”

The Assistant Commissioner, rising a little in his chair, pulled the cloth over to his side of the table. He sat looking at it in silence. Only the number 32 and the name of Brett Street were written in marking ink on a piece of calico slightly larger than an ordinary cigarette paper. He was genuinely surprised.

“Can’t understand why he should have gone about labelled like this,” he said, looking up at Chief Inspector Heat. “It’s a most extraordinary thing.”

“I met once in the smoking-room of a hotel an old gentleman who went about with his name and address sewn on in all his coats in case of an accident or sudden illness,” said the Chief Inspector. “He professed to be eighty-four years old, but he didn’t look his age. He told me he was also afraid of losing his memory suddenly, like those people he has been reading of in the papers.”

A question from the Assistant Commissioner, who wanted to know what was No. 32 Brett Street, interrupted that reminiscence abruptly. The Chief Inspector, driven down to the ground by unfair artifices, had elected to walk the path of unreserved openness. If he believed firmly that to know too much was not good for the department, the judicious holding back of knowledge was as far as his loyalty dared to go for the good of the service. If the Assistant Commissioner wanted to mismanage this affair nothing, of course, could prevent him. But, on his own part, he now saw no reason for a display of alacrity. So he answered concisely:

“It’s a shop, sir.”

The Assistant Commissioner, with his eyes lowered on the rag of blue cloth, waited for more information. As that did not come he proceeded to obtain it by a series of questions propounded with gentle patience. Thus he acquired an idea of the nature of Mr Verloc’s commerce, of his personal appearance, and heard at last his name. In a pause the Assistant Commissioner raised his eyes, and discovered some animation on the Chief Inspector’s face. They looked at each other in silence.

“Of course,” said the latter, “the department has no record of that man.”

“Did any of my predecessors have any knowledge of what you have told me now?” asked the Assistant Commissioner, putting his elbows on the table and raising his joined hands before his face, as if about to offer prayer, only that his eyes had not a pious expression.

“No, sir; certainly not. What would have been the object? That sort of man could never be produced publicly to any good purpose. It was sufficient for me to know who he was, and to make use of him in a way that could be used publicly.”

“And do you think that sort of private knowledge consistent with the official position you occupy?”

“Perfectly, sir. I think it’s quite proper. I will take the liberty to tell you, sir, that it makes me what I am — and I am looked upon as a man who knows his work. It’s a private affair of my own. A personal friend of mine in the French police gave me the hint that the fellow was an Embassy spy. Private friendship, private information, private use of it — that’s how I look upon it.”

The Assistant Commissioner after remarking to himself that the mental state of the renowned Chief Inspector seemed to affect the outline of his lower jaw, as if the lively sense of his high professional distinction had been located in that part of his anatomy, dismissed the point for the moment with a calm “I see.” Then leaning his cheek on his joined hands:

“Well then — speaking privately if you like — how long have you been in private touch with this Embassy spy?”

To this inquiry the private answer of the Chief Inspector, so private that it was never shaped into audible words, was:

“Long before you were even thought of for your place here.”

The so-to-speak public utterance was much more precise.

“I saw him for the first time in my life a little more than seven years ago, when two Imperial Highnesses and the Imperial Chancellor were on a visit here. I was put in charge of all the arrangements for looking after them. Baron Stott-Wartenheim was Ambassador then. He was a very nervous old gentleman. One evening, three days before the Guildhall Banquet, he sent word that he wanted to see me for a moment. I was downstairs, and the carriages were at the door to take the Imperial Highnesses and the Chancellor to the opera. I went up at once. I found the Baron walking up and down his bedroom in a pitiable state of distress, squeezing his hands together. He assured me he had the fullest confidence in our police and in my abilities, but he had there a man just come over from Paris whose information could be trusted implicitly. He wanted me to hear what that man had to say. He took me at once into a dressing-room next door, where I saw a big fellow in a heavy overcoat sitting all alone on a chair, and holding his hat and stick in one hand. The Baron said to him in French ‘Speak, my friend.’ The light in that room was not very good. I talked with him for some five minutes perhaps. He certainly gave me a piece of very startling news. Then the Baron took me aside nervously to praise him up to me, and when I turned round again I discovered that the fellow had vanished like a ghost. Got up and sneaked out down some back stairs, I suppose. There was no time to run after him, as I had to hurry off after the Ambassador down the great staircase, and see the party started safe for the opera. However, I acted upon the information that very night. Whether it was perfectly correct or not, it did look serious enough. Very likely it saved us from an ugly trouble on the day of the Imperial visit to the City.

“Some time later, a month or so after my promotion to Chief Inspector, my attention was attracted to a big burly man, I thought I had seen somewhere before, coming out in a hurry from a jeweller’s shop in the Strand. I went after him, as it was on my way towards Charing Cross, and there seeing one of our detectives across the road, I

beckoned him over, and pointed out the fellow to him, with instructions to watch his movements for a couple of days, and then report to me. No later than next afternoon my man turned up to tell me that the fellow had married his landlady's daughter at a registrar's office that very day at 11.30 a.m., and had gone off with her to Margate for a week. Our man had seen the luggage being put on the cab. There were some old Paris labels on one of the bags. Somehow I couldn't get the fellow out of my head, and the very next time I had to go to Paris on service I spoke about him to that friend of mine in the Paris police. My friend said: 'From what you tell me I think you must mean a rather well-known hanger-on and emissary of the Revolutionary Red Committee. He says he is an Englishman by birth. We have an idea that he has been for a good few years now a secret agent of one of the foreign Embassies in London.' This woke up my memory completely. He was the vanishing fellow I saw sitting on a chair in Baron Stott-Wartenheim's bathroom. I told my friend that he was quite right. The fellow was a secret agent to my certain knowledge. Afterwards my friend took the trouble to ferret out the complete record of that man for me. I thought I had better know all there was to know; but I don't suppose you want to hear his history now, sir?"

The Assistant Commissioner shook his supported head. "The history of your relations with that useful personage is the only thing that matters just now," he said, closing slowly his weary, deep-set eyes, and then opening them swiftly with a greatly refreshed glance.

"There's nothing official about them," said the Chief Inspector bitterly. "I went into his shop one evening, told him who I was, and reminded him of our first meeting. He didn't as much as twitch an eyebrow. He said that he was married and settled now, and that all he wanted was not to be interfered in his little business. I took it upon myself to promise him that, as long as he didn't go in for anything obviously outrageous, he would be left alone by the police. That was worth something to him, because a word from us to the Custom-House people would have been enough to get some of these packages he gets from Paris and Brussels opened in Dover, with confiscation to follow for certain, and perhaps a prosecution as well at the end of it."

"That's a very precarious trade," murmured the Assistant Commissioner. "Why did he go in for that?"

The Chief Inspector raised scornful eyebrows dispassionately.

"Most likely got a connection — friends on the Continent — amongst people who deal in such wares. They would be just the sort he would consort with. He's a lazy dog, too — like the rest of them."

"What do you get from him in exchange for your protection?"

The Chief Inspector was not inclined to enlarge on the value of Mr Verloc's services.

"He would not be much good to anybody but myself. One has got to know a good deal beforehand to make use of a man like that. I can understand the sort of hint he can give. And when I want a hint he can generally furnish it to me."

The Chief Inspector lost himself suddenly in a discreet reflective mood; and the Assistant Commissioner repressed a smile at the fleeting thought that the reputation

of Chief Inspector Heat might possibly have been made in a great part by the Secret Agent Verloc.

“In a more general way of being of use, all our men of the Special Crimes section on duty at Charing Cross and Victoria have orders to take careful notice of anybody they may see with him. He meets the new arrivals frequently, and afterwards keeps track of them. He seems to have been told off for that sort of duty. When I want an address in a hurry, I can always get it from him. Of course, I know how to manage our relations. I haven’t seen him to speak to three times in the last two years. I drop him a line, unsigned, and he answers me in the same way at my private address.”

From time to time the Assistant Commissioner gave an almost imperceptible nod. The Chief Inspector added that he did not suppose Mr Verloc to be deep in the confidence of the prominent members of the Revolutionary International Council, but that he was generally trusted of that there could be no doubt. “Whenever I’ve had reason to think there was something in the wind,” he concluded, “I’ve always found he could tell me something worth knowing.”

The Assistant Commissioner made a significant remark.

“He failed you this time.”

“Neither had I wind of anything in any other way,” retorted Chief Inspector Heat. “I asked him nothing, so he could tell me nothing. He isn’t one of our men. It isn’t as if he were in our pay.”

“No,” muttered the Assistant Commissioner. “He’s a spy in the pay of a foreign government. We could never confess to him.”

“I must do my work in my own way,” declared the Chief Inspector. “When it comes to that I would deal with the devil himself, and take the consequences. There are things not fit for everybody to know.”

“Your idea of secrecy seems to consist in keeping the chief of your department in the dark. That’s stretching it perhaps a little too far, isn’t it? He lives over his shop?”

“Who — Verloc? Oh yes. He lives over his shop. The wife’s mother, I fancy, lives with them.”

“Is the house watched?”

“Oh dear, no. It wouldn’t do. Certain people who come there are watched. My opinion is that he knows nothing of this affair.”

“How do you account for this?” The Assistant Commissioner nodded at the cloth rag lying before him on the table.

“I don’t account for it at all, sir. It’s simply unaccountable. It can’t be explained by what I know.” The Chief Inspector made those admissions with the frankness of a man whose reputation is established as if on a rock. “At any rate not at this present moment. I think that the man who had most to do with it will turn out to be Michaelis.”

“You do?”

“Yes, sir; because I can answer for all the others.”

“What about that other man supposed to have escaped from the park?”

“I should think he’s far away by this time,” opined the Chief Inspector.

The Assistant Commissioner looked hard at him, and rose suddenly, as though having made up his mind to some course of action. As a matter of fact, he had that very moment succumbed to a fascinating temptation. The Chief Inspector heard himself dismissed with instructions to meet his superior early next morning for further consultation upon the case. He listened with an impenetrable face, and walked out of the room with measured steps.

Whatever might have been the plans of the Assistant Commissioner they had nothing to do with that desk work, which was the bane of his existence because of its confined nature and apparent lack of reality. It could not have had, or else the general air of alacrity that came upon the Assistant Commissioner would have been inexplicable. As soon as he was left alone he looked for his hat impulsively, and put it on his head. Having done that, he sat down again to reconsider the whole matter. But as his mind was already made up, this did not take long. And before Chief Inspector Heat had gone very far on the way home, he also left the building.

Chapter 7

The Assistant Commissioner walked along a short and narrow street like a wet, muddy trench, then crossing a very broad thoroughfare entered a public edifice, and sought speech with a young private secretary (unpaid) of a great personage.

This fair, smooth-faced young man, whose symmetrically arranged hair gave him the air of a large and neat schoolboy, met the Assistant Commissioner's request with a doubtful look, and spoke with bated breath.

"Would he see you? I don't know about that. He has walked over from the House an hour ago to talk with the permanent Under-Secretary, and now he's ready to walk back again. He might have sent for him; but he does it for the sake of a little exercise, I suppose. It's all the exercise he can find time for while this session lasts. I don't complain; I rather enjoy these little strolls. He leans on my arm, and doesn't open his lips. But, I say, he's very tired, and — well — not in the sweetest of tempers just now."

"It's in connection with that Greenwich affair."

"Oh! I say! He's very bitter against you people. But I will go and see, if you insist."

"Do. That's a good fellow," said the Assistant Commissioner.

The unpaid secretary admired this pluck. Composing for himself an innocent face, he opened a door, and went in with the assurance of a nice and privileged child. And presently he reappeared, with a nod to the Assistant Commissioner, who passing through the same door left open for him, found himself with the great personage in a large room.

Vast in bulk and stature, with a long white face, which, broadened at the base by a big double chin, appeared egg-shaped in the fringe of thin greyish whisker, the great personage seemed an expanding man. Unfortunate from a tailoring point of view, the cross-folds in the middle of a buttoned black coat added to the impression, as if the fastenings of the garment were tried to the utmost. From the head, set upward on a thick neck, the eyes, with puffy lower lids, stared with a haughty droop on each side of a hooked aggressive nose, nobly salient in the vast pale circumference of the face. A shiny silk hat and a pair of worn gloves lying ready on the end of a long table looked expanded too, enormous.

He stood on the hearthrug in big, roomy boots, and uttered no word of greeting.

"I would like to know if this is the beginning of another dynamite campaign," he asked at once in a deep, very smooth voice. "Don't go into details. I have no time for that."

The Assistant Commissioner's figure before this big and rustic Presence had the frail slenderness of a reed addressing an oak. And indeed the unbroken record of that

man's descent surpassed in the number of centuries the age of the oldest oak in the country.

"No. As far as one can be positive about anything I can assure you that it is not."

"Yes. But your idea of assurances over there," said the great man, with a contemptuous wave of his hand towards a window giving on the broad thoroughfare, "seems to consist mainly in making the Secretary of State look a fool. I have been told positively in this very room less than a month ago that nothing of the sort was even possible."

The Assistant Commissioner glanced in the direction of the window calmly.

"You will allow me to remark, Sir Ethelred, that so far I have had no opportunity to give you assurances of any kind."

The haughty droop of the eyes was focussed now upon the Assistant Commissioner.

"True," confessed the deep, smooth voice. "I sent for Heat. You are still rather a novice in your new berth. And how are you getting on over there?"

"I believe I am learning something every day."

"Of course, of course. I hope you will get on."

"Thank you, Sir Ethelred. I've learned something to-day, and even within the last hour or so. There is much in this affair of a kind that does not meet the eye in a usual anarchist outrage, even if one looked into it as deep as can be. That's why I am here."

The great man put his arms akimbo, the backs of his big hands resting on his hips.

"Very well. Go on. Only no details, pray. Spare me the details."

"You shall not be troubled with them, Sir Ethelred," the Assistant Commissioner began, with a calm and untroubled assurance. While he was speaking the hands on the face of the clock behind the great man's back — a heavy, glistening affair of massive scrolls in the same dark marble as the mantelpiece, and with a ghostly, evanescent tick — had moved through the space of seven minutes. He spoke with a studious fidelity to a parenthetical manner, into which every little fact — that is, every detail — fitted with delightful ease. Not a murmur nor even a movement hinted at interruption. The great Personage might have been the statue of one of his own princely ancestors stripped of a crusader's war harness, and put into an ill-fitting frock coat. The Assistant Commissioner felt as though he were at liberty to talk for an hour. But he kept his head, and at the end of the time mentioned above he broke off with a sudden conclusion, which, reproducing the opening statement, pleasantly surprised Sir Ethelred by its apparent swiftness and force.

"The kind of thing which meets us under the surface of this affair, otherwise without gravity, is unusual — in this precise form at least — and requires special treatment."

The tone of Sir Ethelred was deepened, full of conviction.

"I should think so — involving the Ambassador of a foreign power!"

"Oh! The Ambassador!" protested the other, erect and slender, allowing himself a mere half smile. "It would be stupid of me to advance anything of the kind. And it is absolutely unnecessary, because if I am right in my surmises, whether ambassador or hall porter it's a mere detail."

Sir Ethelred opened a wide mouth, like a cavern, into which the hooked nose seemed anxious to peer; there came from it a subdued rolling sound, as from a distant organ with the scornful indignation stop.

“No! These people are too impossible. What do they mean by importing their methods of Crim-Tartary here? A Turk would have more decency.”

“You forget, Sir Ethelred, that strictly speaking we know nothing positively — as yet.”

“No! But how would you define it? Shortly?”

“Barefaced audacity amounting to childishness of a peculiar sort.”

“We can’t put up with the innocence of nasty little children,” said the great and expanded personage, expanding a little more, as it were. The haughty drooping glance struck crushingly the carpet at the Assistant Commissioner’s feet. “They’ll have to get a hard rap on the knuckles over this affair. We must be in a position to — What is your general idea, stated shortly? No need to go into details.”

“No, Sir Ethelred. In principle, I should lay it down that the existence of secret agents should not be tolerated, as tending to augment the positive dangers of the evil against which they are used. That the spy will fabricate his information is a mere commonplace. But in the sphere of political and revolutionary action, relying partly on violence, the professional spy has every facility to fabricate the very facts themselves, and will spread the double evil of emulation in one direction, and of panic, hasty legislation, unreflecting hate, on the other. However, this is an imperfect world — ”

The deep-voiced Presence on the hearthrug, motionless, with big elbows stuck out, said hastily:

“Be lucid, please.”

“Yes, Sir Ethelred — An imperfect world. Therefore directly the character of this affair suggested itself to me, I thought it should be dealt with with special secrecy, and ventured to come over here.”

“That’s right,” approved the great Personage, glancing down complacently over his double chin. “I am glad there’s somebody over at your shop who thinks that the Secretary of State may be trusted now and then.”

The Assistant Commissioner had an amused smile.

“I was really thinking that it might be better at this stage for Heat to be replaced by — ”

“What! Heat? An ass — eh?” exclaimed the great man, with distinct animosity.

“Not at all. Pray, Sir Ethelred, don’t put that unjust interpretation on my remarks.”

“Then what? Too clever by half?”

“Neither — at least not as a rule. All the grounds of my surmises I have from him. The only thing I’ve discovered by myself is that he has been making use of that man privately. Who could blame him? He’s an old police hand. He told me virtually that he must have tools to work with. It occurred to me that this tool should be surrendered to the Special Crimes division as a whole, instead of remaining the private property of Chief Inspector Heat. I extend my conception of our departmental duties to the

suppression of the secret agent. But Chief Inspector Heat is an old departmental hand. He would accuse me of perverting its morality and attacking its efficiency. He would define it bitterly as protection extended to the criminal class of revolutionists. It would mean just that to him.”

“Yes. But what do you mean?”

“I mean to say, first, that there’s but poor comfort in being able to declare that any given act of violence — damaging property or destroying life — is not the work of anarchism at all, but of something else altogether — some species of authorised scoundrelism. This, I fancy, is much more frequent than we suppose. Next, it’s obvious that the existence of these people in the pay of foreign governments destroys in a measure the efficiency of our supervision. A spy of that sort can afford to be more reckless than the most reckless of conspirators. His occupation is free from all restraint. He’s without as much faith as is necessary for complete negation, and without that much law as is implied in lawlessness. Thirdly, the existence of these spies amongst the revolutionary groups, which we are reproached for harbouring here, does away with all certitude. You have received a reassuring statement from Chief Inspector Heat some time ago. It was by no means groundless — and yet this episode happens. I call it an episode, because this affair, I make bold to say, is episodic; it is no part of any general scheme, however wild. The very peculiarities which surprise and perplex Chief Inspector Heat establish its character in my eyes. I am keeping clear of details, Sir Ethelred.”

The Personage on the hearthrug had been listening with profound attention.

“Just so. Be as concise as you can.”

The Assistant Commissioner intimated by an earnest deferential gesture that he was anxious to be concise.

“There is a peculiar stupidity and feebleness in the conduct of this affair which gives me excellent hopes of getting behind it and finding there something else than an individual freak of fanaticism. For it is a planned thing, undoubtedly. The actual perpetrator seems to have been led by the hand to the spot, and then abandoned hurriedly to his own devices. The inference is that he was imported from abroad for the purpose of committing this outrage. At the same time one is forced to the conclusion that he did not know enough English to ask his way, unless one were to accept the fantastic theory that he was a deaf mute. I wonder now — But this is idle. He has destroyed himself by an accident, obviously. Not an extraordinary accident. But an extraordinary little fact remains: the address on his clothing discovered by the merest accident, too. It is an incredible little fact, so incredible that the explanation which will account for it is bound to touch the bottom of this affair. Instead of instructing Heat to go on with this case, my intention is to seek this explanation personally — by myself, I mean — where it may be picked up. That is in a certain shop in Brett Street, and on the lips of a certain secret agent once upon a time the confidential and trusted spy of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim, Ambassador of a Great Power to the Court of St James.”

The Assistant Commissioner paused, then added: "Those fellows are a perfect pest." In order to raise his drooping glance to the speaker's face, the Personage on the hearthrug had gradually tilted his head farther back, which gave him an aspect of extraordinary haughtiness.

"Why not leave it to Heat?"

"Because he is an old departmental hand. They have their own morality. My line of inquiry would appear to him an awful perversion of duty. For him the plain duty is to fasten the guilt upon as many prominent anarchists as he can on some slight indications he had picked up in the course of his investigation on the spot; whereas I, he would say, am bent upon vindicating their innocence. I am trying to be as lucid as I can in presenting this obscure matter to you without details."

"He would, would he?" muttered the proud head of Sir Ethelred from its lofty elevation.

"I am afraid so — with an indignation and disgust of which you or I can have no idea. He's an excellent servant. We must not put an undue strain on his loyalty. That's always a mistake. Besides, I want a free hand — a freer hand than it would be perhaps advisable to give Chief Inspector Heat. I haven't the slightest wish to spare this man Verloc. He will, I imagine, be extremely startled to find his connection with this affair, whatever it may be, brought home to him so quickly. Frightening him will not be very difficult. But our true objective lies behind him somewhere. I want your authority to give him such assurances of personal safety as I may think proper."

"Certainly," said the Personage on the hearthrug. "Find out as much as you can; find it out in your own way."

"I must set about it without loss of time, this very evening," said the Assistant Commissioner.

Sir Ethelred shifted one hand under his coat tails, and tilting back his head, looked at him steadily.

"We'll have a late sitting to-night," he said. "Come to the House with your discoveries if we are not gone home. I'll warn Toodles to look out for you. He'll take you into my room."

The numerous family and the wide connections of the youthful-looking Private Secretary cherished for him the hope of an austere and exalted destiny. Meantime the social sphere he adorned in his hours of idleness chose to pet him under the above nickname. And Sir Ethelred, hearing it on the lips of his wife and girls every day (mostly at breakfast-time), had conferred upon it the dignity of unsmiling adoption.

The Assistant Commissioner was surprised and gratified extremely.

"I shall certainly bring my discoveries to the House on the chance of you having the time to — "

"I won't have the time," interrupted the great Personage. "But I will see you. I haven't the time now — And you are going yourself?"

"Yes, Sir Ethelred. I think it the best way."

The Personage had tilted his head so far back that, in order to keep the Assistant Commissioner under his observation, he had to nearly close his eyes.

“H’m. Ha! And how do you propose — Will you assume a disguise?”

“Hardly a disguise! I’ll change my clothes, of course.”

“Of course,” repeated the great man, with a sort of absent-minded loftiness. He turned his big head slowly, and over his shoulder gave a haughty oblique stare to the ponderous marble timepiece with the sly, feeble tick. The gilt hands had taken the opportunity to steal through no less than five and twenty minutes behind his back.

The Assistant Commissioner, who could not see them, grew a little nervous in the interval. But the great man presented to him a calm and undismayed face.

“Very well,” he said, and paused, as if in deliberate contempt of the official clock. “But what first put you in motion in this direction?”

“I have been always of opinion,” began the Assistant Commissioner.

“Ah. Yes! Opinion. That’s of course. But the immediate motive?”

“What shall I say, Sir Ethelred? A new man’s antagonism to old methods. A desire to know something at first hand. Some impatience. It’s my old work, but the harness is different. It has been chafing me a little in one or two tender places.”

“I hope you’ll get on over there,” said the great man kindly, extending his hand, soft to the touch, but broad and powerful like the hand of a glorified farmer. The Assistant Commissioner shook it, and withdrew.

In the outer room Toodles, who had been waiting perched on the edge of a table, advanced to meet him, subduing his natural buoyancy.

“Well? Satisfactory?” he asked, with airy importance.

“Perfectly. You’ve earned my undying gratitude,” answered the Assistant Commissioner, whose long face looked wooden in contrast with the peculiar character of the other’s gravity, which seemed perpetually ready to break into ripples and chuckles.

“That’s all right. But seriously, you can’t imagine how irritated he is by the attacks on his Bill for the Nationalisation of Fisheries. They call it the beginning of social revolution. Of course, it is a revolutionary measure. But these fellows have no decency. The personal attacks — ”

“I read the papers,” remarked the Assistant Commissioner.

“Odious? Eh? And you have no notion what a mass of work he has got to get through every day. He does it all himself. Seems unable to trust anyone with these Fisheries.”

“And yet he’s given a whole half hour to the consideration of my very small sprat,” interjected the Assistant Commissioner.

“Small! Is it? I’m glad to hear that. But it’s a pity you didn’t keep away, then. This fight takes it out of him frightfully. The man’s getting exhausted. I feel it by the way he leans on my arm as we walk over. And, I say, is he safe in the streets? Mullins has been marching his men up here this afternoon. There’s a constable stuck by every lamp-post, and every second person we meet between this and Palace Yard is an obvious ‘tec.’ It will get on his nerves presently. I say, these foreign scoundrels

aren't likely to throw something at him — are they? It would be a national calamity. The country can't spare him."

"Not to mention yourself. He leans on your arm," suggested the Assistant Commissioner soberly. "You would both go."

"It would be an easy way for a young man to go down into history? Not so many British Ministers have been assassinated as to make it a minor incident. But seriously now — "

"I am afraid that if you want to go down into history you'll have to do something for it. Seriously, there's no danger whatever for both of you but from overwork."

The sympathetic Toodles welcomed this opening for a chuckle.

"The Fisheries won't kill me. I am used to late hours," he declared, with ingenuous levity. But, feeling an instant compunction, he began to assume an air of statesman-like moodiness, as one draws on a glove. "His massive intellect will stand any amount of work. It's his nerves that I am afraid of. The reactionary gang, with that abusive brute Cheeseman at their head, insult him every night."

"If he will insist on beginning a revolution!" murmured the Assistant Commissioner.

"The time has come, and he is the only man great enough for the work," protested the revolutionary Toodles, flaring up under the calm, speculative gaze of the Assistant Commissioner. Somewhere in a corridor a distant bell tinkled urgently, and with devoted vigilance the young man pricked up his ears at the sound. "He's ready to go now," he exclaimed in a whisper, snatched up his hat, and vanished from the room.

The Assistant Commissioner went out by another door in a less elastic manner. Again he crossed the wide thoroughfare, walked along a narrow street, and re-entered hastily his own departmental buildings. He kept up this accelerated pace to the door of his private room. Before he had closed it fairly his eyes sought his desk. He stood still for a moment, then walked up, looked all round on the floor, sat down in his chair, rang a bell, and waited.

"Chief Inspector Heat gone yet?"

"Yes, sir. Went away half-an-hour ago."

He nodded. "That will do." And sitting still, with his hat pushed off his forehead, he thought that it was just like Heat's confounded cheek to carry off quietly the only piece of material evidence. But he thought this without animosity. Old and valued servants will take liberties. The piece of overcoat with the address sewn on was certainly not a thing to leave about. Dismissing from his mind this manifestation of Chief Inspector Heat's mistrust, he wrote and despatched a note to his wife, charging her to make his apologies to Michaelis' great lady, with whom they were engaged to dine that evening.

The short jacket and the low, round hat he assumed in a sort of curtained alcove containing a washstand, a row of wooden pegs and a shelf, brought out wonderfully the length of his grave, brown face. He stepped back into the full light of the room, looking like the vision of a cool, reflective Don Quixote, with the sunken eyes of a dark enthusiast and a very deliberate manner. He left the scene of his daily labours quickly like an unobtrusive shadow. His descent into the street was like the descent into a

slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off. A murky, gloomy dampness enveloped him. The walls of the houses were wet, the mud of the roadway glistened with an effect of phosphorescence, and when he emerged into the Strand out of a narrow street by the side of Charing Cross Station the genius of the locality assimilated him. He might have been but one more of the queer foreign fish that can be seen of an evening about there flitting round the dark corners.

He came to a stand on the very edge of the pavement, and waited. His exercised eyes had made out in the confused movements of lights and shadows thronging the roadway the crawling approach of a hansom. He gave no sign; but when the low step gliding along the curbstone came to his feet he dodged in skilfully in front of the big turning wheel, and spoke up through the little trap door almost before the man gazing supinely ahead from his perch was aware of having been boarded by a fare.

It was not a long drive. It ended by signal abruptly, nowhere in particular, between two lamp-posts before a large drapery establishment — a long range of shops already lapped up in sheets of corrugated iron for the night. Tendering a coin through the trap door the fare slipped out and away, leaving an effect of uncanny, eccentric ghastliness upon the driver's mind. But the size of the coin was satisfactory to his touch, and his education not being literary, he remained untroubled by the fear of finding it presently turned to a dead leaf in his pocket. Raised above the world of fares by the nature of his calling, he contemplated their actions with a limited interest. The sharp pulling of his horse right round expressed his philosophy.

Meantime the Assistant Commissioner was already giving his order to a waiter in a little Italian restaurant round the corner — one of those traps for the hungry, long and narrow, baited with a perspective of mirrors and white napery; without air, but with an atmosphere of their own — an atmosphere of fraudulent cookery mocking an abject mankind in the most pressing of its miserable necessities. In this immoral atmosphere the Assistant Commissioner, reflecting upon his enterprise, seemed to lose some more of his identity. He had a sense of loneliness, of evil freedom. It was rather pleasant. When, after paying for his short meal, he stood up and waited for his change, he saw himself in the sheet of glass, and was struck by his foreign appearance. He contemplated his own image with a melancholy and inquisitive gaze, then by sudden inspiration raised the collar of his jacket. This arrangement appeared to him commendable, and he completed it by giving an upward twist to the ends of his black moustache. He was satisfied by the subtle modification of his personal aspect caused by these small changes. "That'll do very well," he thought. "I'll get a little wet, a little splashed — "

He became aware of the waiter at his elbow and of a small pile of silver coins on the edge of the table before him. The waiter kept one eye on it, while his other eye followed the long back of a tall, not very young girl, who passed up to a distant table looking perfectly sightless and altogether unapproachable. She seemed to be a habitual customer.

On going out the Assistant Commissioner made to himself the observation that the patrons of the place had lost in the frequentation of fraudulent cookery all their national

and private characteristics. And this was strange, since the Italian restaurant is such a peculiarly British institution. But these people were as denationalised as the dishes set before them with every circumstance of unstamped respectability. Neither was their personality stamped in any way, professionally, socially or racially. They seemed created for the Italian restaurant, unless the Italian restaurant had been perchance created for them. But that last hypothesis was unthinkable, since one could not place them anywhere outside those special establishments. One never met these enigmatical persons elsewhere. It was impossible to form a precise idea what occupations they followed by day and where they went to bed at night. And he himself had become unplaced. It would have been impossible for anybody to guess his occupation. As to going to bed, there was a doubt even in his own mind. Not indeed in regard to his domicile itself, but very much so in respect of the time when he would be able to return there. A pleasurable feeling of independence possessed him when he heard the glass doors swing to behind his back with a sort of imperfect baffled thud. He advanced at once into an immensity of greasy slime and damp plaster interspersed with lamps, and enveloped, oppressed, penetrated, choked, and suffocated by the blackness of a wet London night, which is composed of soot and drops of water.

Brett Street was not very far away. It branched off, narrow, from the side of an open triangular space surrounded by dark and mysterious houses, temples of petty commerce emptied of traders for the night. Only a fruiterer's stall at the corner made a violent blaze of light and colour. Beyond all was black, and the few people passing in that direction vanished at one stride beyond the glowing heaps of oranges and lemons. No footsteps echoed. They would never be heard of again. The adventurous head of the Special Crimes Department watched these disappearances from a distance with an interested eye. He felt light-hearted, as though he had been ambushed all alone in a jungle many thousands of miles away from departmental desks and official inkstands. This joyousness and dispersion of thought before a task of some importance seems to prove that this world of ours is not such a very serious affair after all. For the Assistant Commissioner was not constitutionally inclined to levity.

The policeman on the beat projected his sombre and moving form against the luminous glory of oranges and lemons, and entered Brett Street without haste. The Assistant Commissioner, as though he were a member of the criminal classes, lingered out of sight, awaiting his return. But this constable seemed to be lost for ever to the force. He never returned: must have gone out at the other end of Brett Street.

The Assistant Commissioner, reaching this conclusion, entered the street in his turn, and came upon a large van arrested in front of the dimly lit window-panes of a carter's eating-house. The man was refreshing himself inside, and the horses, their big heads lowered to the ground, fed out of nose-bags steadily. Farther on, on the opposite side of the street, another suspect patch of dim light issued from Mr Verloc's shop front, hung with papers, heaving with vague piles of cardboard boxes and the shapes of books. The Assistant Commissioner stood observing it across the roadway. There could be no mistake. By the side of the front window, encumbered by the shadows of nondescript

things, the door, standing ajar, let escape on the pavement a narrow, clear streak of gas-light within.

Behind the Assistant Commissioner the van and horses, merged into one mass, seemed something alive — a square-backed black monster blocking half the street, with sudden iron-shod stampings, fierce jingles, and heavy, blowing sighs. The harshly festive, ill-omened glare of a large and prosperous public-house faced the other end of Brett Street across a wide road. This barrier of blazing lights, opposing the shadows gathered about the humble abode of Mr Verloc's domestic happiness, seemed to drive the obscurity of the street back upon itself, make it more sullen, brooding, and sinister.

Chapter 8

Having infused by persistent importunities some sort of heat into the chilly interest of several licensed victuallers (the acquaintances once upon a time of her late unlucky husband), Mrs Verloc's mother had at last secured her admission to certain almshouses founded by a wealthy innkeeper for the destitute widows of the trade.

This end, conceived in the astuteness of her uneasy heart, the old woman had pursued with secrecy and determination. That was the time when her daughter Winnie could not help passing a remark to Mr Verloc that "mother has been spending half-crowns and five shillings almost every day this last week in cab fares." But the remark was not made grudgingly. Winnie respected her mother's infirmities. She was only a little surprised at this sudden mania for locomotion. Mr Verloc, who was sufficiently magnificent in his way, had grunted the remark impatiently aside as interfering with his meditations. These were frequent, deep, and prolonged; they bore upon a matter more important than five shillings. Distinctly more important, and beyond all comparison more difficult to consider in all its aspects with philosophical serenity.

Her object attained in astute secrecy, the heroic old woman had made a clean breast of it to Mrs Verloc. Her soul was triumphant and her heart tremulous. Inwardly she quaked, because she dreaded and admired the calm, self-contained character of her daughter Winnie, whose displeasure was made redoubtable by a diversity of dreadful silences. But she did not allow her inward apprehensions to rob her of the advantage of venerable placidity conferred upon her outward person by her triple chin, the floating amplexness of her ancient form, and the impotent condition of her legs.

The shock of the information was so unexpected that Mrs Verloc, against her usual practice when addressed, interrupted the domestic occupation she was engaged upon. It was the dusting of the furniture in the parlour behind the shop. She turned her head towards her mother.

"Whatever did you want to do that for?" she exclaimed, in scandalised astonishment.

The shock must have been severe to make her depart from that distant and uninquiring acceptance of facts which was her force and her safeguard in life.

"Weren't you made comfortable enough here?"

She had lapsed into these inquiries, but next moment she saved the consistency of her conduct by resuming her dusting, while the old woman sat scared and dumb under her dingy white cap and lustreless dark wig.

Winnie finished the chair, and ran the duster along the mahogany at the back of the horse-hair sofa on which Mr Verloc loved to take his ease in hat and overcoat. She was intent on her work, but presently she permitted herself another question.

“How in the world did you manage it, mother?”

As not affecting the inwardness of things, which it was Mrs Verloc’s principle to ignore, this curiosity was excusable. It bore merely on the methods. The old woman welcomed it eagerly as bringing forward something that could be talked about with much sincerity.

She favoured her daughter by an exhaustive answer, full of names and enriched by side comments upon the ravages of time as observed in the alteration of human countenances. The names were principally the names of licensed victuallers — “poor daddy’s friends, my dear.” She enlarged with special appreciation on the kindness and condescension of a large brewer, a Baronet and an M. P., the Chairman of the Governors of the Charity. She expressed herself thus warmly because she had been allowed to interview by appointment his Private Secretary — “a very polite gentleman, all in black, with a gentle, sad voice, but so very, very thin and quiet. He was like a shadow, my dear.”

Winnie, prolonging her dusting operations till the tale was told to the end, walked out of the parlour into the kitchen (down two steps) in her usual manner, without the slightest comment.

Shedding a few tears in sign of rejoicing at her daughter’s mansuetude in this terrible affair, Mrs Verloc’s mother gave play to her astuteness in the direction of her furniture, because it was her own; and sometimes she wished it hadn’t been. Heroism is all very well, but there are circumstances when the disposal of a few tables and chairs, brass bedsteads, and so on, may be big with remote and disastrous consequences. She required a few pieces herself, the Foundation which, after many importunities, had gathered her to its charitable breast, giving nothing but bare planks and cheaply papered bricks to the objects of its solicitude. The delicacy guiding her choice to the least valuable and most dilapidated articles passed unacknowledged, because Winnie’s philosophy consisted in not taking notice of the inside of facts; she assumed that mother took what suited her best. As to Mr Verloc, his intense meditation, like a sort of Chinese wall, isolated him completely from the phenomena of this world of vain effort and illusory appearances.

Her selection made, the disposal of the rest became a perplexing question in a particular way. She was leaving it in Brett Street, of course. But she had two children. Winnie was provided for by her sensible union with that excellent husband, Mr Verloc. Stevie was destitute — and a little peculiar. His position had to be considered before the claims of legal justice and even the promptings of partiality. The possession of the furniture would not be in any sense a provision. He ought to have it — the poor boy. But to give it to him would be like tampering with his position of complete dependence. It was a sort of claim which she feared to weaken. Moreover, the susceptibilities of Mr Verloc would perhaps not brook being beholden to his brother-in-law for the chairs he sat on. In a long experience of gentlemen lodgers, Mrs Verloc’s mother had acquired a dismal but resigned notion of the fantastic side of human nature. What if Mr Verloc suddenly took it into his head to tell Stevie to take his blessed sticks somewhere out

of that? A division, on the other hand, however carefully made, might give some cause of offence to Winnie. No, Stevie must remain destitute and dependent. And at the moment of leaving Brett Street she had said to her daughter: "No use waiting till I am dead, is there? Everything I leave here is altogether your own now, my dear."

Winnie, with her hat on, silent behind her mother's back, went on arranging the collar of the old woman's cloak. She got her hand-bag, an umbrella, with an impassive face. The time had come for the expenditure of the sum of three-and-sixpence on what might well be supposed the last cab drive of Mrs Verloc's mother's life. They went out at the shop door.

The conveyance awaiting them would have illustrated the proverb that "truth can be more cruel than caricature," if such a proverb existed. Crawling behind an infirm horse, a metropolitan hackney carriage drew up on wobbly wheels and with a maimed driver on the box. This last peculiarity caused some embarrassment. Catching sight of a hooked iron contrivance protruding from the left sleeve of the man's coat, Mrs Verloc's mother lost suddenly the heroic courage of these days. She really couldn't trust herself. "What do you think, Winnie?" She hung back. The passionate expostulations of the big-faced cabman seemed to be squeezed out of a blocked throat. Leaning over from his box, he whispered with mysterious indignation. What was the matter now? Was it possible to treat a man so? His enormous and unwashed countenance flamed red in the muddy stretch of the street. Was it likely they would have given him a licence, he inquired desperately, if —

The police constable of the locality quieted him by a friendly glance; then addressing himself to the two women without marked consideration, said:

"He's been driving a cab for twenty years. I never knew him to have an accident."

"Accident!" shouted the driver in a scornful whisper.

The policeman's testimony settled it. The modest assemblage of seven people, mostly under age, dispersed. Winnie followed her mother into the cab. Stevie climbed on the box. His vacant mouth and distressed eyes depicted the state of his mind in regard to the transactions which were taking place. In the narrow streets the progress of the journey was made sensible to those within by the near fronts of the houses gliding past slowly and shakily, with a great rattle and jingling of glass, as if about to collapse behind the cab; and the infirm horse, with the harness hung over his sharp backbone flapping very loose about his thighs, appeared to be dancing mincingly on his toes with infinite patience. Later on, in the wider space of Whitehall, all visual evidences of motion became imperceptible. The rattle and jingle of glass went on indefinitely in front of the long Treasury building — and time itself seemed to stand still.

At last Winnie observed: "This isn't a very good horse."

Her eyes gleamed in the shadow of the cab straight ahead, immovable. On the box, Stevie shut his vacant mouth first, in order to ejaculate earnestly: "Don't."

The driver, holding high the reins twisted around the hook, took no notice. Perhaps he had not heard. Stevie's breast heaved.

"Don't whip."

The man turned slowly his bloated and sodden face of many colours bristling with white hairs. His little red eyes glistened with moisture. His big lips had a violet tint. They remained closed. With the dirty back of his whip-hand he rubbed the stubble sprouting on his enormous chin.

“You mustn’t,” stammered out Stevie violently. “It hurts.”

“Mustn’t whip,” queried the other in a thoughtful whisper, and immediately whipped. He did this, not because his soul was cruel and his heart evil, but because he had to earn his fare. And for a time the walls of St Stephen’s, with its towers and pinnacles, contemplated in immobility and silence a cab that jingled. It rolled too, however. But on the bridge there was a commotion. Stevie suddenly proceeded to get down from the box. There were shouts on the pavement, people ran forward, the driver pulled up, whispering curses of indignation and astonishment. Winnie lowered the window, and put her head out, white as a ghost. In the depths of the cab, her mother was exclaiming, in tones of anguish: “Is that boy hurt? Is that boy hurt?”

Stevie was not hurt, he had not even fallen, but excitement as usual had robbed him of the power of connected speech. He could do no more than stammer at the window. “Too heavy. Too heavy.” Winnie put out her hand on to his shoulder.

“Stevie! Get up on the box directly, and don’t try to get down again.”

“No. No. Walk. Must walk.”

In trying to state the nature of that necessity he stammered himself into utter incoherence. No physical impossibility stood in the way of his whim. Stevie could have managed easily to keep pace with the infirm, dancing horse without getting out of breath. But his sister withheld her consent decisively. “The idea! Whoever heard of such a thing! Run after a cab!” Her mother, frightened and helpless in the depths of the conveyance, entreated: “Oh, don’t let him, Winnie. He’ll get lost. Don’t let him.”

“Certainly not. What next! Mr Verloc will be sorry to hear of this nonsense, Stevie, — I can tell you. He won’t be happy at all.”

The idea of Mr Verloc’s grief and unhappiness acting as usual powerfully upon Stevie’s fundamentally docile disposition, he abandoned all resistance, and climbed up again on the box, with a face of despair.

The cabby turned at him his enormous and inflamed countenance truculently. “Don’t you go for trying this silly game again, young fellow.”

After delivering himself thus in a stern whisper, strained almost to extinction, he drove on, ruminating solemnly. To his mind the incident remained somewhat obscure. But his intellect, though it had lost its pristine vivacity in the benumbing years of sedentary exposure to the weather, lacked not independence or sanity. Gravely he dismissed the hypothesis of Stevie being a drunken young nipper.

Inside the cab the spell of silence, in which the two women had endured shoulder to shoulder the jolting, rattling, and jingling of the journey, had been broken by Stevie’s outbreak. Winnie raised her voice.

“You’ve done what you wanted, mother. You’ll have only yourself to thank for it if you aren’t happy afterwards. And I don’t think you’ll be. That I don’t. Weren’t

you comfortable enough in the house? Whatever people'll think of us — you throwing yourself like this on a Charity?"

"My dear," screamed the old woman earnestly above the noise, "you've been the best of daughters to me. As to Mr Verloc — there — "

Words failing her on the subject of Mr Verloc's excellence, she turned her old tearful eyes to the roof of the cab. Then she averted her head on the pretence of looking out of the window, as if to judge of their progress. It was insignificant, and went on close to the curbstone. Night, the early dirty night, the sinister, noisy, hopeless and rowdy night of South London, had overtaken her on her last cab drive. In the gas-light of the low-fronted shops her big cheeks glowed with an orange hue under a black and mauve bonnet.

Mrs Verloc's mother's complexion had become yellow by the effect of age and from a natural predisposition to biliousness, favoured by the trials of a difficult and worried existence, first as wife, then as widow. It was a complexion, that under the influence of a blush would take on an orange tint. And this woman, modest indeed but hardened in the fires of adversity, of an age, moreover, when blushes are not expected, had positively blushed before her daughter. In the privacy of a four-wheeler, on her way to a charity cottage (one of a row) which by the exiguity of its dimensions and the simplicity of its accommodation, might well have been devised in kindness as a place of training for the still more straitened circumstances of the grave, she was forced to hid from her own child a blush of remorse and shame.

Whatever people will think? She knew very well what they did think, the people Winnie had in her mind — the old friends of her husband, and others too, whose interest she had solicited with such flattering success. She had not known before what a good beggar she could be. But she guessed very well what inference was drawn from her application. On account of that shrinking delicacy, which exists side by side with aggressive brutality in masculine nature, the inquiries into her circumstances had not been pushed very far. She had checked them by a visible compression of the lips and some display of an emotion determined to be eloquently silent. And the men would become suddenly incurious, after the manner of their kind. She congratulated herself more than once on having nothing to do with women, who being naturally more callous and avid of details, would have been anxious to be exactly informed by what sort of unkind conduct her daughter and son-in-law had driven her to that sad extremity. It was only before the Secretary of the great brewer M. P. and Chairman of the Charity, who, acting for his principal, felt bound to be conscientiously inquisitive as to the real circumstances of the applicant, that she had burst into tears outright and aloud, as a cornered woman will weep. The thin and polite gentleman, after contemplating her with an air of being "struck all of a heap," abandoned his position under the cover of soothing remarks. She must not distress herself. The deed of the Charity did not absolutely specify "childless widows." In fact, it did not by any means disqualify her. But the discretion of the Committee must be an informed discretion. One could understand very well her unwillingness to be a burden, etc. etc. Thereupon, to his

profound disappointment, Mrs Verloc's mother wept some more with an augmented vehemence.

The tears of that large female in a dark, dusty wig, and ancient silk dress festooned with dingy white cotton lace, were the tears of genuine distress. She had wept because she was heroic and unscrupulous and full of love for both her children. Girls frequently get sacrificed to the welfare of the boys. In this case she was sacrificing Winnie. By the suppression of truth she was slandering her. Of course, Winnie was independent, and need not care for the opinion of people that she would never see and who would never see her; whereas poor Stevie had nothing in the world he could call his own except his mother's heroism and unscrupulousness.

The first sense of security following on Winnie's marriage wore off in time (for nothing lasts), and Mrs Verloc's mother, in the seclusion of the back bedroom, had recalled the teaching of that experience which the world impresses upon a widowed woman. But she had recalled it without vain bitterness; her store of resignation amounted almost to dignity. She reflected stoically that everything decays, wears out, in this world; that the way of kindness should be made easy to the well disposed; that her daughter Winnie was a most devoted sister, and a very self-confident wife indeed. As regards Winnie's sisterly devotion, her stoicism flinched. She excepted that sentiment from the rule of decay affecting all things human and some things divine. She could not help it; not to do so would have frightened her too much. But in considering the conditions of her daughter's married state, she rejected firmly all flattering illusions. She took the cold and reasonable view that the less strain put on Mr Verloc's kindness the longer its effects were likely to last. That excellent man loved his wife, of course, but he would, no doubt, prefer to keep as few of her relations as was consistent with the proper display of that sentiment. It would be better if its whole effect were concentrated on poor Stevie. And the heroic old woman resolved on going away from her children as an act of devotion and as a move of deep policy.

The "virtue" of this policy consisted in this (Mrs Verloc's mother was subtle in her way), that Stevie's moral claim would be strengthened. The poor boy — a good, useful boy, if a little peculiar — had not a sufficient standing. He had been taken over with his mother, somewhat in the same way as the furniture of the Belgravian mansion had been taken over, as if on the ground of belonging to her exclusively. What will happen, she asked herself (for Mrs Verloc's mother was in a measure imaginative), when I die? And when she asked herself that question it was with dread. It was also terrible to think that she would not then have the means of knowing what happened to the poor boy. But by making him over to his sister, by going thus away, she gave him the advantage of a directly dependent position. This was the more subtle sanction of Mrs Verloc's mother's heroism and unscrupulousness. Her act of abandonment was really an arrangement for settling her son permanently in life. Other people made material sacrifices for such an object, she in that way. It was the only way. Moreover, she would be able to see how it worked. Ill or well she would avoid the horrible incertitude on the death-bed. But it was hard, hard, cruelly hard.

The cab rattled, jingled, jolted; in fact, the last was quite extraordinary. By its disproportionate violence and magnitude it obliterated every sensation of onward movement; and the effect was of being shaken in a stationary apparatus like a mediæval device for the punishment of crime, or some very newfangled invention for the cure of a sluggish liver. It was extremely distressing; and the raising of Mrs Verloc's mother's voice sounded like a wail of pain.

"I know, my dear, you'll come to see me as often as you can spare the time. Won't you?"

"Of course," answered Winnie shortly, staring straight before her.

And the cab jolted in front of a steamy, greasy shop in a blaze of gas and in the smell of fried fish.

The old woman raised a wail again.

"And, my dear, I must see that poor boy every Sunday. He won't mind spending the day with his old mother — "

Winnie screamed out stolidly:

"Mind! I should think not. That poor boy will miss you something cruel. I wish you had thought a little of that, mother."

Not think of it! The heroic woman swallowed a playful and inconvenient object like a billiard ball, which had tried to jump out of her throat. Winnie sat mute for a while, pouting at the front of the cab, then snapped out, which was an unusual tone with her:

"I expect I'll have a job with him at first, he'll be that restless — "

"Whatever you do, don't let him worry your husband, my dear."

Thus they discussed on familiar lines the bearings of a new situation. And the cab jolted. Mrs Verloc's mother expressed some misgivings. Could Stevie be trusted to come all that way alone? Winnie maintained that he was much less "absent-minded" now. They agreed as to that. It could not be denied. Much less — hardly at all. They shouted at each other in the jingle with comparative cheerfulness. But suddenly the maternal anxiety broke out afresh. There were two omnibuses to take, and a short walk between. It was too difficult! The old woman gave way to grief and consternation.

Winnie stared forward.

"Don't you upset yourself like this, mother. You must see him, of course."

"No, my dear. I'll try not to."

She mopped her streaming eyes.

"But you can't spare the time to come with him, and if he should forget himself and lose his way and somebody spoke to him sharply, his name and address may slip his memory, and he'll remain lost for days and days — "

The vision of a workhouse infirmary for poor Stevie — if only during inquiries — wrung her heart. For she was a proud woman. Winnie's stare had grown hard, intent, inventive.

"I can't bring him to you myself every week," she cried. "But don't you worry, mother. I'll see to it that he don't get lost for long."

They felt a peculiar bump; a vision of brick pillars lingered before the rattling windows of the cab; a sudden cessation of atrocious jolting and uproarious jingling dazed the two women. What had happened? They sat motionless and scared in the profound stillness, till the door came open, and a rough, strained whispering was heard:

“Here you are!”

A range of gabled little houses, each with one dim yellow window, on the ground floor, surrounded the dark open space of a grass plot planted with shrubs and railed off from the patchwork of lights and shadows in the wide road, resounding with the dull rumble of traffic. Before the door of one of these tiny houses — one without a light in the little downstairs window — the cab had come to a standstill. Mrs Verloc’s mother got out first, backwards, with a key in her hand. Winnie lingered on the flagstone path to pay the cabman. Stevie, after helping to carry inside a lot of small parcels, came out and stood under the light of a gas-lamp belonging to the Charity. The cabman looked at the pieces of silver, which, appearing very minute in his big, grimy palm, symbolised the insignificant results which reward the ambitious courage and toil of a mankind whose day is short on this earth of evil.

He had been paid decently — four one-shilling pieces — and he contemplated them in perfect stillness, as if they had been the surprising terms of a melancholy problem. The slow transfer of that treasure to an inner pocket demanded much laborious groping in the depths of decayed clothing. His form was squat and without flexibility. Stevie, slender, his shoulders a little up, and his hands thrust deep in the side pockets of his warm overcoat, stood at the edge of the path, pouting.

The cabman, pausing in his deliberate movements, seemed struck by some misty recollection.

“Oh! ‘Ere you are, young fellow,” he whispered. “You’ll know him again — won’t you?”

Stevie was staring at the horse, whose hind quarters appeared unduly elevated by the effect of emaciation. The little stiff tail seemed to have been fitted in for a heartless joke; and at the other end the thin, flat neck, like a plank covered with old horse-hide, drooped to the ground under the weight of an enormous bony head. The ears hung at different angles, negligently; and the macabre figure of that mute dweller on the earth steamed straight up from ribs and backbone in the muggy stillness of the air.

The cabman struck lightly Stevie’s breast with the iron hook protruding from a ragged, greasy sleeve.

“Look ‘ere, young feller. ‘Ow’d you like to sit behind this ‘oss up to two o’clock in the morning p’raps?”

Stevie looked vacantly into the fierce little eyes with red-edged lids.

“He ain’t lame,” pursued the other, whispering with energy. “He ain’t got no sore places on ‘im. ‘Ere he is. ‘Ow would you like — ”

His strained, extinct voice invested his utterance with a character of vehement secrecy. Stevie’s vacant gaze was changing slowly into dread.

“You may well look! Till three and four o’clock in the morning. Cold and ‘ungry. Looking for fares. Drunks.”

His jovial purple cheeks bristled with white hairs; and like Virgil’s Silenus, who, his face smeared with the juice of berries, discoursed of Olympian Gods to the innocent shepherds of Sicily, he talked to Stevie of domestic matters and the affairs of men whose sufferings are great and immortality by no means assured.

“I am a night cabby, I am,” he whispered, with a sort of boastful exasperation. “I’ve got to take out what they will blooming well give me at the yard. I’ve got my missus and four kids at ‘ome.”

The monstrous nature of that declaration of paternity seemed to strike the world dumb. A silence reigned during which the flanks of the old horse, the steed of apocalyptic misery, smoked upwards in the light of the charitable gas-lamp.

The cabman grunted, then added in his mysterious whisper:

“This ain’t an easy world.” Stevie’s face had been twitching for some time, and at last his feelings burst out in their usual concise form.

“Bad! Bad!”

His gaze remained fixed on the ribs of the horse, self-conscious and sombre, as though he were afraid to look about him at the badness of the world. And his slenderness, his rosy lips and pale, clear complexion, gave him the aspect of a delicate boy, notwithstanding the fluffy growth of golden hair on his cheeks. He pouted in a scared way like a child. The cabman, short and broad, eyed him with his fierce little eyes that seemed to smart in a clear and corroding liquid.

“‘Ard on ‘osses, but dam’ sight ‘arder on poor chaps like me,” he wheezed just audibly.

“Poor! Poor!” stammered out Stevie, pushing his hands deeper into his pockets with convulsive sympathy. He could say nothing; for the tenderness to all pain and all misery, the desire to make the horse happy and the cabman happy, had reached the point of a bizarre longing to take them to bed with him. And that, he knew, was impossible. For Stevie was not mad. It was, as it were, a symbolic longing; and at the same time it was very distinct, because springing from experience, the mother of wisdom. Thus when as a child he cowered in a dark corner scared, wretched, sore, and miserable with the black, black misery of the soul, his sister Winnie used to come along, and carry him off to bed with her, as into a heaven of consoling peace. Stevie, though apt to forget mere facts, such as his name and address for instance, had a faithful memory of sensations. To be taken into a bed of compassion was the supreme remedy, with the only one disadvantage of being difficult of application on a large scale. And looking at the cabman, Stevie perceived this clearly, because he was reasonable.

The cabman went on with his leisurely preparations as if Stevie had not existed. He made as if to hoist himself on the box, but at the last moment from some obscure motive, perhaps merely from disgust with carriage exercise, desisted. He approached instead the motionless partner of his labours, and stooping to seize the bridle, lifted

up the big, weary head to the height of his shoulder with one effort of his right arm, like a feat of strength.

“Come on,” he whispered secretly.

Limping, he led the cab away. There was an air of austerity in this departure, the scrunched gravel of the drive crying out under the slowly turning wheels, the horse’s lean thighs moving with ascetic deliberation away from the light into the obscurity of the open space bordered dimly by the pointed roofs and the feebly shining windows of the little alms-houses. The plaint of the gravel travelled slowly all round the drive. Between the lamps of the charitable gateway the slow cortege reappeared, lighted up for a moment, the short, thick man limping busily, with the horse’s head held aloft in his fist, the lank animal walking in stiff and forlorn dignity, the dark, low box on wheels rolling behind comically with an air of waddling. They turned to the left. There was a pub down the street, within fifty yards of the gate.

Stevie left alone beside the private lamp-post of the Charity, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, glared with vacant sulkiness. At the bottom of his pockets his incapable weak hands were clinched hard into a pair of angry fists. In the face of anything which affected directly or indirectly his morbid dread of pain, Stevie ended by turning vicious. A magnanimous indignation swelled his frail chest to bursting, and caused his candid eyes to squint. Supremely wise in knowing his own powerlessness, Stevie was not wise enough to restrain his passions. The tenderness of his universal charity had two phases as indissolubly joined and connected as the reverse and obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate compassion was succeeded by the pain of an innocent but pitiless rage. Those two states expressing themselves outwardly by the same signs of futile bodily agitation, his sister Winnie soothed his excitement without ever fathoming its twofold character. Mrs Verloc wasted no portion of this transient life in seeking for fundamental information. This is a sort of economy having all the appearances and some of the advantages of prudence. Obviously it may be good for one not to know too much. And such a view accords very well with constitutional indolence.

On that evening on which it may be said that Mrs Verloc’s mother having parted for good from her children had also departed this life, Winnie Verloc did not investigate her brother’s psychology. The poor boy was excited, of course. After once more assuring the old woman on the threshold that she would know how to guard against the risk of Stevie losing himself for very long on his pilgrimages of filial piety, she took her brother’s arm to walk away. Stevie did not even mutter to himself, but with the special sense of sisterly devotion developed in her earliest infancy, she felt that the boy was very much excited indeed. Holding tight to his arm, under the appearance of leaning on it, she thought of some words suitable to the occasion.

“Now, Stevie, you must look well after me at the crossings, and get first into the ‘bus, like a good brother.”

This appeal to manly protection was received by Stevie with his usual docility. It flattered him. He raised his head and threw out his chest.

“Don’t be nervous, Winnie. Mustn’t be nervous! ‘Bus all right,” he answered in a brusque, slurring stammer partaking of the timorousness of a child and the resolution of a man. He advanced fearlessly with the woman on his arm, but his lower lip dropped. Nevertheless, on the pavement of the squalid and wide thoroughfare, whose poverty in all the amenities of life stood foolishly exposed by a mad profusion of gas-lights, their resemblance to each other was so pronounced as to strike the casual passers-by.

Before the doors of the public-house at the corner, where the profusion of gas-light reached the height of positive wickedness, a four-wheeled cab standing by the curbstone with no one on the box, seemed cast out into the gutter on account of irremediable decay. Mrs Verloc recognised the conveyance. Its aspect was so profoundly lamentable, with such a perfection of grotesque misery and weirdness of macabre detail, as if it were the Cab of Death itself, that Mrs Verloc, with that ready compassion of a woman for a horse (when she is not sitting behind him), exclaimed vaguely:

“Poor brute!”

Hanging back suddenly, Stevie inflicted an arresting jerk upon his sister.

“Poor! Poor!” he ejaculated appreciatively. “Cabman poor too. He told me himself.”

The contemplation of the infirm and lonely steed overcame him. Jostled, but obstinate, he would remain there, trying to express the view newly opened to his sympathies of the human and equine misery in close association. But it was very difficult. “Poor brute, poor people!” was all he could repeat. It did not seem forcible enough, and he came to a stop with an angry splutter: “Shame!” Stevie was no master of phrases, and perhaps for that very reason his thoughts lacked clearness and precision. But he felt with greater completeness and some profundity. That little word contained all his sense of indignation and horror at one sort of wretchedness having to feed upon the anguish of the other — at the poor cabman beating the poor horse in the name, as it were, of his poor kids at home. And Stevie knew what it was to be beaten. He knew it from experience. It was a bad world. Bad! Bad!

Mrs Verloc, his only sister, guardian, and protector, could not pretend to such depths of insight. Moreover, she had not experienced the magic of the cabman’s eloquence. She was in the dark as to the inwardness of the word “Shame.” And she said placidly:

“Come along, Stevie. You can’t help that.”

The docile Stevie went along; but now he went along without pride, shamblingly, and muttering half words, and even words that would have been whole if they had not been made up of halves that did not belong to each other. It was as though he had been trying to fit all the words he could remember to his sentiments in order to get some sort of corresponding idea. And, as a matter of fact, he got it at last. He hung back to utter it at once.

“Bad world for poor people.”

Directly he had expressed that thought he became aware that it was familiar to him already in all its consequences. This circumstance strengthened his conviction immensely, but also augmented his indignation. Somebody, he felt, ought to be punished

for it — punished with great severity. Being no sceptic, but a moral creature, he was in a manner at the mercy of his righteous passions.

“Beastly!” he added concisely.

It was clear to Mrs Verloc that he was greatly excited.

“Nobody can help that,” she said. “Do come along. Is that the way you’re taking care of me?”

Stevie mended his pace obediently. He prided himself on being a good brother. His morality, which was very complete, demanded that from him. Yet he was pained at the information imparted by his sister Winnie who was good. Nobody could help that! He came along gloomily, but presently he brightened up. Like the rest of mankind, perplexed by the mystery of the universe, he had his moments of consoling trust in the organised powers of the earth.

“Police,” he suggested confidently.

“The police aren’t for that,” observed Mrs Verloc cursorily, hurrying on her way.

Stevie’s face lengthened considerably. He was thinking. The more intense his thinking, the slacker was the droop of his lower jaw.

And it was with an aspect of hopeless vacancy that he gave up his intellectual enterprise.

“Not for that?” he mumbled, resigned but surprised. “Not for that?” He had formed for himself an ideal conception of the metropolitan police as a sort of benevolent institution for the suppression of evil. The notion of benevolence especially was very closely associated with his sense of the power of the men in blue. He had liked all police constables tenderly, with a guileless trustfulness. And he was pained. He was irritated, too, by a suspicion of duplicity in the members of the force. For Stevie was frank and as open as the day himself. What did they mean by pretending then? Unlike his sister, who put her trust in face values, he wished to go to the bottom of the matter. He carried on his inquiry by means of an angry challenge.

“What for are they then, Winn? What are they for? Tell me.”

Winnie disliked controversy. But fearing most a fit of black depression consequent on Stevie missing his mother very much at first, she did not altogether decline the discussion. Guiltless of all irony, she answered yet in a form which was not perhaps unnatural in the wife of Mr Verloc, Delegate of the Central Red Committee, personal friend of certain anarchists, and a votary of social revolution.

“Don’t you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn’t take anything away from them who have.”

She avoided using the verb “to steal,” because it always made her brother uncomfortable. For Stevie was delicately honest. Certain simple principles had been instilled into him so anxiously (on account of his “queerness”) that the mere names of certain transgressions filled him with horror. He had been always easily impressed by speeches. He was impressed and startled now, and his intelligence was very alert.

“What?” he asked at once anxiously. “Not even if they were hungry? Mustn’t they?”

The two had paused in their walk.

“Not if they were ever so,” said Mrs Verloc, with the equanimity of a person untroubled by the problem of the distribution of wealth, and exploring the perspective of the roadway for an omnibus of the right colour. “Certainly not. But what’s the use of talking about all that? You aren’t ever hungry.”

She cast a swift glance at the boy, like a young man, by her side. She saw him amiable, attractive, affectionate, and only a little, a very little, peculiar. And she could not see him otherwise, for he was connected with what there was of the salt of passion in her tasteless life — the passion of indignation, of courage, of pity, and even of self-sacrifice. She did not add: “And you aren’t likely ever to be as long as I live.” But she might very well have done so, since she had taken effectual steps to that end. Mr Verloc was a very good husband. It was her honest impression that nobody could help liking the boy. She cried out suddenly:

“Quick, Stevie. Stop that green ‘bus.”

And Stevie, tremulous and important with his sister Winnie on his arm, flung up the other high above his head at the approaching ‘bus, with complete success.

An hour afterwards Mr Verloc raised his eyes from a newspaper he was reading, or at any rate looking at, behind the counter, and in the expiring clatter of the door-bell beheld Winnie, his wife, enter and cross the shop on her way upstairs, followed by Stevie, his brother-in-law. The sight of his wife was agreeable to Mr Verloc. It was his idiosyncrasy. The figure of his brother-in-law remained imperceptible to him because of the morose thoughtfulness that lately had fallen like a veil between Mr Verloc and the appearances of the world of senses. He looked after his wife fixedly, without a word, as though she had been a phantom. His voice for home use was husky and placid, but now it was heard not at all. It was not heard at supper, to which he was called by his wife in the usual brief manner: “Adolf.” He sat down to consume it without conviction, wearing his hat pushed far back on his head. It was not devotion to an outdoor life, but the frequentation of foreign cafés which was responsible for that habit, investing with a character of unceremonious impermanency Mr Verloc’s steady fidelity to his own fireside. Twice at the clatter of the cracked bell he arose without a word, disappeared into the shop, and came back silently. During these absences Mrs Verloc, becoming acutely aware of the vacant place at her right hand, missed her mother very much, and stared stonily; while Stevie, from the same reason, kept on shuffling his feet, as though the floor under the table were uncomfortably hot. When Mr Verloc returned to sit in his place, like the very embodiment of silence, the character of Mrs Verloc’s stare underwent a subtle change, and Stevie ceased to fidget with his feet, because of his great and awed regard for his sister’s husband. He directed at him glances of respectful compassion. Mr Verloc was sorry. His sister Winnie had impressed upon him (in the omnibus) that Mr Verloc would be found at home in a state of sorrow, and must not be worried. His father’s anger, the irritability of gentlemen lodgers, and Mr Verloc’s predisposition to immoderate grief, had been the main sanctions of Stevie’s self-restraint. Of these sentiments, all easily provoked, but not always easy to understand, the last had the greatest moral efficiency — because Mr Verloc was good. His mother

and his sister had established that ethical fact on an unshakable foundation. They had established, erected, consecrated it behind Mr Verloc's back, for reasons that had nothing to do with abstract morality. And Mr Verloc was not aware of it. It is but bare justice to him to say that he had no notion of appearing good to Stevie. Yet so it was. He was even the only man so qualified in Stevie's knowledge, because the gentlemen lodgers had been too transient and too remote to have anything very distinct about them but perhaps their boots; and as regards the disciplinary measures of his father, the desolation of his mother and sister shrank from setting up a theory of goodness before the victim. It would have been too cruel. And it was even possible that Stevie would not have believed them. As far as Mr Verloc was concerned, nothing could stand in the way of Stevie's belief. Mr Verloc was obviously yet mysteriously good. And the grief of a good man is august.

Stevie gave glances of reverential compassion to his brother-in-law. Mr Verloc was sorry. The brother of Winnie had never before felt himself in such close communion with the mystery of that man's goodness. It was an understandable sorrow. And Stevie himself was sorry. He was very sorry. The same sort of sorrow. And his attention being drawn to this unpleasant state, Stevie shuffled his feet. His feelings were habitually manifested by the agitation of his limbs.

"Keep your feet quiet, dear," said Mrs Verloc, with authority and tenderness; then turning towards her husband in an indifferent voice, the masterly achievement of instinctive tact: "Are you going out to-night?" she asked.

The mere suggestion seemed repugnant to Mr Verloc. He shook his head moodily, and then sat still with downcast eyes, looking at the piece of cheese on his plate for a whole minute. At the end of that time he got up, and went out — went right out in the clatter of the shop-door bell. He acted thus inconsistently, not from any desire to make himself unpleasant, but because of an unconquerable restlessness. It was no earthly good going out. He could not find anywhere in London what he wanted. But he went out. He led a cortege of dismal thoughts along dark streets, through lighted streets, in and out of two flash bars, as if in a half-hearted attempt to make a night of it, and finally back again to his menaced home, where he sat down fatigued behind the counter, and they crowded urgently round him, like a pack of hungry black hounds. After locking up the house and putting out the gas he took them upstairs with him — a dreadful escort for a man going to bed. His wife had preceded him some time before, and with her ample form defined vaguely under the counterpane, her head on the pillow, and a hand under the cheek offered to his distraction the view of early drowsiness arguing the possession of an equable soul. Her big eyes stared wide open, inert and dark against the snowy whiteness of the linen. She did not move.

She had an equable soul. She felt profoundly that things do not stand much looking into. She made her force and her wisdom of that instinct. But the taciturnity of Mr Verloc had been lying heavily upon her for a good many days. It was, as a matter of fact, affecting her nerves. Recumbent and motionless, she said placidly:

"You'll catch cold walking about in your socks like this."

This speech, becoming the solicitude of the wife and the prudence of the woman, took Mr Verloc unawares. He had left his boots downstairs, but he had forgotten to put on his slippers, and he had been turning about the bedroom on noiseless pads like a bear in a cage. At the sound of his wife's voice he stopped and stared at her with a somnambulistic, expressionless gaze so long that Mrs Verloc moved her limbs slightly under the bed-clothes. But she did not move her black head sunk in the white pillow one hand under her cheek and the big, dark, unwinking eyes.

Under her husband's expressionless stare, and remembering her mother's empty room across the landing, she felt an acute pang of loneliness. She had never been parted from her mother before. They had stood by each other. She felt that they had, and she said to herself that now mother was gone — gone for good. Mrs Verloc had no illusions. Stevie remained, however. And she said:

“Mother's done what she wanted to do. There's no sense in it that I can see. I'm sure she couldn't have thought you had enough of her. It's perfectly wicked, leaving us like that.”

Mr Verloc was not a well-read person; his range of allusive phrases was limited, but there was a peculiar aptness in circumstances which made him think of rats leaving a doomed ship. He very nearly said so. He had grown suspicious and embittered. Could it be that the old woman had such an excellent nose? But the unreasonableness of such a suspicion was patent, and Mr Verloc held his tongue. Not altogether, however. He muttered heavily:

“Perhaps it's just as well.”

He began to undress. Mrs Verloc kept very still, perfectly still, with her eyes fixed in a dreamy, quiet stare. And her heart for the fraction of a second seemed to stand still too. That night she was “not quite herself,” as the saying is, and it was borne upon her with some force that a simple sentence may hold several diverse meanings — mostly disagreeable. How was it just as well? And why? But she did not allow herself to fall into the idleness of barren speculation. She was rather confirmed in her belief that things did not stand being looked into. Practical and subtle in her way, she brought Stevie to the front without loss of time, because in her the singleness of purpose had the unerring nature and the force of an instinct.

“What I am going to do to cheer up that boy for the first few days I'm sure I don't know. He'll be worrying himself from morning till night before he gets used to mother being away. And he's such a good boy. I couldn't do without him.”

Mr Verloc went on divesting himself of his clothing with the unnoticing inward concentration of a man undressing in the solitude of a vast and hopeless desert. For thus inhospitably did this fair earth, our common inheritance, present itself to the mental vision of Mr Verloc. All was so still without and within that the lonely ticking of the clock on the landing stole into the room as if for the sake of company.

Mr Verloc, getting into bed on his own side, remained prone and mute behind Mrs Verloc's back. His thick arms rested abandoned on the outside of the counterpane like dropped weapons, like discarded tools. At that moment he was within a hair's breadth

of making a clean breast of it all to his wife. The moment seemed propitious. Looking out of the corners of his eyes, he saw her ample shoulders draped in white, the back of her head, with the hair done for the night in three plaits tied up with black tapes at the ends. And he forbore. Mr Verloc loved his wife as a wife should be loved — that is, maritally, with the regard one has for one's chief possession. This head arranged for the night, those ample shoulders, had an aspect of familiar sacredness — the sacredness of domestic peace. She moved not, massive and shapeless like a recumbent statue in the rough; he remembered her wide-open eyes looking into the empty room. She was mysterious, with the mysteriousness of living beings. The far-famed secret agent [delta] of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim's alarmist despatches was not the man to break into such mysteries. He was easily intimidated. And he was also indolent, with the indolence which is so often the secret of good nature. He forbore touching that mystery out of love, timidity, and indolence. There would be always time enough. For several minutes he bore his sufferings silently in the drowsy silence of the room. And then he disturbed it by a resolute declaration.

"I am going on the Continent to-morrow."

His wife might have fallen asleep already. He could not tell. As a matter of fact, Mrs Verloc had heard him. Her eyes remained very wide open, and she lay very still, confirmed in her instinctive conviction that things don't bear looking into very much. And yet it was nothing very unusual for Mr Verloc to take such a trip. He renewed his stock from Paris and Brussels. Often he went over to make his purchases personally. A little select connection of amateurs was forming around the shop in Brett Street, a secret connection eminently proper for any business undertaken by Mr Verloc, who, by a mystic accord of temperament and necessity, had been set apart to be a secret agent all his life.

He waited for a while, then added: "I'll be away a week or perhaps a fortnight. Get Mrs Neale to come for the day."

Mrs Neale was the charwoman of Brett Street. Victim of her marriage with a debauched joiner, she was oppressed by the needs of many infant children. Red-armed, and aproned in coarse sacking up to the arm-pits, she exhaled the anguish of the poor in a breath of soap-suds and rum, in the uproar of scrubbing, in the clatter of tin pails.

Mrs Verloc, full of deep purpose, spoke in the tone of the shallowest indifference.

"There is no need to have the woman here all day. I shall do very well with Stevie."

She let the lonely clock on the landing count off fifteen ticks into the abyss of eternity, and asked:

"Shall I put the light out?"

Mr Verloc snapped at his wife huskily.

"Put it out."

Chapter 9

Mr Verloc returning from the Continent at the end of ten days, brought back a mind evidently unrefreshed by the wonders of foreign travel and a countenance unlighted by the joys of home-coming. He entered in the clatter of the shop bell with an air of sombre and vexed exhaustion. His bag in hand, his head lowered, he strode straight behind the counter, and let himself fall into the chair, as though he had tramped all the way from Dover. It was early morning. Stevie, dusting various objects displayed in the front windows, turned to gape at him with reverence and awe.

“Here!” said Mr Verloc, giving a slight kick to the gladstone bag on the floor; and Stevie flung himself upon it, seized it, bore it off with triumphant devotion. He was so prompt that Mr Verloc was distinctly surprised.

Already at the clatter of the shop bell Mrs Neale, blackleading the parlour grate, had looked through the door, and rising from her knees had gone, aproned, and grimy with everlasting toll, to tell Mrs Verloc in the kitchen that “there was the master come back.”

Winnie came no farther than the inner shop door.

“You’ll want some breakfast,” she said from a distance.

Mr Verloc moved his hands slightly, as if overcome by an impossible suggestion. But once enticed into the parlour he did not reject the food set before him. He ate as if in a public place, his hat pushed off his forehead, the skirts of his heavy overcoat hanging in a triangle on each side of the chair. And across the length of the table covered with brown oil-cloth Winnie, his wife, talked evenly at him the wifely talk, as artfully adapted, no doubt, to the circumstances of this return as the talk of Penelope to the return of the wandering Odysseus. Mrs Verloc, however, had done no weaving during her husband’s absence. But she had had all the upstairs room cleaned thoroughly, had sold some wares, had seen Mr Michaelis several times. He had told her the last time that he was going away to live in a cottage in the country, somewhere on the London, Chatham, and Dover line. Karl Yundt had come too, once, led under the arm by that “wicked old housekeeper of his.” He was “a disgusting old man.” Of Comrade Ossipon, whom she had received curtly, entrenched behind the counter with a stony face and a faraway gaze, she said nothing, her mental reference to the robust anarchist being marked by a short pause, with the faintest possible blush. And bringing in her brother Stevie as soon as she could into the current of domestic events, she mentioned that the boy had moped a good deal.

“It’s all along of mother leaving us like this.”

Mr Verloc neither said, "Damn!" nor yet "Stevie be hanged!" And Mrs Verloc, not let into the secret of his thoughts, failed to appreciate the generosity of this restraint.

"It isn't that he doesn't work as well as ever," she continued. "He's been making himself very useful. You'd think he couldn't do enough for us."

Mr Verloc directed a casual and somnolent glance at Stevie, who sat on his right, delicate, pale-faced, his rosy mouth open vacantly. It was not a critical glance. It had no intention. And if Mr Verloc thought for a moment that his wife's brother looked uncommonly useless, it was only a dull and fleeting thought, devoid of that force and durability which enables sometimes a thought to move the world. Leaning back, Mr Verloc uncovered his head. Before his extended arm could put down the hat Stevie pounced upon it, and bore it off reverently into the kitchen. And again Mr Verloc was surprised.

"You could do anything with that boy, Adolf," Mrs Verloc said, with her best air of inflexible calmness. "He would go through fire for you. He — "

She paused attentive, her ear turned towards the door of the kitchen.

There Mrs Neale was scrubbing the floor. At Stevie's appearance she groaned lamentably, having observed that he could be induced easily to bestow for the benefit of her infant children the shilling his sister Winnie presented him with from time to time. On all fours amongst the puddles, wet and begrimed, like a sort of amphibious and domestic animal living in ash-bins and dirty water, she uttered the usual exordium: "It's all very well for you, kept doing nothing like a gentleman." And she followed it with the everlasting plaint of the poor, pathetically mendacious, miserably authenticated by the horrible breath of cheap rum and soap-suds. She scrubbed hard, snuffing all the time, and talking volubly. And she was sincere. And on each side of her thin red nose her bleared, misty eyes swam in tears, because she felt really the want of some sort of stimulant in the morning.

In the parlour Mrs Verloc observed, with knowledge:

"There's Mrs Neale at it again with her harrowing tales about her little children. They can't be all so little as she makes them out. Some of them must be big enough by now to try to do something for themselves. It only makes Stevie angry."

These words were confirmed by a thud as of a fist striking the kitchen table. In the normal evolution of his sympathy Stevie had become angry on discovering that he had no shilling in his pocket. In his inability to relieve at once Mrs Neale's "little 'uns'," privations he felt that somebody should be made to suffer for it. Mrs Verloc rose, and went into the kitchen to "stop that nonsense." And she did it firmly but gently. She was well aware that directly Mrs Neale received her money she went round the corner to drink ardent spirits in a mean and musty public-house — the unavoidable station on the *via dolorosa* of her life. Mrs Verloc's comment upon this practice had an unexpected profundity, as coming from a person disinclined to look under the surface of things. "Of course, what is she to do to keep up? If I were like Mrs Neale I expect I wouldn't act any different."

In the afternoon of the same day, as Mr Verloc, coming with a start out of the last of a long series of dozes before the parlour fire, declared his intention of going out for a walk, Winnie said from the shop:

“I wish you would take that boy out with you, Adolf.”

For the third time that day Mr Verloc was surprised. He stared stupidly at his wife. She continued in her steady manner. The boy, whenever he was not doing anything, moped in the house. It made her uneasy; it made her nervous, she confessed. And that from the calm Winnie sounded like exaggeration. But, in truth, Stevie moped in the striking fashion of an unhappy domestic animal. He would go up on the dark landing, to sit on the floor at the foot of the tall clock, with his knees drawn up and his head in his hands. To come upon his pallid face, with its big eyes gleaming in the dusk, was discomposing; to think of him up there was uncomfortable.

Mr Verloc got used to the startling novelty of the idea. He was fond of his wife as a man should be — that is, generously. But a weighty objection presented itself to his mind, and he formulated it.

“He’ll lose sight of me perhaps, and get lost in the street,” he said.

Mrs Verloc shook her head competently.

“He won’t. You don’t know him. That boy just worships you. But if you should miss him — ”

Mrs Verloc paused for a moment, but only for a moment.

“You just go on, and have your walk out. Don’t worry. He’ll be all right. He’s sure to turn up safe here before very long.”

This optimism procured for Mr Verloc his fourth surprise of the day.

“Is he?” he grunted doubtfully. But perhaps his brother-in-law was not such an idiot as he looked. His wife would know best. He turned away his heavy eyes, saying huskily: “Well, let him come along, then,” and relapsed into the clutches of black care, that perhaps prefers to sit behind a horseman, but knows also how to tread close on the heels of people not sufficiently well off to keep horses — like Mr Verloc, for instance.

Winnie, at the shop door, did not see this fatal attendant upon Mr Verloc’s walks. She watched the two figures down the squalid street, one tall and burly, the other slight and short, with a thin neck, and the peaked shoulders raised slightly under the large semi-transparent ears. The material of their overcoats was the same, their hats were black and round in shape. Inspired by the similarity of wearing apparel, Mrs Verloc gave rein to her fancy.

“Might be father and son,” she said to herself. She thought also that Mr Verloc was as much of a father as poor Stevie ever had in his life. She was aware also that it was her work. And with peaceful pride she congratulated herself on a certain resolution she had taken a few years before. It had cost her some effort, and even a few tears.

She congratulated herself still more on observing in the course of days that Mr Verloc seemed to be taking kindly to Stevie’s companionship. Now, when ready to go out for his walk, Mr Verloc called aloud to the boy, in the spirit, no doubt, in which a man invites the attendance of the household dog, though, of course, in a

different manner. In the house Mr Verloc could be detected staring curiously at Stevie a good deal. His own demeanour had changed. Taciturn still, he was not so listless. Mrs Verloc thought that he was rather jumpy at times. It might have been regarded as an improvement. As to Stevie, he moped no longer at the foot of the clock, but muttered to himself in corners instead in a threatening tone. When asked "What is it you're saying, Stevie?" he merely opened his mouth, and squinted at his sister. At odd times he clenched his fists without apparent cause, and when discovered in solitude would be scowling at the wall, with the sheet of paper and the pencil given him for drawing circles lying blank and idle on the kitchen table. This was a change, but it was no improvement. Mrs Verloc including all these vagaries under the general definition of excitement, began to fear that Stevie was hearing more than was good for him of her husband's conversations with his friends. During his "walks" Mr Verloc, of course, met and conversed with various persons. It could hardly be otherwise. His walks were an integral part of his outdoor activities, which his wife had never looked deeply into. Mrs Verloc felt that the position was delicate, but she faced it with the same impenetrable calmness which impressed and even astonished the customers of the shop and made the other visitors keep their distance a little wonderingly. No! She feared that there were things not good for Stevie to hear of, she told her husband. It only excited the poor boy, because he could not help them being so. Nobody could.

It was in the shop. Mr Verloc made no comment. He made no retort, and yet the retort was obvious. But he refrained from pointing out to his wife that the idea of making Stevie the companion of his walks was her own, and nobody else's. At that moment, to an impartial observer, Mr Verloc would have appeared more than human in his magnanimity. He took down a small cardboard box from a shelf, peeped in to see that the contents were all right, and put it down gently on the counter. Not till that was done did he break the silence, to the effect that most likely Stevie would profit greatly by being sent out of town for a while; only he supposed his wife could not get on without him.

"Could not get on without him!" repeated Mrs Verloc slowly. "I couldn't get on without him if it were for his good! The idea! Of course, I can get on without him. But there's nowhere for him to go."

Mr Verloc got out some brown paper and a ball of string; and meanwhile he muttered that Michaelis was living in a little cottage in the country. Michaelis wouldn't mind giving Stevie a room to sleep in. There were no visitors and no talk there. Michaelis was writing a book.

Mrs Verloc declared her affection for Michaelis; mentioned her abhorrence of Karl Yundt, "nasty old man"; and of Ossipon she said nothing. As to Stevie, he could be no other than very pleased. Mr Michaelis was always so nice and kind to him. He seemed to like the boy. Well, the boy was a good boy.

"You too seem to have grown quite fond of him of late," she added, after a pause, with her inflexible assurance.

Mr Verloc tying up the cardboard box into a parcel for the post, broke the string by an injudicious jerk, and muttered several swear words confidentially to himself. Then raising his tone to the usual husky mutter, he announced his willingness to take Stevie into the country himself, and leave him all safe with Michaelis.

He carried out this scheme on the very next day. Stevie offered no objection. He seemed rather eager, in a bewildered sort of way. He turned his candid gaze inquisitively to Mr Verloc's heavy countenance at frequent intervals, especially when his sister was not looking at him. His expression was proud, apprehensive, and concentrated, like that of a small child entrusted for the first time with a box of matches and the permission to strike a light. But Mrs Verloc, gratified by her brother's docility, recommended him not to dirty his clothes unduly in the country. At this Stevie gave his sister, guardian and protector a look, which for the first time in his life seemed to lack the quality of perfect childlike trustfulness. It was haughtily gloomy. Mrs Verloc smiled.

"Goodness me! You needn't be offended. You know you do get yourself very untidy when you get a chance, Stevie."

Mr Verloc was already gone some way down the street.

Thus in consequence of her mother's heroic proceedings, and of her brother's absence on this villegiature, Mrs Verloc found herself oftener than usual all alone not only in the shop, but in the house. For Mr Verloc had to take his walks. She was alone longer than usual on the day of the attempted bomb outrage in Greenwich Park, because Mr Verloc went out very early that morning and did not come back till nearly dusk. She did not mind being alone. She had no desire to go out. The weather was too bad, and the shop was cosier than the streets. Sitting behind the counter with some sewing, she did not raise her eyes from her work when Mr Verloc entered in the aggressive clatter of the bell. She had recognised his step on the pavement outside.

She did not raise her eyes, but as Mr Verloc, silent, and with his hat rammed down upon his forehead, made straight for the parlour door, she said serenely:

"What a wretched day. You've been perhaps to see Stevie?"

"No! I haven't," said Mr Verloc softly, and slammed the glazed parlour door behind him with unexpected energy.

For some time Mrs Verloc remained quiescent, with her work dropped in her lap, before she put it away under the counter and got up to light the gas. This done, she went into the parlour on her way to the kitchen. Mr Verloc would want his tea presently. Confident of the power of her charms, Winnie did not expect from her husband in the daily intercourse of their married life a ceremonious amenity of address and courtliness of manner; vain and antiquated forms at best, probably never very exactly observed, discarded nowadays even in the highest spheres, and always foreign to the standards of her class. She did not look for courtesies from him. But he was a good husband, and she had a loyal respect for his rights.

Mrs Verloc would have gone through the parlour and on to her domestic duties in the kitchen with the perfect serenity of a woman sure of the power of her charms. But a slight, very slight, and rapid rattling sound grew upon her hearing. Bizarre and

incomprehensible, it arrested Mrs Verloc's attention. Then as its character became plain to the ear she stopped short, amazed and concerned. Striking a match on the box she held in her hand, she turned on and lighted, above the parlour table, one of the two gas-burners, which, being defective, first whistled as if astonished, and then went on purring comfortably like a cat.

Mr Verloc, against his usual practice, had thrown off his overcoat. It was lying on the sofa. His hat, which he must also have thrown off, rested overturned under the edge of the sofa. He had dragged a chair in front of the fireplace, and his feet planted inside the fender, his head held between his hands, he was hanging low over the glowing grate. His teeth rattled with an ungovernable violence, causing his whole enormous back to tremble at the same rate. Mrs Verloc was startled.

"You've been getting wet," she said.

"Not very," Mr Verloc managed to falter out, in a profound shudder. By a great effort he suppressed the rattling of his teeth.

"I'll have you laid up on my hands," she said, with genuine uneasiness.

"I don't think so," remarked Mr Verloc, snuffing huskily.

He had certainly contrived somehow to catch an abominable cold between seven in the morning and five in the afternoon. Mrs Verloc looked at his bowed back.

"Where have you been to-day?" she asked.

"Nowhere," answered Mr Verloc in a low, choked nasal tone. His attitude suggested aggrieved sulks or a severe headache. The unsufficiency and uncandidness of his answer became painfully apparent in the dead silence of the room. He snuffled apologetically, and added: "I've been to the bank."

Mrs Verloc became attentive.

"You have!" she said dispassionately. "What for?"

Mr Verloc mumbled, with his nose over the grate, and with marked unwillingness.

"Draw the money out!"

"What do you mean? All of it?"

"Yes. All of it."

Mrs Verloc spread out with care the scanty table-cloth, got two knives and two forks out of the table drawer, and suddenly stopped in her methodical proceedings.

"What did you do that for?"

"May want it soon," snuffled vaguely Mr Verloc, who was coming to the end of his calculated indiscretions.

"I don't know what you mean," remarked his wife in a tone perfectly casual, but standing stock still between the table and the cupboard.

"You know you can trust me," Mr Verloc remarked to the grate, with hoarse feeling.

Mrs Verloc turned slowly towards the cupboard, saying with deliberation:

"Oh yes. I can trust you."

And she went on with her methodical proceedings. She laid two plates, got the bread, the butter, going to and fro quietly between the table and the cupboard in the peace and silence of her home. On the point of taking out the jam, she reflected

practically: "He will be feeling hungry, having been away all day," and she returned to the cupboard once more to get the cold beef. She set it under the purring gas-jet, and with a passing glance at her motionless husband hugging the fire, she went (down two steps) into the kitchen. It was only when coming back, carving knife and fork in hand, that she spoke again.

"If I hadn't trusted you I wouldn't have married you."

Bowed under the overmantel, Mr Verloc, holding his head in both hands, seemed to have gone to sleep. Winnie made the tea, and called out in an undertone:

"Adolf."

Mr Verloc got up at once, and staggered a little before he sat down at the table. His wife examining the sharp edge of the carving knife, placed it on the dish, and called his attention to the cold beef. He remained insensible to the suggestion, with his chin on his breast.

"You should feed your cold," Mrs Verloc said dogmatically.

He looked up, and shook his head. His eyes were bloodshot and his face red. His fingers had ruffled his hair into a dissipated untidiness. Altogether he had a disreputable aspect, expressive of the discomfort, the irritation and the gloom following a heavy debauch. But Mr Verloc was not a debauched man. In his conduct he was respectable. His appearance might have been the effect of a feverish cold. He drank three cups of tea, but abstained from food entirely. He recoiled from it with sombre aversion when urged by Mrs Verloc, who said at last:

"Aren't your feet wet? You had better put on your slippers. You aren't going out any more this evening."

Mr Verloc intimated by morose grunts and signs that his feet were not wet, and that anyhow he did not care. The proposal as to slippers was disregarded as beneath his notice. But the question of going out in the evening received an unexpected development. It was not of going out in the evening that Mr Verloc was thinking. His thoughts embraced a vaster scheme. From moody and incomplete phrases it became apparent that Mr Verloc had been considering the expediency of emigrating. It was not very clear whether he had in his mind France or California.

The utter unexpectedness, improbability, and inconceivableness of such an event robbed this vague declaration of all its effect. Mrs Verloc, as placidly as if her husband had been threatening her with the end of the world, said:

"The idea!"

Mr Verloc declared himself sick and tired of everything, and besides — She interrupted him.

"You've a bad cold."

It was indeed obvious that Mr Verloc was not in his usual state, physically and even mentally. A sombre irresolution held him silent for a while. Then he murmured a few ominous generalities on the theme of necessity.

"Will have to," repeated Winnie, sitting calmly back, with folded arms, opposite her husband. "I should like to know who's to make you. You ain't a slave. No one

need be a slave in this country — and don't you make yourself one." She paused, and with invincible and steady candour. "The business isn't so bad," she went on. "You've a comfortable home."

She glanced all round the parlour, from the corner cupboard to the good fire in the grate. Ensconced cosily behind the shop of doubtful wares, with the mysteriously dim window, and its door suspiciously ajar in the obscure and narrow street, it was in all essentials of domestic propriety and domestic comfort a respectable home. Her devoted affection missed out of it her brother Stevie, now enjoying a damp villegiature in the Kentish lanes under the care of Mr Michaelis. She missed him poignantly, with all the force of her protecting passion. This was the boy's home too — the roof, the cupboard, the stoked grate. On this thought Mrs Verloc rose, and walking to the other end of the table, said in the fulness of her heart:

"And you are not tired of me."

Mr Verloc made no sound. Winnie leaned on his shoulder from behind, and pressed her lips to his forehead. Thus she lingered. Not a whisper reached them from the outside world.

The sound of footsteps on the pavement died out in the discreet dimness of the shop. Only the gas-jet above the table went on purring equably in the brooding silence of the parlour.

During the contact of that unexpected and lingering kiss Mr Verloc, gripping with both hands the edges of his chair, preserved a hieratic immobility. When the pressure was removed he let go the chair, rose, and went to stand before the fireplace. He turned no longer his back to the room. With his features swollen and an air of being drugged, he followed his wife's movements with his eyes.

Mrs Verloc went about serenely, clearing up the table. Her tranquil voice commented the idea thrown out in a reasonable and domestic tone. It wouldn't stand examination. She condemned it from every point of view. But her only real concern was Stevie's welfare. He appeared to her thought in that connection as sufficiently "peculiar" not to be taken rashly abroad. And that was all. But talking round that vital point, she approached absolute vehemence in her delivery. Meanwhile, with brusque movements, she arrayed herself in an apron for the washing up of cups. And as if excited by the sound of her uncontradicted voice, she went so far as to say in a tone almost tart:

"If you go abroad you'll have to go without me."

"You know I wouldn't," said Mr Verloc huskily, and the unresonant voice of his private life trembled with an enigmatical emotion.

Already Mrs Verloc was regretting her words. They had sounded more unkind than she meant them to be. They had also the unwisdom of unnecessary things. In fact, she had not meant them at all. It was a sort of phrase that is suggested by the demon of perverse inspiration. But she knew a way to make it as if it had not been.

She turned her head over her shoulder and gave that man planted heavily in front of the fireplace a glance, half arch, half cruel, out of her large eyes — a glance of which the Winnie of the Belgravian mansion days would have been incapable, because of her

respectability and her ignorance. But the man was her husband now, and she was no longer ignorant. She kept it on him for a whole second, with her grave face motionless like a mask, while she said playfully:

“You couldn’t. You would miss me too much.”

Mr Verloc started forward.

“Exactly,” he said in a louder tone, throwing his arms out and making a step towards her. Something wild and doubtful in his expression made it appear uncertain whether he meant to strangle or to embrace his wife. But Mrs Verloc’s attention was called away from that manifestation by the clatter of the shop bell.

“Shop, Adolf. You go.”

He stopped, his arms came down slowly.

“You go,” repeated Mrs Verloc. “I’ve got my apron on.”

Mr Verloc obeyed woodenly, stony-eyed, and like an automaton whose face had been painted red. And this resemblance to a mechanical figure went so far that he had an automaton’s absurd air of being aware of the machinery inside of him.

He closed the parlour door, and Mrs Verloc moving briskly, carried the tray into the kitchen. She washed the cups and some other things before she stopped in her work to listen. No sound reached her. The customer was a long time in the shop. It was a customer, because if he had not been Mr Verloc would have taken him inside. Undoing the strings of her apron with a jerk, she threw it on a chair, and walked back to the parlour slowly.

At that precise moment Mr Verloc entered from the shop.

He had gone in red. He came out a strange papery white. His face, losing its drugged, feverish stupor, had in that short time acquired a bewildered and harassed expression. He walked straight to the sofa, and stood looking down at his overcoat lying there, as though he were afraid to touch it.

“What’s the matter?” asked Mrs Verloc in a subdued voice. Through the door left ajar she could see that the customer was not gone yet.

“I find I’ll have to go out this evening,” said Mr Verloc. He did not attempt to pick up his outer garment.

Without a word Winnie made for the shop, and shutting the door after her, walked in behind the counter. She did not look overtly at the customer till she had established herself comfortably on the chair. But by that time she had noted that he was tall and thin, and wore his moustaches twisted up. In fact, he gave the sharp points a twist just then. His long, bony face rose out of a turned-up collar. He was a little splashed, a little wet. A dark man, with the ridge of the cheek-bone well defined under the slightly hollow temple. A complete stranger. Not a customer either.

Mrs Verloc looked at him placidly.

“You came over from the Continent?” she said after a time.

The long, thin stranger, without exactly looking at Mrs Verloc, answered only by a faint and peculiar smile.

Mrs Verloc’s steady, incurious gaze rested on him.

“You understand English, don’t you?”

“Oh yes. I understand English.”

There was nothing foreign in his accent, except that he seemed in his slow enunciation to be taking pains with it. And Mrs Verloc, in her varied experience, had come to the conclusion that some foreigners could speak better English than the natives. She said, looking at the door of the parlour fixedly:

“You don’t think perhaps of staying in England for good?”

The stranger gave her again a silent smile. He had a kindly mouth and probing eyes. And he shook his head a little sadly, it seemed.

“My husband will see you through all right. Meantime for a few days you couldn’t do better than take lodgings with Mr Giugliani. Continental Hotel it’s called. Private. It’s quiet. My husband will take you there.”

“A good idea,” said the thin, dark man, whose glance had hardened suddenly.

“You knew Mr Verloc before — didn’t you? Perhaps in France?”

“I have heard of him,” admitted the visitor in his slow, painstaking tone, which yet had a certain curtness of intention.

There was a pause. Then he spoke again, in a far less elaborate manner.

“Your husband has not gone out to wait for me in the street by chance?”

“In the street!” repeated Mrs Verloc, surprised. “He couldn’t. There’s no other door to the house.”

For a moment she sat impassive, then left her seat to go and peep through the glazed door. Suddenly she opened it, and disappeared into the parlour.

Mr Verloc had done no more than put on his overcoat. But why he should remain afterwards leaning over the table propped up on his two arms as though he were feeling giddy or sick, she could not understand. “Adolf,” she called out half aloud; and when he had raised himself:

“Do you know that man?” she asked rapidly.

“I’ve heard of him,” whispered uneasily Mr Verloc, darting a wild glance at the door.

Mrs Verloc’s fine, incurious eyes lighted up with a flash of abhorrence.

“One of Karl Yundt’s friends — beastly old man.”

“No! No!” protested Mr Verloc, busy fishing for his hat. But when he got it from under the sofa he held it as if he did not know the use of a hat.

“Well — he’s waiting for you,” said Mrs Verloc at last. “I say, Adolf, he ain’t one of them Embassy people you have been bothered with of late?”

“Bothered with Embassy people,” repeated Mr Verloc, with a heavy start of surprise and fear. “Who’s been talking to you of the Embassy people?”

“Yourself.”

“I! I! Talked of the Embassy to you!”

Mr Verloc seemed scared and bewildered beyond measure. His wife explained:

“You’ve been talking a little in your sleep of late, Adolf.”

“What — what did I say? What do you know?”

“Nothing much. It seemed mostly nonsense. Enough to let me guess that something worried you.”

Mr Verloc rammed his hat on his head. A crimson flood of anger ran over his face.

“Nonsense — eh? The Embassy people! I would cut their hearts out one after another. But let them look out. I’ve got a tongue in my head.”

He fumed, pacing up and down between the table and the sofa, his open overcoat catching against the angles. The red flood of anger ebbed out, and left his face all white, with quivering nostrils. Mrs Verloc, for the purposes of practical existence, put down these appearances to the cold.

“Well,” she said, “get rid of the man, whoever he is, as soon as you can, and come back home to me. You want looking after for a day or two.”

Mr Verloc calmed down, and, with resolution imprinted on his pale face, had already opened the door, when his wife called him back in a whisper:

“Adolf! Adolf!” He came back startled. “What about that money you drew out?” she asked. “You’ve got it in your pocket? Hadn’t you better — ”

Mr Verloc gazed stupidly into the palm of his wife’s extended hand for some time before he slapped his brow.

“Money! Yes! Yes! I didn’t know what you meant.”

He drew out of his breast pocket a new pigskin pocket-book. Mrs Verloc received it without another word, and stood still till the bell, clattering after Mr Verloc and Mr Verloc’s visitor, had quieted down. Only then she peeped in at the amount, drawing the notes out for the purpose. After this inspection she looked round thoughtfully, with an air of mistrust in the silence and solitude of the house. This abode of her married life appeared to her as lonely and unsafe as though it had been situated in the midst of a forest. No receptacle she could think of amongst the solid, heavy furniture seemed other but flimsy and particularly tempting to her conception of a house-breaker. It was an ideal conception, endowed with sublime faculties and a miraculous insight. The till was not to be thought of. It was the first spot a thief would make for. Mrs Verloc unfastening hastily a couple of hooks, slipped the pocket-book under the bodice of her dress. Having thus disposed of her husband’s capital, she was rather glad to hear the clatter of the door bell, announcing an arrival. Assuming the fixed, unabashed stare and the stony expression reserved for the casual customer, she walked in behind the counter.

A man standing in the middle of the shop was inspecting it with a swift, cool, all-round glance. His eyes ran over the walls, took in the ceiling, noted the floor — all in a moment. The points of a long fair moustache fell below the line of the jaw. He smiled the smile of an old if distant acquaintance, and Mrs Verloc remembered having seen him before. Not a customer. She softened her “customer stare” to mere indifference, and faced him across the counter.

He approached, on his side, confidentially, but not too markedly so.

“Husband at home, Mrs Verloc?” he asked in an easy, full tone.

“No. He’s gone out.”

"I am sorry for that. I've called to get from him a little private information."

This was the exact truth. Chief Inspector Heat had been all the way home, and had even gone so far as to think of getting into his slippers, since practically he was, he told himself, chucked out of that case. He indulged in some scornful and in a few angry thoughts, and found the occupation so unsatisfactory that he resolved to seek relief out of doors. Nothing prevented him paying a friendly call to Mr Verloc, casually as it were. It was in the character of a private citizen that walking out privately he made use of his customary conveyances. Their general direction was towards Mr Verloc's home. Chief Inspector Heat respected his own private character so consistently that he took especial pains to avoid all the police constables on point and patrol duty in the vicinity of Brett Street. This precaution was much more necessary for a man of his standing than for an obscure Assistant Commissioner. Private Citizen Heat entered the street, manoeuvring in a way which in a member of the criminal classes would have been stigmatised as slinking. The piece of cloth picked up in Greenwich was in his pocket. Not that he had the slightest intention of producing it in his private capacity. On the contrary, he wanted to know just what Mr Verloc would be disposed to say voluntarily. He hoped Mr Verloc's talk would be of a nature to incriminate Michaelis. It was a conscientiously professional hope in the main, but not without its moral value. For Chief Inspector Heat was a servant of justice. Finding Mr Verloc from home, he felt disappointed.

"I would wait for him a little if I were sure he wouldn't be long," he said.

Mrs Verloc volunteered no assurance of any kind.

"The information I need is quite private," he repeated. "You understand what I mean? I wonder if you could give me a notion where he's gone to?"

Mrs Verloc shook her head.

"Can't say."

She turned away to range some boxes on the shelves behind the counter. Chief Inspector Heat looked at her thoughtfully for a time.

"I suppose you know who I am?" he said.

Mrs Verloc glanced over her shoulder. Chief Inspector Heat was amazed at her coolness.

"Come! You know I am in the police," he said sharply.

"I don't trouble my head much about it," Mrs Verloc remarked, returning to the ranging of her boxes.

"My name is Heat. Chief Inspector Heat of the Special Crimes section."

Mrs Verloc adjusted nicely in its place a small cardboard box, and turning round, faced him again, heavy-eyed, with idle hands hanging down. A silence reigned for a time.

"So your husband went out a quarter of an hour ago! And he didn't say when he would be back?"

"He didn't go out alone," Mrs Verloc let fall negligently.

"A friend?"

Mrs Verloc touched the back of her hair. It was in perfect order.

“A stranger who called.”

“I see. What sort of man was that stranger? Would you mind telling me?”

Mrs Verloc did not mind. And when Chief Inspector Heat heard of a man dark, thin, with a long face and turned up moustaches, he gave signs of perturbation, and exclaimed:

“Dash me if I didn’t think so! He hasn’t lost any time.”

He was intensely disgusted in the secrecy of his heart at the unofficial conduct of his immediate chief. But he was not quixotic. He lost all desire to await Mr Verloc’s return. What they had gone out for he did not know, but he imagined it possible that they would return together. The case is not followed properly, it’s being tampered with, he thought bitterly.

“I am afraid I haven’t time to wait for your husband,” he said.

Mrs Verloc received this declaration listlessly. Her detachment had impressed Chief Inspector Heat all along. At this precise moment it whetted his curiosity. Chief Inspector Heat hung in the wind, swayed by his passions like the most private of citizens.

“I think,” he said, looking at her steadily, “that you could give me a pretty good notion of what’s going on if you liked.”

Forcing her fine, inert eyes to return his gaze, Mrs Verloc murmured:

“Going on! What is going on?”

“Why, the affair I came to talk about a little with your husband.”

That day Mrs Verloc had glanced at a morning paper as usual. But she had not stirred out of doors. The newsboys never invaded Brett Street. It was not a street for their business. And the echo of their cries drifting along the populous thoroughfares, expired between the dirty brick walls without reaching the threshold of the shop. Her husband had not brought an evening paper home. At any rate she had not seen it. Mrs Verloc knew nothing whatever of any affair. And she said so, with a genuine note of wonder in her quiet voice.

Chief Inspector Heat did not believe for a moment in so much ignorance. Curtly, without amiability, he stated the bare fact.

Mrs Verloc turned away her eyes.

“I call it silly,” she pronounced slowly. She paused. “We ain’t downtrodden slaves here.”

The Chief Inspector waited watchfully. Nothing more came.

“And your husband didn’t mention anything to you when he came home?”

Mrs Verloc simply turned her face from right to left in sign of negation. A languid, baffling silence reigned in the shop. Chief Inspector Heat felt provoked beyond endurance.

“There was another small matter,” he began in a detached tone, “which I wanted to speak to your husband about. There came into our hands a — a — what we believe is — a stolen overcoat.”

Mrs Verloc, with her mind specially aware of thieves that evening, touched lightly the bosom of her dress.

“We have lost no overcoat,” she said calmly.

“That’s funny,” continued Private Citizen Heat. “I see you keep a lot of marking ink here — ”

He took up a small bottle, and looked at it against the gas-jet in the middle of the shop.

“Purple — isn’t it?” he remarked, setting it down again. “As I said, it’s strange. Because the overcoat has got a label sewn on the inside with your address written in marking ink.”

Mrs Verloc leaned over the counter with a low exclamation.

“That’s my brother’s, then.”

“Where’s your brother? Can I see him?” asked the Chief Inspector briskly. Mrs Verloc leaned a little more over the counter.

“No. He isn’t here. I wrote that label myself.”

“Where’s your brother now?”

“He’s been away living with — a friend — in the country.”

“The overcoat comes from the country. And what’s the name of the friend?”

“Michaelis,” confessed Mrs Verloc in an awed whisper.

The Chief Inspector let out a whistle. His eyes snapped.

“Just so. Capital. And your brother now, what’s he like — a sturdy, darkish chap — eh?”

“Oh no,” exclaimed Mrs Verloc fervently. “That must be the thief. Stevie’s slight and fair.”

“Good,” said the Chief Inspector in an approving tone. And while Mrs Verloc, wavering between alarm and wonder, stared at him, he sought for information. Why have the address sewn like this inside the coat? And he heard that the mangled remains he had inspected that morning with extreme repugnance were those of a youth, nervous, absent-minded, peculiar, and also that the woman who was speaking to him had had the charge of that boy since he was a baby.

“Easily excitable?” he suggested.

“Oh yes. He is. But how did he come to lose his coat — ”

Chief Inspector Heat suddenly pulled out a pink newspaper he had bought less than half-an-hour ago. He was interested in horses. Forced by his calling into an attitude of doubt and suspicion towards his fellow-citizens, Chief Inspector Heat relieved the instinct of credulity implanted in the human breast by putting unbounded faith in the sporting prophets of that particular evening publication. Dropping the extra special on to the counter, he plunged his hand again into his pocket, and pulling out the piece of cloth fate had presented him with out of a heap of things that seemed to have been collected in shambles and rag shops, he offered it to Mrs Verloc for inspection.

“I suppose you recognise this?”

She took it mechanically in both her hands. Her eyes seemed to grow bigger as she looked.

“Yes,” she whispered, then raised her head, and staggered backward a little.

“Whatever for is it torn out like this?”

The Chief Inspector snatched across the counter the cloth out of her hands, and she sat heavily on the chair. He thought: identification’s perfect. And in that moment he had a glimpse into the whole amazing truth. Verloc was the “other man.”

“Mrs Verloc,” he said, “it strikes me that you know more of this bomb affair than even you yourself are aware of.”

Mrs Verloc sat still, amazed, lost in boundless astonishment. What was the connection? And she became so rigid all over that she was not able to turn her head at the clatter of the bell, which caused the private investigator Heat to spin round on his heel. Mr Verloc had shut the door, and for a moment the two men looked at each other.

Mr Verloc, without looking at his wife, walked up to the Chief Inspector, who was relieved to see him return alone.

“You here!” muttered Mr Verloc heavily. “Who are you after?”

“No one,” said Chief Inspector Heat in a low tone. “Look here, I would like a word or two with you.”

Mr Verloc, still pale, had brought an air of resolution with him. Still he didn’t look at his wife. He said:

“Come in here, then.” And he led the way into the parlour.

The door was hardly shut when Mrs Verloc, jumping up from the chair, ran to it as if to fling it open, but instead of doing so fell on her knees, with her ear to the keyhole. The two men must have stopped directly they were through, because she heard plainly the Chief Inspector’s voice, though she could not see his finger pressed against her husband’s breast emphatically.

“You are the other man, Verloc. Two men were seen entering the park.”

And the voice of Mr Verloc said:

“Well, take me now. What’s to prevent you? You have the right.”

“Oh no! I know too well who you have been giving yourself away to. He’ll have to manage this little affair all by himself. But don’t you make a mistake, it’s I who found you out.”

Then she heard only muttering. Inspector Heat must have been showing to Mr Verloc the piece of Stevie’s overcoat, because Stevie’s sister, guardian, and protector heard her husband a little louder.

“I never noticed that she had hit upon that dodge.”

Again for a time Mrs Verloc heard nothing but murmurs, whose mysteriousness was less nightmarish to her brain than the horrible suggestions of shaped words. Then Chief Inspector Heat, on the other side of the door, raised his voice.

“You must have been mad.”

And Mr Verloc’s voice answered, with a sort of gloomy fury:

"I have been mad for a month or more, but I am not mad now. It's all over. It shall all come out of my head, and hang the consequences."

There was a silence, and then Private Citizen Heat murmured:

"What's coming out?"

"Everything," exclaimed the voice of Mr Verloc, and then sank very low.

After a while it rose again.

"You have known me for several years now, and you've found me useful, too. You know I was a straight man. Yes, straight."

This appeal to old acquaintance must have been extremely distasteful to the Chief Inspector.

His voice took on a warning note.

"Don't you trust so much to what you have been promised. If I were you I would clear out. I don't think we will run after you."

Mr Verloc was heard to laugh a little.

"Oh yes; you hope the others will get rid of me for you — don't you? No, no; you don't shake me off now. I have been a straight man to those people too long, and now everything must come out."

"Let it come out, then," the indifferent voice of Chief Inspector Heat assented. "But tell me now how did you get away?"

"I was making for Chesterfield Walk," Mrs Verloc heard her husband's voice, "when I heard the bang. I started running then. Fog. I saw no one till I was past the end of George Street. Don't think I met anyone till then."

"So easy as that!" marvelled the voice of Chief Inspector Heat. "The bang startled you, eh?"

"Yes; it came too soon," confessed the gloomy, husky voice of Mr Verloc.

Mrs Verloc pressed her ear to the keyhole; her lips were blue, her hands cold as ice, and her pale face, in which the two eyes seemed like two black holes, felt to her as if it were enveloped in flames.

On the other side of the door the voices sank very low. She caught words now and then, sometimes in her husband's voice, sometimes in the smooth tones of the Chief Inspector. She heard this last say:

"We believe he stumbled against the root of a tree?"

There was a husky, voluble murmur, which lasted for some time, and then the Chief Inspector, as if answering some inquiry, spoke emphatically.

"Of course. Blown to small bits: limbs, gravel, clothing, bones, splinters — all mixed up together. I tell you they had to fetch a shovel to gather him up with."

Mrs Verloc sprang up suddenly from her crouching position, and stopping her ears, reeled to and fro between the counter and the shelves on the wall towards the chair. Her crazed eyes noted the sporting sheet left by the Chief Inspector, and as she knocked herself against the counter she snatched it up, fell into the chair, tore the optimistic, rosy sheet right across in trying to open it, then flung it on the floor. On the other side of the door, Chief Inspector Heat was saying to Mr Verloc, the secret agent:

“So your defence will be practically a full confession?”

“It will. I am going to tell the whole story.”

“You won’t be believed as much as you fancy you will.”

And the Chief Inspector remained thoughtful. The turn this affair was taking meant the disclosure of many things — the laying waste of fields of knowledge, which, cultivated by a capable man, had a distinct value for the individual and for the society. It was sorry, sorry meddling. It would leave Michaelis unscathed; it would drag to light the Professor’s home industry; disorganise the whole system of supervision; make no end of a row in the papers, which, from that point of view, appeared to him by a sudden illumination as invariably written by fools for the reading of imbeciles. Mentally he agreed with the words Mr Verloc let fall at last in answer to his last remark.

“Perhaps not. But it will upset many things. I have been a straight man, and I shall keep straight in this — ”

“If they let you,” said the Chief Inspector cynically. “You will be preached to, no doubt, before they put you into the dock. And in the end you may yet get let in for a sentence that will surprise you. I wouldn’t trust too much the gentleman who’s been talking to you.”

Mr Verloc listened, frowning.

“My advice to you is to clear out while you may. I have no instructions. There are some of them,” continued Chief Inspector Heat, laying a peculiar stress on the word “them,” “who think you are already out of the world.”

“Indeed!” Mr Verloc was moved to say. Though since his return from Greenwich he had spent most of his time sitting in the tap-room of an obscure little public-house, he could hardly have hoped for such favourable news.

“That’s the impression about you.” The Chief Inspector nodded at him. “Vanish. Clear out.”

“Where to?” snarled Mr Verloc. He raised his head, and gazing at the closed door of the parlour, muttered feelingly: “I only wish you would take me away to-night. I would go quietly.”

“I daresay,” assented sardonically the Chief Inspector, following the direction of his glance.

The brow of Mr Verloc broke into slight moisture. He lowered his husky voice confidentially before the unmoved Chief Inspector.

“The lad was half-witted, irresponsible. Any court would have seen that at once. Only fit for the asylum. And that was the worst that would’ve happened to him if — ”

The Chief Inspector, his hand on the door handle, whispered into Mr Verloc’s face.

“He may’ve been half-witted, but you must have been crazy. What drove you off your head like this?”

Mr Verloc, thinking of Mr Vladimir, did not hesitate in the choice of words.

“A Hyperborean swine,” he hissed forcibly. “A what you might call a — a gentleman.”

The Chief Inspector, steady-eyed, nodded briefly his comprehension, and opened the door. Mrs Verloc, behind the counter, might have heard but did not see his departure,

pursued by the aggressive clatter of the bell. She sat at her post of duty behind the counter. She sat rigidly erect in the chair with two dirty pink pieces of paper lying spread out at her feet. The palms of her hands were pressed convulsively to her face, with the tips of the fingers contracted against the forehead, as though the skin had been a mask which she was ready to tear off violently. The perfect immobility of her pose expressed the agitation of rage and despair, all the potential violence of tragic passions, better than any shallow display of shrieks, with the beating of a distracted head against the walls, could have done. Chief Inspector Heat, crossing the shop at his busy, swinging pace, gave her only a cursory glance. And when the cracked bell ceased to tremble on its curved ribbon of steel nothing stirred near Mrs Verloc, as if her attitude had the locking power of a spell. Even the butterfly-shaped gas flames posed on the ends of the suspended T-bracket burned without a quiver. In that shop of shady wares fitted with deal shelves painted a dull brown, which seemed to devour the sheen of the light, the gold circlet of the wedding ring on Mrs Verloc's left hand glittered exceedingly with the untarnished glory of a piece from some splendid treasure of jewels, dropped in a dust-bin.

Chapter 10

The Assistant Commissioner, driven rapidly in a hansom from the neighbourhood of Soho in the direction of Westminster, got out at the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets. Some stalwart constables, who did not seem particularly impressed by the duty of watching the august spot, saluted him. Penetrating through a portal by no means lofty into the precincts of the House which is the House, par excellence in the minds of many millions of men, he was met at last by the volatile and revolutionary Toodles.

That neat and nice young man concealed his astonishment at the early appearance of the Assistant Commissioner, whom he had been told to look out for some time about midnight. His turning up so early he concluded to be the sign that things, whatever they were, had gone wrong. With an extremely ready sympathy, which in nice youngsters goes often with a joyous temperament, he felt sorry for the great Presence he called "The Chief," and also for the Assistant Commissioner, whose face appeared to him more ominously wooden than ever before, and quite wonderfully long. "What a queer, foreign-looking chap he is," he thought to himself, smiling from a distance with friendly buoyancy. And directly they came together he began to talk with the kind intention of burying the awkwardness of failure under a heap of words. It looked as if the great assault threatened for that night were going to fizzle out. An inferior henchman of "that brute Cheeseman" was up boring mercilessly a very thin House with some shamelessly cooked statistics. He, Toodles, hoped he would bore them into a count out every minute. But then he might be only marking time to let that guzzling Cheeseman dine at his leisure. Anyway, the Chief could not be persuaded to go home.

"He will see you at once, I think. He's sitting all alone in his room thinking of all the fishes of the sea," concluded Toodles airily. "Come along."

Notwithstanding the kindness of his disposition, the young private secretary (unpaid) was accessible to the common failings of humanity. He did not wish to harrow the feelings of the Assistant Commissioner, who looked to him uncommonly like a man who has made a mess of his job. But his curiosity was too strong to be restrained by mere compassion. He could not help, as they went along, to throw over his shoulder lightly:

"And your sprat?"

"Got him," answered the Assistant Commissioner with a concision which did not mean to be repellent in the least.

"Good. You've no idea how these great men dislike to be disappointed in small things."

After this profound observation the experienced Toodles seemed to reflect. At any rate he said nothing for quite two seconds. Then:

"I'm glad. But — I say — is it really such a very small thing as you make it out?"

"Do you know what may be done with a sprat?" the Assistant Commissioner asked in his turn.

"He's sometimes put into a sardine box," chuckled Toodles, whose erudition on the subject of the fishing industry was fresh and, in comparison with his ignorance of all other industrial matters, immense. "There are sardine canneries on the Spanish coast which — "

The Assistant Commissioner interrupted the apprentice statesman.

"Yes. Yes. But a sprat is also thrown away sometimes in order to catch a whale."

"A whale. Phew!" exclaimed Toodles, with bated breath. "You're after a whale, then?"

"Not exactly. What I am after is more like a dog-fish. You don't know perhaps what a dog-fish is like."

"Yes; I do. We're buried in special books up to our necks — whole shelves full of them — with plates. . . . It's a noxious, rascally-looking, altogether detestable beast, with a sort of smooth face and moustaches."

"Described to a T," commended the Assistant Commissioner. "Only mine is clean-shaven altogether. You've seen him. It's a witty fish."

"I have seen him!" said Toodles incredulously. "I can't conceive where I could have seen him."

"At the Explorers, I should say," dropped the Assistant Commissioner calmly. At the name of that extremely exclusive club Toodles looked scared, and stopped short.

"Nonsense," he protested, but in an awe-struck tone. "What do you mean? A member?"

"Honorary," muttered the Assistant Commissioner through his teeth.

"Heavens!"

Toodles looked so thunderstruck that the Assistant Commissioner smiled faintly.

"That's between ourselves strictly," he said.

"That's the beastliest thing I've ever heard in my life," declared Toodles feebly, as if astonishment had robbed him of all his buoyant strength in a second.

The Assistant Commissioner gave him an unsmiling glance. Till they came to the door of the great man's room, Toodles preserved a scandalised and solemn silence, as though he were offended with the Assistant Commissioner for exposing such an unsavoury and disturbing fact. It revolutionised his idea of the Explorers' Club's extreme selectness, of its social purity. Toodles was revolutionary only in politics; his social beliefs and personal feelings he wished to preserve unchanged through all the years allotted to him on this earth which, upon the whole, he believed to be a nice place to live on.

He stood aside.

"Go in without knocking," he said.

Shades of green silk fitted low over all the lights imparted to the room something of a forest's deep gloom. The haughty eyes were physically the great man's weak point. This point was wrapped up in secrecy. When an opportunity offered, he rested them conscientiously.

The Assistant Commissioner entering saw at first only a big pale hand supporting a big head, and concealing the upper part of a big pale face. An open despatch-box stood on the writing-table near a few oblong sheets of paper and a scattered handful of quill pens. There was absolutely nothing else on the large flat surface except a little bronze statuette draped in a toga, mysteriously watchful in its shadowy immobility. The Assistant Commissioner, invited to take a chair, sat down. In the dim light, the salient points of his personality, the long face, the black hair, his lankness, made him look more foreign than ever.

The great man manifested no surprise, no eagerness, no sentiment whatever. The attitude in which he rested his menaced eyes was profoundly meditative. He did not alter it the least bit. But his tone was not dreamy.

"Well! What is it that you've found out already? You came upon something unexpected on the first step."

"Not exactly unexpected, Sir Ethelred. What I mainly came upon was a psychological state."

The Great Presence made a slight movement. "You must be lucid, please."

"Yes, Sir Ethelred. You know no doubt that most criminals at some time or other feel an irresistible need of confessing — of making a clean breast of it to somebody — to anybody. And they do it often to the police. In that Verloc whom Heat wished so much to screen I've found a man in that particular psychological state. The man, figuratively speaking, flung himself on my breast. It was enough on my part to whisper to him who I was and to add 'I know that you are at the bottom of this affair.' It must have seemed miraculous to him that we should know already, but he took it all in the stride. The wonderfulness of it never checked him for a moment. There remained for me only to put to him the two questions: Who put you up to it? and Who was the man who did it? He answered the first with remarkable emphasis. As to the second question, I gather that the fellow with the bomb was his brother-in-law — quite a lad — a weak-minded creature. . . . It is rather a curious affair — too long perhaps to state fully just now."

"What then have you learned?" asked the great man.

"First, I've learned that the ex-convict Michaelis had nothing to do with it, though indeed the lad had been living with him temporarily in the country up to eight o'clock this morning. It is more than likely that Michaelis knows nothing of it to this moment."

"You are positive as to that?" asked the great man.

"Quite certain, Sir Ethelred. This fellow Verloc went there this morning, and took away the lad on the pretence of going out for a walk in the lanes. As it was not the first time that he did this, Michaelis could not have the slightest suspicion of anything unusual. For the rest, Sir Ethelred, the indignation of this man Verloc had

left nothing in doubt — nothing whatever. He had been driven out of his mind almost by an extraordinary performance, which for you or me it would be difficult to take as seriously meant, but which produced a great impression obviously on him.”

The Assistant Commissioner then imparted briefly to the great man, who sat still, resting his eyes under the screen of his hand, Mr Verloc’s appreciation of Mr Vladimir’s proceedings and character. The Assistant Commissioner did not seem to refuse it a certain amount of competency. But the great personage remarked:

“All this seems very fantastic.”

“Doesn’t it? One would think a ferocious joke. But our man took it seriously, it appears. He felt himself threatened. In the time, you know, he was in direct communication with old Stott-Wartenheim himself, and had come to regard his services as indispensable. It was an extremely rude awakening. I imagine that he lost his head. He became angry and frightened. Upon my word, my impression is that he thought these Embassy people quite capable not only to throw him out but, to give him away too in some manner or other — ”

“How long were you with him,” interrupted the Presence from behind his big hand.

“Some forty minutes, Sir Ethelred, in a house of bad repute called Continental Hotel, closeted in a room which by-the-by I took for the night. I found him under the influence of that reaction which follows the effort of crime. The man cannot be defined as a hardened criminal. It is obvious that he did not plan the death of that wretched lad — his brother-in-law. That was a shock to him — I could see that. Perhaps he is a man of strong sensibilities. Perhaps he was even fond of the lad — who knows? He might have hoped that the fellow would get clear away; in which case it would have been almost impossible to bring this thing home to anyone. At any rate he risked consciously nothing more but arrest for him.”

The Assistant Commissioner paused in his speculations to reflect for a moment.

“Though how, in that last case, he could hope to have his own share in the business concealed is more than I can tell,” he continued, in his ignorance of poor Stevie’s devotion to Mr Verloc (who was good), and of his truly peculiar dumbness, which in the old affair of fireworks on the stairs had for many years resisted entreaties, coaxing, anger, and other means of investigation used by his beloved sister. For Stevie was loyal. . . . “No, I can’t imagine. It’s possible that he never thought of that at all. It sounds an extravagant way of putting it, Sir Ethelred, but his state of dismay suggested to me an impulsive man who, after committing suicide with the notion that it would end all his troubles, had discovered that it did nothing of the kind.”

The Assistant Commissioner gave this definition in an apologetic voice. But in truth there is a sort of lucidity proper to extravagant language, and the great man was not offended. A slight jerky movement of the big body half lost in the gloom of the green silk shades, of the big head leaning on the big hand, accompanied an intermittent stifled but powerful sound. The great man had laughed.

“What have you done with him?”

The Assistant Commissioner answered very readily:

“As he seemed very anxious to get back to his wife in the shop I let him go, Sir Ethelred.”

“You did? But the fellow will disappear.”

“Pardon me. I don’t think so. Where could he go to? Moreover, you must remember that he has got to think of the danger from his comrades too. He’s there at his post. How could he explain leaving it? But even if there were no obstacles to his freedom of action he would do nothing. At present he hasn’t enough moral energy to take a resolution of any sort. Permit me also to point out that if I had detained him we would have been committed to a course of action on which I wished to know your precise intentions first.”

The great personage rose heavily, an imposing shadowy form in the greenish gloom of the room.

“I’ll see the Attorney-General to-night, and will send for you to-morrow morning. Is there anything more you’d wish to tell me now?”

The Assistant Commissioner had stood up also, slender and flexible.

“I think not, Sir Ethelred, unless I were to enter into details which — ”

“No. No details, please.”

The great shadowy form seemed to shrink away as if in physical dread of details; then came forward, expanded, enormous, and weighty, offering a large hand. “And you say that this man has got a wife?”

“Yes, Sir Ethelred,” said the Assistant Commissioner, pressing deferentially the extended hand. “A genuine wife and a genuinely, respectably, marital relation. He told me that after his interview at the Embassy he would have thrown everything up, would have tried to sell his shop, and leave the country, only he felt certain that his wife would not even hear of going abroad. Nothing could be more characteristic of the respectable bond than that,” went on, with a touch of grimness, the Assistant Commissioner, whose own wife too had refused to hear of going abroad. “Yes, a genuine wife. And the victim was a genuine brother-in-law. From a certain point of view we are here in the presence of a domestic drama.”

The Assistant Commissioner laughed a little; but the great man’s thoughts seemed to have wandered far away, perhaps to the questions of his country’s domestic policy, the battle-ground of his crusading valour against the paynim Cheeseman. The Assistant Commissioner withdrew quietly, unnoticed, as if already forgotten.

He had his own crusading instincts. This affair, which, in one way or another, disgusted Chief Inspector Heat, seemed to him a providentially given starting-point for a crusade. He had it much at heart to begin. He walked slowly home, meditating that enterprise on the way, and thinking over Mr Verloc’s psychology in a composite mood of repugnance and satisfaction. He walked all the way home. Finding the drawing-room dark, he went upstairs, and spent some time between the bedroom and the dressing-room, changing his clothes, going to and fro with the air of a thoughtful somnambulist. But he shook it off before going out again to join his wife at the house of the great lady patroness of Michaelis.

He knew he would be welcomed there. On entering the smaller of the two drawing-rooms he saw his wife in a small group near the piano. A youngish composer in pass of becoming famous was discoursing from a music stool to two thick men whose backs looked old, and three slender women whose backs looked young. Behind the screen the great lady had only two persons with her: a man and a woman, who sat side by side on arm-chairs at the foot of her couch. She extended her hand to the Assistant Commissioner.

“I never hoped to see you here to-night. Annie told me — ”

“Yes. I had no idea myself that my work would be over so soon.”

The Assistant Commissioner added in a low tone. “I am glad to tell you that Michaelis is altogether clear of this — ”

The patroness of the ex-convict received this assurance indignantly.

“Why? Were your people stupid enough to connect him with — ”

“Not stupid,” interrupted the Assistant Commissioner, contradicting deferentially. “Clever enough — quite clever enough for that.”

A silence fell. The man at the foot of the couch had stopped speaking to the lady, and looked on with a faint smile.

“I don’t know whether you ever met before,” said the great lady.

Mr Vladimir and the Assistant Commissioner, introduced, acknowledged each other’s existence with punctilious and guarded courtesy.

“He’s been frightening me,” declared suddenly the lady who sat by the side of Mr Vladimir, with an inclination of the head towards that gentleman. The Assistant Commissioner knew the lady.

“You do not look frightened,” he pronounced, after surveying her conscientiously with his tired and equable gaze. He was thinking meantime to himself that in this house one met everybody sooner or later. Mr Vladimir’s rosy countenance was wreathed in smiles, because he was witty, but his eyes remained serious, like the eyes of convinced man.

“Well, he tried to at least,” amended the lady.

“Force of habit perhaps,” said the Assistant Commissioner, moved by an irresistible inspiration.

“He has been threatening society with all sorts of horrors,” continued the lady, whose enunciation was caressing and slow, “apropos of this explosion in Greenwich Park. It appears we all ought to quake in our shoes at what’s coming if those people are not suppressed all over the world. I had no idea this was such a grave affair.”

Mr Vladimir, affecting not to listen, leaned towards the couch, talking amiably in subdued tones, but he heard the Assistant Commissioner say:

“I’ve no doubt that Mr Vladimir has a very precise notion of the true importance of this affair.”

Mr Vladimir asked himself what that confounded and intrusive policeman was driving at. Descended from generations victimised by the instruments of an arbitrary power, he was racially, nationally, and individually afraid of the police. It was an inherited

weakness, altogether independent of his judgment, of his reason, of his experience. He was born to it. But that sentiment, which resembled the irrational horror some people have of cats, did not stand in the way of his immense contempt for the English police. He finished the sentence addressed to the great lady, and turned slightly in his chair.

"You mean that we have a great experience of these people. Yes; indeed, we suffer greatly from their activity, while you" — Mr Vladimir hesitated for a moment, in smiling perplexity — "while you suffer their presence gladly in your midst," he finished, displaying a dimple on each clean-shaven cheek. Then he added more gravely: "I may even say — because you do."

When Mr Vladimir ceased speaking the Assistant Commissioner lowered his glance, and the conversation dropped. Almost immediately afterwards Mr Vladimir took leave.

Directly his back was turned on the couch the Assistant Commissioner rose too.

"I thought you were going to stay and take Annie home," said the lady patroness of Michaelis.

"I find that I've yet a little work to do to-night."

"In connection — ?"

"Well, yes — in a way."

"Tell me, what is it really — this horror?"

"It's difficult to say what it is, but it may yet be a cause célèbre," said the Assistant Commissioner.

He left the drawing-room hurriedly, and found Mr Vladimir still in the hall, wrapping up his throat carefully in a large silk handkerchief. Behind him a footman waited, holding his overcoat. Another stood ready to open the door. The Assistant Commissioner was duly helped into his coat, and let out at once. After descending the front steps he stopped, as if to consider the way he should take. On seeing this through the door held open, Mr Vladimir lingered in the hall to get out a cigar and asked for a light. It was furnished to him by an elderly man out of livery with an air of calm solicitude. But the match went out; the footman then closed the door, and Mr Vladimir lighted his large Havana with leisurely care.

When at last he got out of the house, he saw with disgust the "confounded policeman" still standing on the pavement.

"Can he be waiting for me," thought Mr Vladimir, looking up and down for some signs of a hansom. He saw none. A couple of carriages waited by the curbstone, their lamps blazing steadily, the horses standing perfectly still, as if carved in stone, the coachmen sitting motionless under the big fur capes, without as much as a quiver stirring the white thongs of their big whips. Mr Vladimir walked on, and the "confounded policeman" fell into step at his elbow. He said nothing. At the end of the fourth stride Mr Vladimir felt infuriated and uneasy. This could not last.

"Rotten weather," he growled savagely.

"Mild," said the Assistant Commissioner without passion. He remained silent for a little while. "We've got hold of a man called Verloc," he announced casually.

Mr Vladimir did not stumble, did not stagger back, did not change his stride. But he could not prevent himself from exclaiming: "What?" The Assistant Commissioner did not repeat his statement. "You know him," he went on in the same tone.

Mr Vladimir stopped, and became guttural. "What makes you say that?"

"I don't. It's Verloc who says that."

"A lying dog of some sort," said Mr Vladimir in somewhat Oriental phraseology. But in his heart he was almost awed by the miraculous cleverness of the English police. The change of his opinion on the subject was so violent that it made him for a moment feel slightly sick. He threw away his cigar, and moved on.

"What pleased me most in this affair," the Assistant went on, talking slowly, "is that it makes such an excellent starting-point for a piece of work which I've felt must be taken in hand — that is, the clearing out of this country of all the foreign political spies, police, and that sort of — of — dogs. In my opinion they are a ghastly nuisance; also an element of danger. But we can't very well seek them out individually. The only way is to make their employment unpleasant to their employers. The thing's becoming indecent. And dangerous too, for us, here."

Mr Vladimir stopped again for a moment.

"What do you mean?"

"The prosecution of this Verloc will demonstrate to the public both the danger and the indecency."

"Nobody will believe what a man of that sort says," said Mr Vladimir contemptuously.

"The wealth and precision of detail will carry conviction to the great mass of the public," advanced the Assistant Commissioner gently.

"So that is seriously what you mean to do."

"We've got the man; we have no choice."

"You will be only feeding up the lying spirit of these revolutionary scoundrels," Mr Vladimir protested. "What do you want to make a scandal for? — from morality — or what?"

Mr Vladimir's anxiety was obvious. The Assistant Commissioner having ascertained in this way that there must be some truth in the summary statements of Mr Verloc, said indifferently:

"There's a practical side too. We have really enough to do to look after the genuine article. You can't say we are not effective. But we don't intend to let ourselves be bothered by shams under any pretext whatever."

Mr Vladimir's tone became lofty.

"For my part, I can't share your view. It is selfish. My sentiments for my own country cannot be doubted; but I've always felt that we ought to be good Europeans besides — I mean governments and men."

"Yes," said the Assistant Commissioner simply. "Only you look at Europe from its other end. But," he went on in a good-natured tone, "the foreign governments cannot complain of the inefficiency of our police. Look at this outrage; a case specially difficult

to trace inasmuch as it was a sham. In less than twelve hours we have established the identity of a man literally blown to shreds, have found the organiser of the attempt, and have had a glimpse of the inciter behind him. And we could have gone further; only we stopped at the limits of our territory.”

“So this instructive crime was planned abroad,” Mr Vladimir said quickly. “You admit it was planned abroad?”

“Theoretically. Theoretically only, on foreign territory; abroad only by a fiction,” said the Assistant Commissioner, alluding to the character of Embassies, which are supposed to be part and parcel of the country to which they belong. “But that’s a detail. I talked to you of this business because it’s your government that grumbles most at our police. You see that we are not so bad. I wanted particularly to tell you of our success.”

“I’m sure I’m very grateful,” muttered Mr Vladimir through his teeth.

“We can put our finger on every anarchist here,” went on the Assistant Commissioner, as though he were quoting Chief Inspector Heat. “All that’s wanted now is to do away with the agent provocateur to make everything safe.”

Mr Vladimir held up his hand to a passing hansom.

“You’re not going in here,” remarked the Assistant Commissioner, looking at a building of noble proportions and hospitable aspect, with the light of a great hall falling through its glass doors on a broad flight of steps.

But Mr Vladimir, sitting, stony-eyed, inside the hansom, drove off without a word.

The Assistant Commissioner himself did not turn into the noble building. It was the Explorers’ Club. The thought passed through his mind that Mr Vladimir, honorary member, would not be seen very often there in the future. He looked at his watch. It was only half-past ten. He had had a very full evening.

Chapter 11

After Chief Inspector Heat had left him Mr Verloc moved about the parlour.

From time to time he eyed his wife through the open door. "She knows all about it now," he thought to himself with commiseration for her sorrow and with some satisfaction as regarded himself. Mr Verloc's soul, if lacking greatness perhaps, was capable of tender sentiments. The prospect of having to break the news to her had put him into a fever. Chief Inspector Heat had relieved him of the task. That was good as far as it went. It remained for him now to face her grief.

Mr Verloc had never expected to have to face it on account of death, whose catastrophic character cannot be argued away by sophisticated reasoning or persuasive eloquence. Mr Verloc never meant Stevie to perish with such abrupt violence. He did not mean him to perish at all. Stevie dead was a much greater nuisance than ever he had been when alive. Mr Verloc had augured a favourable issue to his enterprise, basing himself not on Stevie's intelligence, which sometimes plays queer tricks with a man, but on the blind docility and on the blind devotion of the boy. Though not much of a psychologist, Mr Verloc had gauged the depth of Stevie's fanaticism. He dared cherish the hope of Stevie walking away from the walls of the Observatory as he had been instructed to do, taking the way shown to him several times previously, and rejoining his brother-in-law, the wise and good Mr Verloc, outside the precincts of the park. Fifteen minutes ought to have been enough for the veriest fool to deposit the engine and walk away. And the Professor had guaranteed more than fifteen minutes. But Stevie had stumbled within five minutes of being left to himself. And Mr Verloc was shaken morally to pieces. He had foreseen everything but that. He had foreseen Stevie distracted and lost — sought for — found in some police station or provincial workhouse in the end. He had foreseen Stevie arrested, and was not afraid, because Mr Verloc had a great opinion of Stevie's loyalty, which had been carefully indoctrinated with the necessity of silence in the course of many walks. Like a peripatetic philosopher, Mr Verloc, strolling along the streets of London, had modified Stevie's view of the police by conversations full of subtle reasonings. Never had a sage a more attentive and admiring disciple. The submission and worship were so apparent that Mr Verloc had come to feel something like a liking for the boy. In any case, he had not foreseen the swift bringing home of his connection. That his wife should hit upon the precaution of sewing the boy's address inside his overcoat was the last thing Mr Verloc would have thought of. One can't think of everything. That was what she meant when she said that he need not worry if he lost Stevie during their walks. She had assured him that the boy would turn up all right. Well, he had turned up with a vengeance!

“Well, well,” muttered Mr Verloc in his wonder. What did she mean by it? Spare him the trouble of keeping an anxious eye on Stevie? Most likely she had meant well. Only she ought to have told him of the precaution she had taken.

Mr Verloc walked behind the counter of the shop. His intention was not to overwhelm his wife with bitter reproaches. Mr Verloc felt no bitterness. The unexpected march of events had converted him to the doctrine of fatalism. Nothing could be helped now. He said:

“I didn’t mean any harm to come to the boy.”

Mrs Verloc shuddered at the sound of her husband’s voice. She did not uncover her face. The trusted secret agent of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim looked at her for a time with a heavy, persistent, undiscerning glance. The torn evening paper was lying at her feet. It could not have told her much. Mr Verloc felt the need of talking to his wife.

“It’s that damned Heat — eh?” he said. “He upset you. He’s a brute, blurting it out like this to a woman. I made myself ill thinking how to break it to you. I sat for hours in the little parlour of Cheshire Cheese thinking over the best way. You understand I never meant any harm to come to that boy.”

Mr Verloc, the Secret Agent, was speaking the truth. It was his marital affection that had received the greatest shock from the premature explosion. He added:

“I didn’t feel particularly gay sitting there and thinking of you.”

He observed another slight shudder of his wife, which affected his sensibility. As she persisted in hiding her face in her hands, he thought he had better leave her alone for a while. On this delicate impulse Mr Verloc withdrew into the parlour again, where the gas jet purred like a contented cat. Mrs Verloc’s wifely forethought had left the cold beef on the table with carving knife and fork and half a loaf of bread for Mr Verloc’s supper. He noticed all these things now for the first time, and cutting himself a piece of bread and meat, began to eat.

His appetite did not proceed from callousness. Mr Verloc had not eaten any breakfast that day. He had left his home fasting. Not being an energetic man, he found his resolution in nervous excitement, which seemed to hold him mainly by the throat. He could not have swallowed anything solid. Michaelis’ cottage was as destitute of provisions as the cell of a prisoner. The ticket-of-leave apostle lived on a little milk and crusts of stale bread. Moreover, when Mr Verloc arrived he had already gone upstairs after his frugal meal. Absorbed in the toil and delight of literary composition, he had not even answered Mr Verloc’s shout up the little staircase.

“I am taking this young fellow home for a day or two.”

And, in truth, Mr Verloc did not wait for an answer, but had marched out of the cottage at once, followed by the obedient Stevie.

Now that all action was over and his fate taken out of his hands with unexpected swiftness, Mr Verloc felt terribly empty physically. He carved the meat, cut the bread, and devoured his supper standing by the table, and now and then casting a glance towards his wife. Her prolonged immobility disturbed the comfort of his refectation. He

walked again into the shop, and came up very close to her. This sorrow with a veiled face made Mr Verloc uneasy. He expected, of course, his wife to be very much upset, but he wanted her to pull herself together. He needed all her assistance and all her loyalty in these new conjunctures his fatalism had already accepted.

“Can’t be helped,” he said in a tone of gloomy sympathy. “Come, Winnie, we’ve got to think of to-morrow. You’ll want all your wits about you after I am taken away.”

He paused. Mrs Verloc’s breast heaved convulsively. This was not reassuring to Mr Verloc, in whose view the newly created situation required from the two people most concerned in it calmness, decision, and other qualities incompatible with the mental disorder of passionate sorrow. Mr Verloc was a humane man; he had come home prepared to allow every latitude to his wife’s affection for her brother.

Only he did not understand either the nature or the whole extent of that sentiment. And in this he was excusable, since it was impossible for him to understand it without ceasing to be himself. He was startled and disappointed, and his speech conveyed it by a certain roughness of tone.

“You might look at a fellow,” he observed after waiting a while.

As if forced through the hands covering Mrs Verloc’s face the answer came, deadened, almost pitiful.

“I don’t want to look at you as long as I live.”

“Eh? What!” Mr Verloc was merely startled by the superficial and literal meaning of this declaration. It was obviously unreasonable, the mere cry of exaggerated grief. He threw over it the mantle of his marital indulgence. The mind of Mr Verloc lacked profundity. Under the mistaken impression that the value of individuals consists in what they are in themselves, he could not possibly comprehend the value of Stevie in the eyes of Mrs Verloc. She was taking it confoundedly hard, he thought to himself. It was all the fault of that damned Heat. What did he want to upset the woman for? But she mustn’t be allowed, for her own good, to carry on so till she got quite beside herself.

“Look here! You can’t sit like this in the shop,” he said with affected severity, in which there was some real annoyance; for urgent practical matters must be talked over if they had to sit up all night. “Somebody might come in at any minute,” he added, and waited again. No effect was produced, and the idea of the finality of death occurred to Mr Verloc during the pause. He changed his tone. “Come. This won’t bring him back,” he said gently, feeling ready to take her in his arms and press her to his breast, where impatience and compassion dwelt side by side. But except for a short shudder Mrs Verloc remained apparently unaffected by the force of that terrible truism. It was Mr Verloc himself who was moved. He was moved in his simplicity to urge moderation by asserting the claims of his own personality.

“Do be reasonable, Winnie. What would it have been if you had lost me!”

He had vaguely expected to hear her cry out. But she did not budge. She leaned back a little, quieted down to a complete unreadable stillness. Mr Verloc’s heart began

to beat faster with exasperation and something resembling alarm. He laid his hand on her shoulder, saying:

“Don’t be a fool, Winnie.”

She gave no sign. It was impossible to talk to any purpose with a woman whose face one cannot see. Mr Verloc caught hold of his wife’s wrists. But her hands seemed glued fast. She swayed forward bodily to his tug, and nearly went off the chair. Startled to feel her so helplessly limp, he was trying to put her back on the chair when she stiffened suddenly all over, tore herself out of his hands, ran out of the shop, across the parlour, and into the kitchen. This was very swift. He had just a glimpse of her face and that much of her eyes that he knew she had not looked at him.

It all had the appearance of a struggle for the possession of a chair, because Mr Verloc instantly took his wife’s place in it. Mr Verloc did not cover his face with his hands, but a sombre thoughtfulness veiled his features. A term of imprisonment could not be avoided. He did not wish now to avoid it. A prison was a place as safe from certain unlawful vengeance as the grave, with this advantage, that in a prison there is room for hope. What he saw before him was a term of imprisonment, an early release and then life abroad somewhere, such as he had contemplated already, in case of failure. Well, it was a failure, if not exactly the sort of failure he had feared. It had been so near success that he could have positively terrified Mr Vladimir out of his ferocious scoffing with this proof of occult efficiency. So at least it seemed now to Mr Verloc. His prestige with the Embassy would have been immense if — if his wife had not had the unlucky notion of sewing on the address inside Stevie’s overcoat. Mr Verloc, who was no fool, had soon perceived the extraordinary character of the influence he had over Stevie, though he did not understand exactly its origin — the doctrine of his supreme wisdom and goodness inculcated by two anxious women. In all the eventualities he had foreseen Mr Verloc had calculated with correct insight on Stevie’s instinctive loyalty and blind discretion. The eventuality he had not foreseen had appalled him as a humane man and a fond husband. From every other point of view it was rather advantageous. Nothing can equal the everlasting discretion of death. Mr Verloc, sitting perplexed and frightened in the small parlour of the Cheshire Cheese, could not help acknowledging that to himself, because his sensibility did not stand in the way of his judgment. Stevie’s violent disintegration, however disturbing to think about, only assured the success; for, of course, the knocking down of a wall was not the aim of Mr Vladimir’s menaces, but the production of a moral effect. With much trouble and distress on Mr Verloc’s part the effect might be said to have been produced. When, however, most unexpectedly, it came home to roost in Brett Street, Mr Verloc, who had been struggling like a man in a nightmare for the preservation of his position, accepted the blow in the spirit of a convinced fatalist. The position was gone through no one’s fault really. A small, tiny fact had done it. It was like slipping on a bit of orange peel in the dark and breaking your leg.

Mr Verloc drew a weary breath. He nourished no resentment against his wife. He thought: She will have to look after the shop while they keep me locked up. And

thinking also how cruelly she would miss Stevie at first, he felt greatly concerned about her health and spirits. How would she stand her solitude — absolutely alone in that house? It would not do for her to break down while he was locked up? What would become of the shop then? The shop was an asset. Though Mr Verloc's fatalism accepted his undoing as a secret agent, he had no mind to be utterly ruined, mostly, it must be owned, from regard for his wife.

Silent, and out of his line of sight in the kitchen, she frightened him. If only she had had her mother with her. But that silly old woman — An angry dismay possessed Mr Verloc. He must talk with his wife. He could tell her certainly that a man does get desperate under certain circumstances. But he did not go incontinently to impart to her that information. First of all, it was clear to him that this evening was no time for business. He got up to close the street door and put the gas out in the shop.

Having thus assured a solitude around his hearthstone Mr Verloc walked into the parlour, and glanced down into the kitchen. Mrs Verloc was sitting in the place where poor Stevie usually established himself of an evening with paper and pencil for the pastime of drawing these coruscations of innumerable circles suggesting chaos and eternity. Her arms were folded on the table, and her head was lying on her arms. Mr Verloc contemplated her back and the arrangement of her hair for a time, then walked away from the kitchen door. Mrs Verloc's philosophical, almost disdainful incuriosity, the foundation of their accord in domestic life made it extremely difficult to get into contact with her, now this tragic necessity had arisen. Mr Verloc felt this difficulty acutely. He turned around the table in the parlour with his usual air of a large animal in a cage.

Curiosity being one of the forms of self-revelation, — a systematically incurious person remains always partly mysterious. Every time he passed near the door Mr Verloc glanced at his wife uneasily. It was not that he was afraid of her. Mr Verloc imagined himself loved by that woman. But she had not accustomed him to make confidences. And the confidence he had to make was of a profound psychological order. How with his want of practice could he tell her what he himself felt but vaguely: that there are conspiracies of fatal destiny, that a notion grows in a mind sometimes till it acquires an outward existence, an independent power of its own, and even a suggestive voice? He could not inform her that a man may be haunted by a fat, witty, clean-shaved face till the wildest expedient to get rid of it appears a child of wisdom.

On this mental reference to a First Secretary of a great Embassy, Mr Verloc stopped in the doorway, and looking down into the kitchen with an angry face and clenched fists, addressed his wife.

“You don't know what a brute I had to deal with.”

He started off to make another perambulation of the table; then when he had come to the door again he stopped, glaring in from the height of two steps.

“A silly, jeering, dangerous brute, with no more sense than — After all these years! A man like me! And I have been playing my head at that game. You didn't know. Quite right, too. What was the good of telling you that I stood the risk of having a

knife stuck into me any time these seven years we've been married? I am not a chap to worry a woman that's fond of me. You had no business to know." Mr Verloc took another turn round the parlour, fuming.

"A venomous beast," he began again from the doorway. "Drive me out into a ditch to starve for a joke. I could see he thought it was a damned good joke. A man like me! Look here! Some of the highest in the world got to thank me for walking on their two legs to this day. That's the man you've got married to, my girl!"

He perceived that his wife had sat up. Mrs Verloc's arms remained lying stretched on the table. Mr Verloc watched at her back as if he could read there the effect of his words.

"There isn't a murdering plot for the last eleven years that I hadn't my finger in at the risk of my life. There's scores of these revolutionists I've sent off, with their bombs in their blamed pockets, to get themselves caught on the frontier. The old Baron knew what I was worth to his country. And here suddenly a swine comes along — an ignorant, overbearing swine."

Mr Verloc, stepping slowly down two steps, entered the kitchen, took a tumbler off the dresser, and holding it in his hand, approached the sink, without looking at his wife. "It wasn't the old Baron who would have had the wicked folly of getting me to call on him at eleven in the morning. There are two or three in this town that, if they had seen me going in, would have made no bones about knocking me on the head sooner or later. It was a silly, murderous trick to expose for nothing a man — like me."

Mr Verloc, turning on the tap above the sink, poured three glasses of water, one after another, down his throat to quench the fires of his indignation. Mr Vladimir's conduct was like a hot brand which set his internal economy in a blaze. He could not get over the disloyalty of it. This man, who would not work at the usual hard tasks which society sets to its humbler members, had exercised his secret industry with an indefatigable devotion. There was in Mr Verloc a fund of loyalty. He had been loyal to his employers, to the cause of social stability, — and to his affections too — as became apparent when, after standing the tumbler in the sink, he turned about, saying:

"If I hadn't thought of you I would have taken the bullying brute by the throat and rammed his head into the fireplace. I'd have been more than a match for that pink-faced, smooth-shaved — "

Mr Verloc, neglected to finish the sentence, as if there could be no doubt of the terminal word. For the first time in his life he was taking that incurious woman into his confidence. The singularity of the event, the force and importance of the personal feelings aroused in the course of this confession, drove Stevie's fate clean out of Mr Verloc's mind. The boy's stuttering existence of fears and indignations, together with the violence of his end, had passed out of Mr Verloc's mental sight for a time. For that reason, when he looked up he was startled by the inappropriate character of his wife's stare. It was not a wild stare, and it was not inattentive, but its attention was peculiar and not satisfactory, inasmuch that it seemed concentrated upon some point beyond Mr Verloc's person. The impression was so strong that Mr Verloc glanced over

his shoulder. There was nothing behind him: there was just the whitewashed wall. The excellent husband of Winnie Verloc saw no writing on the wall. He turned to his wife again, repeating, with some emphasis:

“I would have taken him by the throat. As true as I stand here, if I hadn’t thought of you then I would have half choked the life out of the brute before I let him get up. And don’t you think he would have been anxious to call the police either. He wouldn’t have dared. You understand why — don’t you?”

He blinked at his wife knowingly.

“No,” said Mrs Verloc in an unresonant voice, and without looking at him at all. “What are you talking about?”

A great discouragement, the result of fatigue, came upon Mr Verloc. He had had a very full day, and his nerves had been tried to the utmost. After a month of maddening worry, ending in an unexpected catastrophe, the storm-tossed spirit of Mr Verloc longed for repose. His career as a secret agent had come to an end in a way no one could have foreseen; only, now, perhaps he could manage to get a night’s sleep at last. But looking at his wife, he doubted it. She was taking it very hard — not at all like herself, he thought. He made an effort to speak.

“You’ll have to pull yourself together, my girl,” he said sympathetically. “What’s done can’t be undone.”

Mrs Verloc gave a slight start, though not a muscle of her white face moved in the least. Mr Verloc, who was not looking at her, continued ponderously.

“You go to bed now. What you want is a good cry.”

This opinion had nothing to recommend it but the general consent of mankind. It is universally understood that, as if it were nothing more substantial than vapour floating in the sky, every emotion of a woman is bound to end in a shower. And it is very probable that had Stevie died in his bed under her despairing gaze, in her protecting arms, Mrs Verloc’s grief would have found relief in a flood of bitter and pure tears. Mrs Verloc, in common with other human beings, was provided with a fund of unconscious resignation sufficient to meet the normal manifestation of human destiny. Without “troubling her head about it,” she was aware that it “did not stand looking into very much.” But the lamentable circumstances of Stevie’s end, which to Mr Verloc’s mind had only an episodic character, as part of a greater disaster, dried her tears at their very source. It was the effect of a white-hot iron drawn across her eyes; at the same time her heart, hardened and chilled into a lump of ice, kept her body in an inward shudder, set her features into a frozen contemplative immobility addressed to a whitewashed wall with no writing on it. The exigencies of Mrs Verloc’s temperament, which, when stripped of its philosophical reserve, was maternal and violent, forced her to roll a series of thoughts in her motionless head. These thoughts were rather imagined than expressed. Mrs Verloc was a woman of singularly few words, either for public or private use. With the rage and dismay of a betrayed woman, she reviewed the tenor of her life in visions concerned mostly with Stevie’s difficult existence from its earliest days. It was a life of single purpose and of a noble unity of inspiration, like those rare

lives that have left their mark on the thoughts and feelings of mankind. But the visions of Mrs Verloc lacked nobility and magnificence. She saw herself putting the boy to bed by the light of a single candle on the deserted top floor of a "business house," dark under the roof and scintillating exceedingly with lights and cut glass at the level of the street like a fairy palace. That meretricious splendour was the only one to be met in Mrs Verloc's visions. She remembered brushing the boy's hair and tying his pinafores — herself in a pinafore still; the consolations administered to a small and badly scared creature by another creature nearly as small but not quite so badly scared; she had the vision of the blows intercepted (often with her own head), of a door held desperately shut against a man's rage (not for very long); of a poker flung once (not very far), which stilled that particular storm into the dumb and awful silence which follows a thunder-clap. And all these scenes of violence came and went accompanied by the unrefined noise of deep vociferations proceeding from a man wounded in his paternal pride, declaring himself obviously accursed since one of his kids was a "slobbering idjut and the other a wicked she-devil." It was of her that this had been said many years ago.

Mrs Verloc heard the words again in a ghostly fashion, and then the dreary shadow of the Belgravian mansion descended upon her shoulders. It was a crushing memory, an exhausting vision of countless breakfast trays carried up and down innumerable stairs, of endless haggling over pence, of the endless drudgery of sweeping, dusting, cleaning, from basement to attics; while the impotent mother, staggering on swollen legs, cooked in a grimy kitchen, and poor Stevie, the unconscious presiding genius of all their toil, blacked the gentlemen's boots in the scullery. But this vision had a breath of a hot London summer in it, and for a central figure a young man wearing his Sunday best, with a straw hat on his dark head and a wooden pipe in his mouth. Affectionate and jolly, he was a fascinating companion for a voyage down the sparkling stream of life; only his boat was very small. There was room in it for a girl-partner at the oar, but no accommodation for passengers. He was allowed to drift away from the threshold of the Belgravian mansion while Winnie averted her tearful eyes. He was not a lodger. The lodger was Mr Verloc, indolent, and keeping late hours, sleepily jocular of a morning from under his bed-clothes, but with gleams of infatuation in his heavy lidded eyes, and always with some money in his pockets. There was no sparkle of any kind on the lazy stream of his life. It flowed through secret places. But his barque seemed a roomy craft, and his taciturn magnanimity accepted as a matter of course the presence of passengers.

Mrs Verloc pursued the visions of seven years' security for Stevie, loyally paid for on her part; of security growing into confidence, into a domestic feeling, stagnant and deep like a placid pool, whose guarded surface hardly shuddered on the occasional passage of Comrade Ossipon, the robust anarchist with shamelessly inviting eyes, whose glance had a corrupt clearness sufficient to enlighten any woman not absolutely imbecile.

A few seconds only had elapsed since the last word had been uttered aloud in the kitchen, and Mrs Verloc was staring already at the vision of an episode not more than a

fortnight old. With eyes whose pupils were extremely dilated she stared at the vision of her husband and poor Stevie walking up Brett Street side by side away from the shop. It was the last scene of an existence created by Mrs Verloc's genius; an existence foreign to all grace and charm, without beauty and almost without decency, but admirable in the continuity of feeling and tenacity of purpose. And this last vision has such plastic relief, such nearness of form, such a fidelity of suggestive detail, that it wrung from Mrs Verloc an anguished and faint murmur, reproducing the supreme illusion of her life, an appalled murmur that died out on her blanched lips.

"Might have been father and son."

Mr Verloc stopped, and raised a care-worn face. "Eh? What did you say?" he asked. Receiving no reply, he resumed his sinister tramping. Then with a menacing flourish of a thick, fleshy fist, he burst out:

"Yes. The Embassy people. A pretty lot, ain't they! Before a week's out I'll make some of them wish themselves twenty feet underground. Eh? What?"

He glanced sideways, with his head down. Mrs Verloc gazed at the whitewashed wall. A blank wall — perfectly blank. A blankness to run at and dash your head against. Mrs Verloc remained immovably seated. She kept still as the population of half the globe would keep still in astonishment and despair, were the sun suddenly put out in the summer sky by the perfidy of a trusted providence.

"The Embassy," Mr Verloc began again, after a preliminary grimace which bared his teeth wolfishly. "I wish I could get loose in there with a cudgel for half-an-hour. I would keep on hitting till there wasn't a single unbroken bone left amongst the whole lot. But never mind, I'll teach them yet what it means trying to throw out a man like me to rot in the streets. I've a tongue in my head. All the world shall know what I've done for them. I am not afraid. I don't care. Everything'll come out. Every damned thing. Let them look out!"

In these terms did Mr Verloc declare his thirst for revenge. It was a very appropriate revenge. It was in harmony with the promptings of Mr Verloc's genius. It had also the advantage of being within the range of his powers and of adjusting itself easily to the practice of his life, which had consisted precisely in betraying the secret and unlawful proceedings of his fellow-men. Anarchists or diplomats were all one to him. Mr Verloc was temperamentally no respecter of persons. His scorn was equally distributed over the whole field of his operations. But as a member of a revolutionary proletariat — which he undoubtedly was — he nourished a rather inimical sentiment against social distinction.

"Nothing on earth can stop me now," he added, and paused, looking fixedly at his wife, who was looking fixedly at a blank wall.

The silence in the kitchen was prolonged, and Mr Verloc felt disappointed. He had expected his wife to say something. But Mrs Verloc's lips, composed in their usual form, preserved a statuesque immobility like the rest of her face. And Mr Verloc was disappointed. Yet the occasion did not, he recognised, demand speech from her. She was a woman of very few words. For reasons involved in the very foundation of his

psychology, Mr Verloc was inclined to put his trust in any woman who had given herself to him. Therefore he trusted his wife. Their accord was perfect, but it was not precise. It was a tacit accord, congenial to Mrs Verloc's incuriosity and to Mr Verloc's habits of mind, which were indolent and secret. They refrained from going to the bottom of facts and motives.

This reserve, expressing, in a way, their profound confidence in each other, introduced at the same time a certain element of vagueness into their intimacy. No system of conjugal relations is perfect. Mr Verloc presumed that his wife had understood him, but he would have been glad to hear her say what she thought at the moment. It would have been a comfort.

There were several reasons why this comfort was denied him. There was a physical obstacle: Mrs Verloc had no sufficient command over her voice. She did not see any alternative between screaming and silence, and instinctively she chose the silence. Winnie Verloc was temperamentally a silent person. And there was the paralysing atrocity of the thought which occupied her. Her cheeks were blanched, her lips ashy, her immobility amazing. And she thought without looking at Mr Verloc: "This man took the boy away to murder him. He took the boy away from his home to murder him. He took the boy away from me to murder him!"

Mrs Verloc's whole being was racked by that inconclusive and maddening thought. It was in her veins, in her bones, in the roots of her hair. Mentally she assumed the biblical attitude of mourning — the covered face, the rent garments; the sound of wailing and lamentation filled her head. But her teeth were violently clenched, and her tearless eyes were hot with rage, because she was not a submissive creature. The protection she had extended over her brother had been in its origin of a fierce and indignant complexion. She had to love him with a militant love. She had battled for him — even against herself. His loss had the bitterness of defeat, with the anguish of a baffled passion. It was not an ordinary stroke of death. Moreover, it was not death that took Stevie from her. It was Mr Verloc who took him away. She had seen him. She had watched him, without raising a hand, take the boy away. And she had let him go, like — like a fool — a blind fool. Then after he had murdered the boy he came home to her. Just came home like any other man would come home to his wife. . . .

Through her set teeth Mrs Verloc muttered at the wall:

"And I thought he had caught a cold."

Mr Verloc heard these words and appropriated them.

"It was nothing," he said moodily. "I was upset. I was upset on your account."

Mrs Verloc, turning her head slowly, transferred her stare from the wall to her husband's person. Mr Verloc, with the tips of his fingers between his lips, was looking on the ground.

"Can't be helped," he mumbled, letting his hand fall. "You must pull yourself together. You'll want all your wits about you. It is you who brought the police about our ears. Never mind, I won't say anything more about it," continued Mr Verloc magnanimously. "You couldn't know."

"I couldn't," breathed out Mrs Verloc. It was as if a corpse had spoken. Mr Verloc took up the thread of his discourse.

"I don't blame you. I'll make them sit up. Once under lock and key it will be safe enough for me to talk — you understand. You must reckon on me being two years away from you," he continued, in a tone of sincere concern. "It will be easier for you than for me. You'll have something to do, while I — Look here, Winnie, what you must do is to keep this business going for two years. You know enough for that. You've a good head on you. I'll send you word when it's time to go about trying to sell. You'll have to be extra careful. The comrades will be keeping an eye on you all the time. You'll have to be as artful as you know how, and as close as the grave. No one must know what you are going to do. I have no mind to get a knock on the head or a stab in the back directly I am let out."

Thus spoke Mr Verloc, applying his mind with ingenuity and forethought to the problems of the future. His voice was sombre, because he had a correct sentiment of the situation. Everything which he did not wish to pass had come to pass. The future had become precarious. His judgment, perhaps, had been momentarily obscured by his dread of Mr Vladimir's truculent folly. A man somewhat over forty may be excusably thrown into considerable disorder by the prospect of losing his employment, especially if the man is a secret agent of political police, dwelling secure in the consciousness of his high value and in the esteem of high personages. He was excusable.

Now the thing had ended in a crash. Mr Verloc was cool; but he was not cheerful. A secret agent who throws his secrecy to the winds from desire of vengeance, and flaunts his achievements before the public eye, becomes the mark for desperate and bloodthirsty indignations. Without unduly exaggerating the danger, Mr Verloc tried to bring it clearly before his wife's mind. He repeated that he had no intention to let the revolutionists do away with him.

He looked straight into his wife's eyes. The enlarged pupils of the woman received his stare into their unfathomable depths.

"I am too fond of you for that," he said, with a little nervous laugh.

A faint flush coloured Mrs Verloc's ghastly and motionless face. Having done with the visions of the past, she had not only heard, but had also understood the words uttered by her husband. By their extreme disaccord with her mental condition these words produced on her a slightly suffocating effect. Mrs Verloc's mental condition had the merit of simplicity; but it was not sound. It was governed too much by a fixed idea. Every nook and cranny of her brain was filled with the thought that this man, with whom she had lived without distaste for seven years, had taken the "poor boy" away from her in order to kill him — the man to whom she had grown accustomed in body and mind; the man whom she had trusted, took the boy away to kill him! In its form, in its substance, in its effect, which was universal, altering even the aspect of inanimate things, it was a thought to sit still and marvel at for ever and ever. Mrs Verloc sat still. And across that thought (not across the kitchen) the form of Mr Verloc went to and

fro, familiarly in hat and overcoat, stamping with his boots upon her brain. He was probably talking too; but Mrs Verloc's thought for the most part covered the voice.

Now and then, however, the voice would make itself heard. Several connected words emerged at times. Their purport was generally hopeful. On each of these occasions Mrs Verloc's dilated pupils, losing their far-off fixity, followed her husband's movements with the effect of black care and impenetrable attention. Well informed upon all matters relating to his secret calling, Mr Verloc augured well for the success of his plans and combinations. He really believed that it would be upon the whole easy for him to escape the knife of infuriated revolutionists. He had exaggerated the strength of their fury and the length of their arm (for professional purposes) too often to have many illusions one way or the other. For to exaggerate with judgment one must begin by measuring with nicety. He knew also how much virtue and how much infamy is forgotten in two years — two long years. His first really confidential discourse to his wife was optimistic from conviction. He also thought it good policy to display all the assurance he could muster. It would put heart into the poor woman. On his liberation, which, harmonising with the whole tenor of his life, would be secret, of course, they would vanish together without loss of time. As to covering up the tracks, he begged his wife to trust him for that. He knew how it was to be done so that the devil himself —

He waved his hand. He seemed to boast. He wished only to put heart into her. It was a benevolent intention, but Mr Verloc had the misfortune not to be in accord with his audience.

The self-confident tone grew upon Mrs Verloc's ear which let most of the words go by; for what were words to her now? What could words do to her, for good or evil in the face of her fixed idea? Her black glance followed that man who was asserting his impunity — the man who had taken poor Stevie from home to kill him somewhere. Mrs Verloc could not remember exactly where, but her heart began to beat very perceptibly.

Mr Verloc, in a soft and conjugal tone, was now expressing his firm belief that there were yet a good few years of quiet life before them both. He did not go into the question of means. A quiet life it must be and, as it were, nestling in the shade, concealed among men whose flesh is grass; modest, like the life of violets. The words used by Mr Verloc were: "Lie low for a bit." And far from England, of course. It was not clear whether Mr Verloc had in his mind Spain or South America; but at any rate somewhere abroad.

This last word, falling into Mrs Verloc's ear, produced a definite impression. This man was talking of going abroad. The impression was completely disconnected; and such is the force of mental habit that Mrs Verloc at once and automatically asked herself: "And what of Stevie?"

It was a sort of forgetfulness; but instantly she became aware that there was no longer any occasion for anxiety on that score. There would never be any occasion any more. The poor boy had been taken out and killed. The poor boy was dead.

This shaking piece of forgetfulness stimulated Mrs Verloc's intelligence. She began to perceive certain consequences which would have surprised Mr Verloc. There was no

need for her now to stay there, in that kitchen, in that house, with that man — since the boy was gone for ever. No need whatever. And on that Mrs Verloc rose as if raised by a spring. But neither could she see what there was to keep her in the world at all. And this inability arrested her. Mr Verloc watched her with marital solicitude.

“You’re looking more like yourself,” he said uneasily. Something peculiar in the blackness of his wife’s eyes disturbed his optimism. At that precise moment Mrs Verloc began to look upon herself as released from all earthly ties.

She had her freedom. Her contract with existence, as represented by that man standing over there, was at an end. She was a free woman. Had this view become in some way perceptible to Mr Verloc he would have been extremely shocked. In his affairs of the heart Mr Verloc had been always carelessly generous, yet always with no other idea than that of being loved for himself. Upon this matter, his ethical notions being in agreement with his vanity, he was completely incorrigible. That this should be so in the case of his virtuous and legal connection he was perfectly certain. He had grown older, fatter, heavier, in the belief that he lacked no fascination for being loved for his own sake. When he saw Mrs Verloc starting to walk out of the kitchen without a word he was disappointed.

“Where are you going to?” he called out rather sharply. “Upstairs?”

Mrs Verloc in the doorway turned at the voice. An instinct of prudence born of fear, the excessive fear of being approached and touched by that man, induced her to nod at him slightly (from the height of two steps), with a stir of the lips which the conjugal optimism of Mr Verloc took for a wan and uncertain smile.

“That’s right,” he encouraged her gruffly. “Rest and quiet’s what you want. Go on. It won’t be long before I am with you.”

Mrs Verloc, the free woman who had had really no idea where she was going to, obeyed the suggestion with rigid steadiness.

Mr Verloc watched her. She disappeared up the stairs. He was disappointed. There was that within him which would have been more satisfied if she had been moved to throw herself upon his breast. But he was generous and indulgent. Winnie was always undemonstrative and silent. Neither was Mr Verloc himself prodigal of endearments and words as a rule. But this was not an ordinary evening. It was an occasion when a man wants to be fortified and strengthened by open proofs of sympathy and affection. Mr Verloc sighed, and put out the gas in the kitchen. Mr Verloc’s sympathy with his wife was genuine and intense. It almost brought tears into his eyes as he stood in the parlour reflecting on the loneliness hanging over her head. In this mood Mr Verloc missed Stevie very much out of a difficult world. He thought mournfully of his end. If only that lad had not stupidly destroyed himself!

The sensation of unappeasable hunger, not unknown after the strain of a hazardous enterprise to adventurers of tougher fibre than Mr Verloc, overcame him again. The piece of roast beef, laid out in the likeness of funereal baked meats for Stevie’s obsequies, offered itself largely to his notice. And Mr Verloc again partook. He partook ravenously, without restraint and decency, cutting thick slices with the sharp carving knife, and

swallowing them without bread. In the course of that refection it occurred to Mr Verloc that he was not hearing his wife move about the bedroom as he should have done. The thought of finding her perhaps sitting on the bed in the dark not only cut Mr Verloc's appetite, but also took from him the inclination to follow her upstairs just yet. Laying down the carving knife, Mr Verloc listened with careworn attention.

He was comforted by hearing her move at last. She walked suddenly across the room, and threw the window up. After a period of stillness up there, during which he figured her to himself with her head out, he heard the sash being lowered slowly. Then she made a few steps, and sat down. Every resonance of his house was familiar to Mr Verloc, who was thoroughly domesticated. When next he heard his wife's footsteps overhead he knew, as well as if he had seen her doing it, that she had been putting on her walking shoes. Mr Verloc wriggled his shoulders slightly at this ominous symptom, and moving away from the table, stood with his back to the fireplace, his head on one side, and gnawing perplexedly at the tips of his fingers. He kept track of her movements by the sound. She walked here and there violently, with abrupt stoppages, now before the chest of drawers, then in front of the wardrobe. An immense load of weariness, the harvest of a day of shocks and surprises, weighed Mr Verloc's energies to the ground.

He did not raise his eyes till he heard his wife descending the stairs. It was as he had guessed. She was dressed for going out.

Mrs Verloc was a free woman. She had thrown open the window of the bedroom either with the intention of screaming Murder! Help! or of throwing herself out. For she did not exactly know what use to make of her freedom. Her personality seemed to have been torn into two pieces, whose mental operations did not adjust themselves very well to each other. The street, silent and deserted from end to end, repelled her by taking sides with that man who was so certain of his impunity. She was afraid to shout lest no one should come. Obviously no one would come. Her instinct of self-preservation recoiled from the depth of the fall into that sort of slimy, deep trench. Mrs Verloc closed the window, and dressed herself to go out into the street by another way. She was a free woman. She had dressed herself thoroughly, down to the tying of a black veil over her face. As she appeared before him in the light of the parlour, Mr Verloc observed that she had even her little handbag hanging from her left wrist. . . . Flying off to her mother, of course.

The thought that women were wearisome creatures after all presented itself to his fatigued brain. But he was too generous to harbour it for more than an instant. This man, hurt cruelly in his vanity, remained magnanimous in his conduct, allowing himself no satisfaction of a bitter smile or of a contemptuous gesture. With true greatness of soul, he only glanced at the wooden clock on the wall, and said in a perfectly calm but forcible manner:

"Five and twenty minutes past eight, Winnie. There's no sense in going over there so late. You will never manage to get back to-night."

Before his extended hand Mrs Verloc had stopped short. He added heavily: "Your mother will be gone to bed before you get there. This is the sort of news that can wait."

Nothing was further from Mrs Verloc's thoughts than going to her mother. She recoiled at the mere idea, and feeling a chair behind her, she obeyed the suggestion of the touch, and sat down. Her intention had been simply to get outside the door for ever. And if this feeling was correct, its mental form took an unrefined shape corresponding to her origin and station. "I would rather walk the streets all the days of my life," she thought. But this creature, whose moral nature had been subjected to a shock of which, in the physical order, the most violent earthquake of history could only be a faint and languid rendering, was at the mercy of mere trifles, of casual contacts. She sat down. With her hat and veil she had the air of a visitor, of having looked in on Mr Verloc for a moment. Her instant docility encouraged him, whilst her aspect of only temporary and silent acquiescence provoked him a little.

"Let me tell you, Winnie," he said with authority, "that your place is here this evening. Hang it all! you brought the damned police high and low about my ears. I don't blame you — but it's your doing all the same. You'd better take this confounded hat off. I can't let you go out, old girl," he added in a softened voice.

Mrs Verloc's mind got hold of that declaration with morbid tenacity. The man who had taken Stevie out from under her very eyes to murder him in a locality whose name was at the moment not present to her memory would not allow her go out. Of course he wouldn't.

Now he had murdered Stevie he would never let her go. He would want to keep her for nothing. And on this characteristic reasoning, having all the force of insane logic, Mrs Verloc's disconnected wits went to work practically. She could slip by him, open the door, run out. But he would dash out after her, seize her round the body, drag her back into the shop. She could scratch, kick, and bite — and stab too; but for stabbing she wanted a knife. Mrs Verloc sat still under her black veil, in her own house, like a masked and mysterious visitor of impenetrable intentions.

Mr Verloc's magnanimity was not more than human. She had exasperated him at last.

"Can't you say something? You have your own dodges for vexing a man. Oh yes! I know your deaf-and-dumb trick. I've seen you at it before to-day. But just now it won't do. And to begin with, take this damned thing off. One can't tell whether one is talking to a dummy or to a live woman."

He advanced, and stretching out his hand, dragged the veil off, unmasking a still, unreadable face, against which his nervous exasperation was shattered like a glass bubble flung against a rock. "That's better," he said, to cover his momentary uneasiness, and retreated back to his old station by the mantelpiece. It never entered his head that his wife could give him up. He felt a little ashamed of himself, for he was fond and generous. What could he do? Everything had been said already. He protested vehemently.

“By heavens! You know that I hunted high and low. I ran the risk of giving myself away to find somebody for that accursed job. And I tell you again I couldn’t find anyone crazy enough or hungry enough. What do you take me for — a murderer, or what? The boy is gone. Do you think I wanted him to blow himself up? He’s gone. His troubles are over. Ours are just going to begin, I tell you, precisely because he did blow himself. I don’t blame you. But just try to understand that it was a pure accident; as much an accident as if he had been run over by a ‘bus while crossing the street.”

His generosity was not infinite, because he was a human being — and not a monster, as Mrs Verloc believed him to be. He paused, and a snarl lifting his moustaches above a gleam of white teeth gave him the expression of a reflective beast, not very dangerous — a slow beast with a sleek head, gloomier than a seal, and with a husky voice.

“And when it comes to that, it’s as much your doing as mine. That’s so. You may glare as much as you like. I know what you can do in that way. Strike me dead if I ever would have thought of the lad for that purpose. It was you who kept on shoving him in my way when I was half distracted with the worry of keeping the lot of us out of trouble. What the devil made you? One would think you were doing it on purpose. And I am damned if I know that you didn’t. There’s no saying how much of what’s going on you have got hold of on the sly with your infernal don’t-care-a-damn way of looking nowhere in particular, and saying nothing at all. . . . “

His husky domestic voice ceased for a while. Mrs Verloc made no reply. Before that silence he felt ashamed of what he had said. But as often happens to peaceful men in domestic tiffs, being ashamed he pushed another point.

“You have a devilish way of holding your tongue sometimes,” he began again, without raising his voice. “Enough to make some men go mad. It’s lucky for you that I am not so easily put out as some of them would be by your deaf-and-dumb sulks. I am fond of you. But don’t you go too far. This isn’t the time for it. We ought to be thinking of what we’ve got to do. And I can’t let you go out to-night, galloping off to your mother with some crazy tale or other about me. I won’t have it. Don’t you make any mistake about it: if you will have it that I killed the boy, then you’ve killed him as much as I.”

In sincerity of feeling and openness of statement, these words went far beyond anything that had ever been said in this home, kept up on the wages of a secret industry eked out by the sale of more or less secret wares: the poor expedients devised by a mediocre mankind for preserving an imperfect society from the dangers of moral and physical corruption, both secret too of their kind. They were spoken because Mr Verloc had felt himself really outraged; but the reticent decencies of this home life, nestling in a shady street behind a shop where the sun never shone, remained apparently undisturbed. Mrs Verloc heard him out with perfect propriety, and then rose from her chair in her hat and jacket like a visitor at the end of a call. She advanced towards her husband, one arm extended as if for a silent leave-taking. Her net veil dangling down by one end on the left side of her face gave an air of disorderly formality to her restrained movements. But when she arrived as far as the hearthrug, Mr Verloc was no longer standing there. He had moved off in the direction of the sofa, without raising

his eyes to watch the effect of his tirade. He was tired, resigned in a truly marital spirit. But he felt hurt in the tender spot of his secret weakness. If she would go on sulking in that dreadful overcharged silence — why then she must. She was a master in that domestic art. Mr Verloc flung himself heavily upon the sofa, disregarding as usual the fate of his hat, which, as if accustomed to take care of itself, made for a safe shelter under the table.

He was tired. The last particle of his nervous force had been expended in the wonders and agonies of this day full of surprising failures coming at the end of a harassing month of scheming and insomnia. He was tired. A man isn't made of stone. Hang everything! Mr Verloc reposed characteristically, clad in his outdoor garments. One side of his open overcoat was lying partly on the ground. Mr Verloc wallowed on his back. But he longed for a more perfect rest — for sleep — for a few hours of delicious forgetfulness. That would come later. Provisionally he rested. And he thought: "I wish she would give over this damned nonsense. It's exasperating."

There must have been something imperfect in Mrs Verloc's sentiment of regained freedom. Instead of taking the way of the door she leaned back, with her shoulders against the tablet of the mantelpiece, as a wayfarer rests against a fence. A tinge of wildness in her aspect was derived from the black veil hanging like a rag against her cheek, and from the fixity of her black gaze where the light of the room was absorbed and lost without the trace of a single gleam. This woman, capable of a bargain the mere suspicion of which would have been infinitely shocking to Mr Verloc's idea of love, remained irresolute, as if scrupulously aware of something wanting on her part for the formal closing of the transaction.

On the sofa Mr Verloc wriggled his shoulders into perfect comfort, and from the fulness of his heart emitted a wish which was certainly as pious as anything likely to come from such a source.

"I wish to goodness," he growled huskily, "I had never seen Greenwich Park or anything belonging to it."

The veiled sound filled the small room with its moderate volume, well adapted to the modest nature of the wish. The waves of air of the proper length, propagated in accordance with correct mathematical formulas, flowed around all the inanimate things in the room, lapped against Mrs Verloc's head as if it had been a head of stone. And incredible as it may appear, the eyes of Mrs Verloc seemed to grow still larger. The audible wish of Mr Verloc's overflowing heart flowed into an empty place in his wife's memory. Greenwich Park. A park! That's where the boy was killed. A park — smashed branches, torn leaves, gravel, bits of brotherly flesh and bone, all spouting up together in the manner of a firework. She remembered now what she had heard, and she remembered it pictorially. They had to gather him up with the shovel. Trembling all over with irrepressible shudders, she saw before her the very implement with its ghastly load scraped up from the ground. Mrs Verloc closed her eyes desperately, throwing upon that vision the night of her eyelids, where after a rainlike fall of mangled limbs the decapitated head of Stevie lingered suspended alone,

and fading out slowly like the last star of a pyrotechnic display. Mrs Verloc opened her eyes.

Her face was no longer stony. Anybody could have noted the subtle change on her features, in the stare of her eyes, giving her a new and startling expression; an expression seldom observed by competent persons under the conditions of leisure and security demanded for thorough analysis, but whose meaning could not be mistaken at a glance. Mrs Verloc's doubts as to the end of the bargain no longer existed; her wits, no longer disconnected, were working under the control of her will. But Mr Verloc observed nothing. He was reposing in that pathetic condition of optimism induced by excess of fatigue. He did not want any more trouble — with his wife too — of all people in the world. He had been unanswerable in his vindication. He was loved for himself. The present phase of her silence he interpreted favourably. This was the time to make it up with her. The silence had lasted long enough. He broke it by calling to her in an undertone.

“Winnie.”

“Yes,” answered obediently Mrs Verloc the free woman. She commanded her wits now, her vocal organs; she felt herself to be in an almost preternaturally perfect control of every fibre of her body. It was all her own, because the bargain was at an end. She was clear sighted. She had become cunning. She chose to answer him so readily for a purpose. She did not wish that man to change his position on the sofa which was very suitable to the circumstances. She succeeded. The man did not stir. But after answering him she remained leaning negligently against the mantelpiece in the attitude of a resting wayfarer. She was unhurried. Her brow was smooth. The head and shoulders of Mr Verloc were hidden from her by the high side of the sofa. She kept her eyes fixed on his feet.

She remained thus mysteriously still and suddenly collected till Mr Verloc was heard with an accent of marital authority, and moving slightly to make room for her to sit on the edge of the sofa.

“Come here,” he said in a peculiar tone, which might have been the tone of brutality, but was intimately known to Mrs Verloc as the note of wooing.

She started forward at once, as if she were still a loyal woman bound to that man by an unbroken contract. Her right hand skimmed slightly the end of the table, and when she had passed on towards the sofa the carving knife had vanished without the slightest sound from the side of the dish. Mr Verloc heard the creaky plank in the floor, and was content. He waited. Mrs Verloc was coming. As if the homeless soul of Stevie had flown for shelter straight to the breast of his sister, guardian and protector, the resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step, even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the slight divergence of the eyes. But Mr Verloc did not see that. He was lying on his back and staring upwards. He saw partly on the ceiling and partly on the wall the moving shadow of an arm with a clenched hand holding a carving knife. It flickered up and down. Its movements were leisurely. They were leisurely enough for Mr Verloc to recognise the limb and the weapon.

They were leisurely enough for him to take in the full meaning of the portent, and to taste the flavour of death rising in his gorge. His wife had gone raving mad — murdering mad. They were leisurely enough for the first paralysing effect of this discovery to pass away before a resolute determination to come out victorious from the ghastly struggle with that armed lunatic. They were leisurely enough for Mr Verloc to elaborate a plan of defence involving a dash behind the table, and the felling of the woman to the ground with a heavy wooden chair. But they were not leisurely enough to allow Mr Verloc the time to move either hand or foot. The knife was already planted in his breast. It met no resistance on its way. Hazard has such accuracies. Into that plunging blow, delivered over the side of the couch, Mrs Verloc had put all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns, and the unbalanced nervous fury of the age of bar-rooms. Mr Verloc, the Secret Agent, turning slightly on his side with the force of the blow, expired without stirring a limb, in the muttered sound of the word “Don’t” by way of protest.

Mrs Verloc had let go the knife, and her extraordinary resemblance to her late brother had faded, had become very ordinary now. She drew a deep breath, the first easy breath since Chief Inspector Heat had exhibited to her the labelled piece of Stevie’s overcoat. She leaned forward on her folded arms over the side of the sofa. She adopted that easy attitude not in order to watch or gloat over the body of Mr Verloc, but because of the undulatory and swinging movements of the parlour, which for some time behaved as though it were at sea in a tempest. She was giddy but calm. She had become a free woman with a perfection of freedom which left her nothing to desire and absolutely nothing to do, since Stevie’s urgent claim on her devotion no longer existed. Mrs Verloc, who thought in images, was not troubled now by visions, because she did not think at all. And she did not move. She was a woman enjoying her complete irresponsibility and endless leisure, almost in the manner of a corpse. She did not move, she did not think. Neither did the mortal envelope of the late Mr Verloc reposing on the sofa. Except for the fact that Mrs Verloc breathed these two would have been perfect in accord: that accord of prudent reserve without superfluous words, and sparing of signs, which had been the foundation of their respectable home life. For it had been respectable, covering by a decent reticence the problems that may arise in the practice of a secret profession and the commerce of shady wares. To the last its decorum had remained undisturbed by unseemly shrieks and other misplaced sincerities of conduct. And after the striking of the blow, this respectability was continued in immobility and silence.

Nothing moved in the parlour till Mrs Verloc raised her head slowly and looked at the clock with inquiring mistrust. She had become aware of a ticking sound in the room. It grew upon her ear, while she remembered clearly that the clock on the wall was silent, had no audible tick. What did it mean by beginning to tick so loudly all of a sudden? Its face indicated ten minutes to nine. Mrs Verloc cared nothing for time, and the ticking went on. She concluded it could not be the clock, and her sullen gaze

moved along the walls, wavered, and became vague, while she strained her hearing to locate the sound. Tic, tic, tic.

After listening for some time Mrs Verloc lowered her gaze deliberately on her husband's body. Its attitude of repose was so home-like and familiar that she could do so without feeling embarrassed by any pronounced novelty in the phenomena of her home life. Mr Verloc was taking his habitual ease. He looked comfortable.

By the position of the body the face of Mr Verloc was not visible to Mrs Verloc, his widow. Her fine, sleepy eyes, travelling downward on the track of the sound, became contemplative on meeting a flat object of bone which protruded a little beyond the edge of the sofa. It was the handle of the domestic carving knife with nothing strange about it but its position at right angles to Mr Verloc's waistcoat and the fact that something dripped from it. Dark drops fell on the floorcloth one after another, with a sound of ticking growing fast and furious like the pulse of an insane clock. At its highest speed this ticking changed into a continuous sound of trickling. Mrs Verloc watched that transformation with shadows of anxiety coming and going on her face. It was a trickle, dark, swift, thin. . . . Blood!

At this unforeseen circumstance Mrs Verloc abandoned her pose of idleness and irresponsibility.

With a sudden snatch at her skirts and a faint shriek she ran to the door, as if the trickle had been the first sign of a destroying flood. Finding the table in her way she gave it a push with both hands as though it had been alive, with such force that it went for some distance on its four legs, making a loud, scraping racket, whilst the big dish with the joint crashed heavily on the floor.

Then all became still. Mrs Verloc on reaching the door had stopped. A round hat disclosed in the middle of the floor by the moving of the table rocked slightly on its crown in the wind of her flight.

Chapter 12

Winnie Verloc, the widow of Mr Verloc, the sister of the late faithful Stevie (blown to fragments in a state of innocence and in the conviction of being engaged in a humanitarian enterprise), did not run beyond the door of the parlour. She had indeed run away so far from a mere trickle of blood, but that was a movement of instinctive repulsion. And there she had paused, with staring eyes and lowered head. As though she had run through long years in her flight across the small parlour, Mrs Verloc by the door was quite a different person from the woman who had been leaning over the sofa, a little swimmy in her head, but otherwise free to enjoy the profound calm of idleness and irresponsibility. Mrs Verloc was no longer giddy. Her head was steady. On the other hand, she was no longer calm. She was afraid.

If she avoided looking in the direction of her reposing husband it was not because she was afraid of him. Mr Verloc was not frightful to behold. He looked comfortable. Moreover, he was dead. Mrs Verloc entertained no vain delusions on the subject of the dead. Nothing brings them back, neither love nor hate. They can do nothing to you. They are as nothing. Her mental state was tinged by a sort of austere contempt for that man who had let himself be killed so easily. He had been the master of a house, the husband of a woman, and the murderer of her Stevie. And now he was of no account in every respect. He was of less practical account than the clothing on his body, than his overcoat, than his boots — than that hat lying on the floor. He was nothing. He was not worth looking at. He was even no longer the murderer of poor Stevie. The only murderer that would be found in the room when people came to look for Mr Verloc would be — herself!

Her hands shook so that she failed twice in the task of refastening her veil. Mrs Verloc was no longer a person of leisure and responsibility. She was afraid. The stabbing of Mr Verloc had been only a blow. It had relieved the pent-up agony of shrieks strangled in her throat, of tears dried up in her hot eyes, of the maddening and indignant rage at the atrocious part played by that man, who was less than nothing now, in robbing her of the boy.

It had been an obscurely prompted blow. The blood trickling on the floor off the handle of the knife had turned it into an extremely plain case of murder. Mrs Verloc, who always refrained from looking deep into things, was compelled to look into the very bottom of this thing. She saw there no haunting face, no reproachful shade, no vision of remorse, no sort of ideal conception. She saw there an object. That object was the gallows. Mrs Verloc was afraid of the gallows.

She was terrified of them ideally. Having never set eyes on that last argument of men's justice except in illustrative woodcuts to a certain type of tales, she first saw them erect against a black and stormy background, festooned with chains and human bones, circled about by birds that peck at dead men's eyes. This was frightful enough, but Mrs Verloc, though not a well-informed woman, had a sufficient knowledge of the institutions of her country to know that gallows are no longer erected romantically on the banks of dismal rivers or on wind-swept headlands, but in the yards of jails. There within four high walls, as if into a pit, at dawn of day, the murderer was brought out to be executed, with a horrible quietness and, as the reports in the newspapers always said, "in the presence of the authorities." With her eyes staring on the floor, her nostrils quivering with anguish and shame, she imagined herself all alone amongst a lot of strange gentlemen in silk hats who were calmly proceeding about the business of hanging her by the neck. That — never! Never! And how was it done? The impossibility of imagining the details of such quiet execution added something maddening to her abstract terror. The newspapers never gave any details except one, but that one with some affectation was always there at the end of a meagre report. Mrs Verloc remembered its nature. It came with a cruel burning pain into her head, as if the words "The drop given was fourteen feet" had been scratched on her brain with a hot needle. "The drop given was fourteen feet."

These words affected her physically too. Her throat became convulsed in waves to resist strangulation; and the apprehension of the jerk was so vivid that she seized her head in both hands as if to save it from being torn off her shoulders. "The drop given was fourteen feet." No! that must never be. She could not stand that. The thought of it even was not bearable. She could not stand thinking of it. Therefore Mrs Verloc formed the resolution to go at once and throw herself into the river off one of the bridges.

This time she managed to refasten her veil. With her face as if masked, all black from head to foot except for some flowers in her hat, she looked up mechanically at the clock. She thought it must have stopped. She could not believe that only two minutes had passed since she had looked at it last. Of course not. It had been stopped all the time. As a matter of fact, only three minutes had elapsed from the moment she had drawn the first deep, easy breath after the blow, to this moment when Mrs Verloc formed the resolution to drown herself in the Thames. But Mrs Verloc could not believe that. She seemed to have heard or read that clocks and watches always stopped at the moment of murder for the undoing of the murderer. She did not care. "To the bridge — and over I go." . . . But her movements were slow.

She dragged herself painfully across the shop, and had to hold on to the handle of the door before she found the necessary fortitude to open it. The street frightened her, since it led either to the gallows or to the river. She floundered over the doorstep head forward, arms thrown out, like a person falling over the parapet of a bridge. This entrance into the open air had a foretaste of drowning; a slimy dampness enveloped her, entered her nostrils, clung to her hair. It was not actually raining, but each gas lamp had a rusty little halo of mist. The van and horses were gone, and in the black street the

curtained window of the carters' eating-house made a square patch of soiled blood-red light glowing faintly very near the level of the pavement. Mrs Verloc, dragging herself slowly towards it, thought that she was a very friendless woman. It was true. It was so true that, in a sudden longing to see some friendly face, she could think of no one else but of Mrs Neale, the charwoman. She had no acquaintances of her own. Nobody would miss her in a social way. It must not be imagined that the Widow Verloc had forgotten her mother. This was not so. Winnie had been a good daughter because she had been a devoted sister. Her mother had always leaned on her for support. No consolation or advice could be expected there. Now that Stevie was dead the bond seemed to be broken. She could not face the old woman with the horrible tale. Moreover, it was too far. The river was her present destination. Mrs Verloc tried to forget her mother.

Each step cost her an effort of will which seemed the last possible. Mrs Verloc had dragged herself past the red glow of the eating-house window. "To the bridge — and over I go," she repeated to herself with fierce obstinacy. She put out her hand just in time to steady herself against a lamp-post. "I'll never get there before morning," she thought. The fear of death paralysed her efforts to escape the gallows. It seemed to her she had been staggering in that street for hours. "I'll never get there," she thought. "They'll find me knocking about the streets. It's too far." She held on, panting under her black veil.

"The drop given was fourteen feet."

She pushed the lamp-post away from her violently, and found herself walking. But another wave of faintness overtook her like a great sea, washing away her heart clean out of her breast. "I will never get there," she muttered, suddenly arrested, swaying lightly where she stood. "Never."

And perceiving the utter impossibility of walking as far as the nearest bridge, Mrs Verloc thought of a flight abroad.

It came to her suddenly. Murderers escaped. They escaped abroad. Spain or California. Mere names. The vast world created for the glory of man was only a vast blank to Mrs Verloc. She did not know which way to turn. Murderers had friends, relations, helpers — they had knowledge. She had nothing. She was the most lonely of murderers that ever struck a mortal blow. She was alone in London: and the whole town of marvels and mud, with its maze of streets and its mass of lights, was sunk in a hopeless night, rested at the bottom of a black abyss from which no unaided woman could hope to scramble out.

She swayed forward, and made a fresh start blindly, with an awful dread of falling down; but at the end of a few steps, unexpectedly, she found a sensation of support, of security. Raising her head, she saw a man's face peering closely at her veil. Comrade Ossipon was not afraid of strange women, and no feeling of false delicacy could prevent him from striking an acquaintance with a woman apparently very much intoxicated. Comrade Ossipon was interested in women. He held up this one between his two large palms, peering at her in a business-like way till he heard her say faintly "Mr Ossipon!" and then he very nearly let her drop to the ground.

"Mrs Verloc!" he exclaimed. "You here!"

It seemed impossible to him that she should have been drinking. But one never knows. He did not go into that question, but attentive not to discourage kind fate surrendering to him the widow of Comrade Verloc, he tried to draw her to his breast. To his astonishment she came quite easily, and even rested on his arm for a moment before she attempted to disengage herself. Comrade Ossipon would not be brusque with kind fate. He withdrew his arm in a natural way.

"You recognised me," she faltered out, standing before him, fairly steady on her legs.

"Of course I did," said Ossipon with perfect readiness. "I was afraid you were going to fall. I've thought of you too often lately not to recognise you anywhere, at any time. I've always thought of you — ever since I first set eyes on you."

Mrs Verloc seemed not to hear. "You were coming to the shop?" she said nervously.

"Yes; at once," answered Ossipon. "Directly I read the paper."

In fact, Comrade Ossipon had been skulking for a good two hours in the neighbourhood of Brett Street, unable to make up his mind for a bold move. The robust anarchist was not exactly a bold conqueror. He remembered that Mrs Verloc had never responded to his glances by the slightest sign of encouragement. Besides, he thought the shop might be watched by the police, and Comrade Ossipon did not wish the police to form an exaggerated notion of his revolutionary sympathies. Even now he did not know precisely what to do. In comparison with his usual amatory speculations this was a big and serious undertaking. He ignored how much there was in it and how far he would have to go in order to get hold of what there was to get — supposing there was a chance at all. These perplexities checking his elation imparted to his tone a soberness well in keeping with the circumstances.

"May I ask you where you were going?" he inquired in a subdued voice.

"Don't ask me!" cried Mrs Verloc with a shuddering, repressed violence. All her strong vitality recoiled from the idea of death. "Never mind where I was going. . . ."

Ossipon concluded that she was very much excited but perfectly sober. She remained silent by his side for moment, then all at once she did something which he did not expect. She slipped her hand under his arm. He was startled by the act itself certainly, and quite as much too by the palpably resolute character of this movement. But this being a delicate affair, Comrade Ossipon behaved with delicacy. He contented himself by pressing the hand slightly against his robust ribs. At the same time he felt himself being impelled forward, and yielded to the impulse. At the end of Brett Street he became aware of being directed to the left. He submitted.

The fruiterer at the corner had put out the blazing glory of his oranges and lemons, and Brett Place was all darkness, interspersed with the misty halos of the few lamps defining its triangular shape, with a cluster of three lights on one stand in the middle. The dark forms of the man and woman glided slowly arm in arm along the walls with a loverlike and homeless aspect in the miserable night.

"What would you say if I were to tell you that I was going to find you?" Mrs Verloc asked, gripping his arm with force.

"I would say that you couldn't find anyone more ready to help you in your trouble," answered Ossipon, with a notion of making tremendous headway. In fact, the progress of this delicate affair was almost taking his breath away.

"In my trouble!" Mrs Verloc repeated slowly.

"Yes."

"And do you know what my trouble is?" she whispered with strange intensity.

"Ten minutes after seeing the evening paper," explained Ossipon with ardour, "I met a fellow whom you may have seen once or twice at the shop perhaps, and I had a talk with him which left no doubt whatever in my mind. Then I started for here, wondering whether you — I've been fond of you beyond words ever since I set eyes on your face," he cried, as if unable to command his feelings.

Comrade Ossipon assumed correctly that no woman was capable of wholly disbelieving such a statement. But he did not know that Mrs Verloc accepted it with all the fierceness the instinct of self-preservation puts into the grip of a drowning person. To the widow of Mr Verloc the robust anarchist was like a radiant messenger of life.

They walked slowly, in step. "I thought so," Mrs Verloc murmured faintly.

"You've read it in my eyes," suggested Ossipon with great assurance.

"Yes," she breathed out into his inclined ear.

"A love like mine could not be concealed from a woman like you," he went on, trying to detach his mind from material considerations such as the business value of the shop, and the amount of money Mr Verloc might have left in the bank. He applied himself to the sentimental side of the affair. In his heart of hearts he was a little shocked at his success. Verloc had been a good fellow, and certainly a very decent husband as far as one could see. However, Comrade Ossipon was not going to quarrel with his luck for the sake of a dead man. Resolutely he suppressed his sympathy for the ghost of Comrade Verloc, and went on.

"I could not conceal it. I was too full of you. I daresay you could not help seeing it in my eyes. But I could not guess it. You were always so distant. . . ."

"What else did you expect?" burst out Mrs Verloc. "I was a respectable woman —"

She paused, then added, as if speaking to herself, in sinister resentment: "Till he made me what I am."

Ossipon let that pass, and took up his running. "He never did seem to me to be quite worthy of you," he began, throwing loyalty to the winds. "You were worthy of a better fate."

Mrs Verloc interrupted bitterly:

"Better fate! He cheated me out of seven years of life."

"You seemed to live so happily with him." Ossipon tried to exculpate the lukewarmness of his past conduct. "It's that what's made me timid. You seemed to love him. I was surprised — and jealous," he added.

"Love him!" Mrs Verloc cried out in a whisper, full of scorn and rage. "Love him! I was a good wife to him. I am a respectable woman. You thought I loved him! You did! Look here, Tom —"

The sound of this name thrilled Comrade Ossipon with pride. For his name was Alexander, and he was called Tom by arrangement with the most familiar of his intimates. It was a name of friendship — of moments of expansion. He had no idea that she had ever heard it used by anybody. It was apparent that she had not only caught it, but had treasured it in her memory — perhaps in her heart.

“Look here, Tom! I was a young girl. I was done up. I was tired. I had two people depending on what I could do, and it did seem as if I couldn’t do any more. Two people — mother and the boy. He was much more mine than mother’s. I sat up nights and nights with him on my lap, all alone upstairs, when I wasn’t more than eight years old myself. And then — He was mine, I tell you. . . . You can’t understand that. No man can understand it. What was I to do? There was a young fellow — ”

The memory of the early romance with the young butcher survived, tenacious, like the image of a glimpsed ideal in that heart quailing before the fear of the gallows and full of revolt against death.

“That was the man I loved then,” went on the widow of Mr Verloc. “I suppose he could see it in my eyes too. Five and twenty shillings a week, and his father threatened to kick him out of the business if he made such a fool of himself as to marry a girl with a crippled mother and a crazy idiot of a boy on her hands. But he would hang about me, till one evening I found the courage to slam the door in his face. I had to do it. I loved him dearly. Five and twenty shillings a week! There was that other man — a good lodger. What is a girl to do? Could I’ve gone on the streets? He seemed kind. He wanted me, anyhow. What was I to do with mother and that poor boy? Eh? I said yes. He seemed good-natured, he was freehanded, he had money, he never said anything. Seven years — seven years a good wife to him, the kind, the good, the generous, the — And he loved me. Oh yes. He loved me till I sometimes wished myself — Seven years. Seven years a wife to him. And do you know what he was, that dear friend of yours? Do you know what he was? He was a devil!”

The superhuman vehemence of that whispered statement completely stunned Comrade Ossipon. Winnie Verloc turning about held him by both arms, facing him under the falling mist in the darkness and solitude of Brett Place, in which all sounds of life seemed lost as if in a triangular well of asphalt and bricks, of blind houses and unfeeling stones.

“No; I didn’t know,” he declared, with a sort of flabby stupidity, whose comical aspect was lost upon a woman haunted by the fear of the gallows, “but I do now. I — I understand,” he floundered on, his mind speculating as to what sort of atrocities Verloc could have practised under the sleepy, placid appearances of his married estate. It was positively awful. “I understand,” he repeated, and then by a sudden inspiration uttered an — “Unhappy woman!” of lofty commiseration instead of the more familiar “Poor darling!” of his usual practice. This was no usual case. He felt conscious of something abnormal going on, while he never lost sight of the greatness of the stake. “Unhappy, brave woman!”

He was glad to have discovered that variation; but he could discover nothing else.

“Ah, but he is dead now,” was the best he could do. And he put a remarkable amount of animosity into his guarded exclamation. Mrs Verloc caught at his arm with a sort of frenzy.

“You guessed then he was dead,” she murmured, as if beside herself. “You! You guessed what I had to do. Had to!”

There were suggestions of triumph, relief, gratitude in the indefinable tone of these words. It engrossed the whole attention of Ossipon to the detriment of mere literal sense. He wondered what was up with her, why she had worked herself into this state of wild excitement. He even began to wonder whether the hidden causes of that Greenwich Park affair did not lie deep in the unhappy circumstances of the Verlocs’ married life. He went so far as to suspect Mr Verloc of having selected that extraordinary manner of committing suicide. By Jove! that would account for the utter inanity and wrong-headedness of the thing. No anarchist manifestation was required by the circumstances. Quite the contrary; and Verloc was as well aware of that as any other revolutionist of his standing. What an immense joke if Verloc had simply made fools of the whole of Europe, of the revolutionary world, of the police, of the press, and of the cocksure Professor as well. Indeed, thought Ossipon, in astonishment, it seemed almost certain that he did! Poor beggar! It struck him as very possible that of that household of two it wasn’t precisely the man who was the devil.

Alexander Ossipon, nicknamed the Doctor, was naturally inclined to think indulgently of his men friends. He eyed Mrs Verloc hanging on his arm. Of his women friends he thought in a specially practical way. Why Mrs Verloc should exclaim at his knowledge of Mr Verloc’s death, which was no guess at all, did not disturb him beyond measure. They often talked like lunatics. But he was curious to know how she had been informed. The papers could tell her nothing beyond the mere fact: the man blown to pieces in Greenwich Park not having been identified. It was inconceivable on any theory that Verloc should have given her an inkling of his intention — whatever it was. This problem interested Comrade Ossipon immensely. He stopped short. They had gone then along the three sides of Brett Place, and were near the end of Brett Street again.

“How did you first come to hear of it?” he asked in a tone he tried to render appropriate to the character of the revelations which had been made to him by the woman at his side.

She shook violently for a while before she answered in a listless voice.

“From the police. A chief inspector came, Chief Inspector Heat he said he was. He showed me — ”

Mrs Verloc choked. “Oh, Tom, they had to gather him up with a shovel.”

Her breast heaved with dry sobs. In a moment Ossipon found his tongue.

“The police! Do you mean to say the police came already? That Chief Inspector Heat himself actually came to tell you.”

“Yes,” she confirmed in the same listless tone. “He came just like this. He came. I didn’t know. He showed me a piece of overcoat, and — just like that. Do you know this? he says.”

“Heat! Heat! And what did he do?”

Mrs Verloc’s head dropped. “Nothing. He did nothing. He went away. The police were on that man’s side,” she murmured tragically. “Another one came too.”

“Another — another inspector, do you mean?” asked Ossipon, in great excitement, and very much in the tone of a scared child.

“I don’t know. He came. He looked like a foreigner. He may have been one of them Embassy people.”

Comrade Ossipon nearly collapsed under this new shock.

“Embassy! Are you aware what you are saying? What Embassy? What on earth do you mean by Embassy?”

“It’s that place in Chesham Square. The people he cursed so. I don’t know. What does it matter!”

“And that fellow, what did he do or say to you?”

“I don’t remember. . . . Nothing I don’t care. Don’t ask me,” she pleaded in a weary voice.

“All right. I won’t,” assented Ossipon tenderly. And he meant it too, not because he was touched by the pathos of the pleading voice, but because he felt himself losing his footing in the depths of this tenebrous affair. Police! Embassy! Phew! For fear of adventuring his intelligence into ways where its natural lights might fail to guide it safely he dismissed resolutely all suppositions, surmises, and theories out of his mind. He had the woman there, absolutely flinging herself at him, and that was the principal consideration. But after what he had heard nothing could astonish him any more. And when Mrs Verloc, as if startled suddenly out of a dream of safety, began to urge upon him wildly the necessity of an immediate flight on the Continent, he did not exclaim in the least. He simply said with unaffected regret that there was no train till the morning, and stood looking thoughtfully at her face, veiled in black net, in the light of a gas lamp veiled in a gauze of mist.

Near him, her black form merged in the night, like a figure half chiselled out of a block of black stone. It was impossible to say what she knew, how deep she was involved with policemen and Embassies. But if she wanted to get away, it was not for him to object. He was anxious to be off himself. He felt that the business, the shop so strangely familiar to chief inspectors and members of foreign Embassies, was not the place for him. That must be dropped. But there was the rest. These savings. The money!

“You must hide me till the morning somewhere,” she said in a dismayed voice.

“Fact is, my dear, I can’t take you where I live. I share the room with a friend.”

He was somewhat dismayed himself. In the morning the blessed ‘tecs will be out in all the stations, no doubt. And if they once got hold of her, for one reason or another she would be lost to him indeed.

“But you must. Don’t you care for me at all — at all? What are you thinking of?”

She said this violently, but she let her clasped hands fall in discouragement. There was a silence, while the mist fell, and darkness reigned undisturbed over Brett Place. Not a soul, not even the vagabond, lawless, and amorous soul of a cat, came near the man and the woman facing each other.

“It would be possible perhaps to find a safe lodging somewhere,” Ossipon spoke at last. “But the truth is, my dear, I have not enough money to go and try with — only a few pence. We revolutionists are not rich.”

He had fifteen shillings in his pocket. He added:

“And there’s the journey before us, too — first thing in the morning at that.”

She did not move, made no sound, and Comrade Ossipon’s heart sank a little. Apparently she had no suggestion to offer. Suddenly she clutched at her breast, as if she had felt a sharp pain there.

“But I have,” she gasped. “I have the money. I have enough money. Tom! Let us go from here.”

“How much have you got?” he inquired, without stirring to her tug; for he was a cautious man.

“I have the money, I tell you. All the money.”

“What do you mean by it? All the money there was in the bank, or what?” he asked incredulously, but ready not to be surprised at anything in the way of luck.

“Yes, yes!” she said nervously. “All there was. I’ve it all.”

“How on earth did you manage to get hold of it already?” he marvelled.

“He gave it to me,” she murmured, suddenly subdued and trembling. Comrade Ossipon put down his rising surprise with a firm hand.

“Why, then — we are saved,” he uttered slowly.

She leaned forward, and sank against his breast. He welcomed her there. She had all the money. Her hat was in the way of very marked effusion; her veil too. He was adequate in his manifestations, but no more. She received them without resistance and without abandonment, passively, as if only half-sensible. She freed herself from his lax embraces without difficulty.

“You will save me, Tom,” she broke out, recoiling, but still keeping her hold on him by the two lapels of his damp coat. “Save me. Hide me. Don’t let them have me. You must kill me first. I couldn’t do it myself — I couldn’t, I couldn’t — not even for what I am afraid of.”

She was confoundedly bizarre, he thought. She was beginning to inspire him with an indefinite uneasiness. He said surlily, for he was busy with important thoughts:

“What the devil are you afraid of?”

“Haven’t you guessed what I was driven to do!” cried the woman. Distracted by the vividness of her dreadful apprehensions, her head ringing with forceful words, that kept the horror of her position before her mind, she had imagined her incoherence to be clearness itself. She had no conscience of how little she had audibly said in the disjointed phrases completed only in her thought. She had felt the relief of a full

confession, and she gave a special meaning to every sentence spoken by Comrade Ossipon, whose knowledge did not in the least resemble her own. "Haven't you guessed what I was driven to do!" Her voice fell. "You needn't be long in guessing then what I am afraid of," she continued, in a bitter and sombre murmur. "I won't have it. I won't. I won't. I won't. You must promise to kill me first!" She shook the lapels of his coat. "It must never be!"

He assured her curtly that no promises on his part were necessary, but he took good care not to contradict her in set terms, because he had had much to do with excited women, and he was inclined in general to let his experience guide his conduct in preference to applying his sagacity to each special case. His sagacity in this case was busy in other directions. Women's words fell into water, but the shortcomings of time-tables remained. The insular nature of Great Britain obtruded itself upon his notice in an odious form. "Might just as well be put under lock and key every night," he thought irritably, as nonplussed as though he had a wall to scale with the woman on his back. Suddenly he slapped his forehead. He had by dint of cudgelling his brains just thought of the Southampton — St Malo service. The boat left about midnight. There was a train at 10.30. He became cheery and ready to act.

"From Waterloo. Plenty of time. We are all right after all. . . . What's the matter now? This isn't the way," he protested.

Mrs Verloc, having hooked her arm into his, was trying to drag him into Brett Street again.

"I've forgotten to shut the shop door as I went out," she whispered, terribly agitated.

The shop and all that was in it had ceased to interest Comrade Ossipon. He knew how to limit his desires. He was on the point of saying "What of that? Let it be," but he refrained. He disliked argument about trifles. He even mended his pace considerably on the thought that she might have left the money in the drawer. But his willingness lagged behind her feverish impatience.

The shop seemed to be quite dark at first. The door stood ajar. Mrs Verloc, leaning against the front, gasped out:

"Nobody has been in. Look! The light — the light in the parlour."

Ossipon, stretching his head forward, saw a faint gleam in the darkness of the shop.

"There is," he said.

"I forgot it." Mrs Verloc's voice came from behind her veil faintly. And as he stood waiting for her to enter first, she said louder: "Go in and put it out — or I'll go mad."

He made no immediate objection to this proposal, so strangely motivated. "Where's all that money?" he asked.

"On me! Go, Tom. Quick! Put it out. . . . Go in!" she cried, seizing him by both shoulders from behind.

Not prepared for a display of physical force, Comrade Ossipon stumbled far into the shop before her push. He was astonished at the strength of the woman and scandalised by her proceedings. But he did not retrace his steps in order to remonstrate with her severely in the street. He was beginning to be disagreeably impressed by her fantastic

behaviour. Moreover, this or never was the time to humour the woman. Comrade Ossipon avoided easily the end of the counter, and approached calmly the glazed door of the parlour. The curtain over the panes being drawn back a little he, by a very natural impulse, looked in, just as he made ready to turn the handle. He looked in without a thought, without intention, without curiosity of any sort. He looked in because he could not help looking in. He looked in, and discovered Mr Verloc reposing quietly on the sofa.

A yell coming from the innermost depths of his chest died out unheard and transformed into a sort of greasy, sickly taste on his lips. At the same time the mental personality of Comrade Ossipon executed a frantic leap backward. But his body, left thus without intellectual guidance, held on to the door handle with the unthinking force of an instinct. The robust anarchist did not even totter. And he stared, his face close to the glass, his eyes protruding out of his head. He would have given anything to get away, but his returning reason informed him that it would not do to let go the door handle. What was it — madness, a nightmare, or a trap into which he had been decoyed with fiendish artfulness? Why — what for? He did not know. Without any sense of guilt in his breast, in the full peace of his conscience as far as these people were concerned, the idea that he would be murdered for mysterious reasons by the couple Verloc passed not so much across his mind as across the pit of his stomach, and went out, leaving behind a trail of sickly faintness — an indisposition. Comrade Ossipon did not feel very well in a very special way for a moment — a long moment. And he stared. Mr Verloc lay very still meanwhile, simulating sleep for reasons of his own, while that savage woman of his was guarding the door — invisible and silent in the dark and deserted street. Was all this a some sort of terrifying arrangement invented by the police for his especial benefit? His modesty shrank from that explanation.

But the true sense of the scene he was beholding came to Ossipon through the contemplation of the hat. It seemed an extraordinary thing, an ominous object, a sign. Black, and rim upward, it lay on the floor before the couch as if prepared to receive the contributions of pence from people who would come presently to behold Mr Verloc in the fullness of his domestic ease reposing on a sofa. From the hat the eyes of the robust anarchist wandered to the displaced table, gazed at the broken dish for a time, received a kind of optical shock from observing a white gleam under the imperfectly closed eyelids of the man on the couch. Mr Verloc did not seem so much asleep now as lying down with a bent head and looking insistently at his left breast. And when Comrade Ossipon had made out the handle of the knife he turned away from the glazed door, and retched violently.

The crash of the street door flung to made his very soul leap in a panic. This house with its harmless tenant could still be made a trap of — a trap of a terrible kind. Comrade Ossipon had no settled conception now of what was happening to him. Catching his thigh against the end of the counter, he spun round, staggered with a cry of pain, felt in the distracting clatter of the bell his arms pinned to his side by a

convulsive hug, while the cold lips of a woman moved creepily on his very ear to form the words:

“Policeman! He has seen me!”

He ceased to struggle; she never let him go. Her hands had locked themselves with an inseparable twist of fingers on his robust back. While the footsteps approached, they breathed quickly, breast to breast, with hard, laboured breaths, as if theirs had been the attitude of a deadly struggle, while, in fact, it was the attitude of deadly fear. And the time was long.

The constable on the beat had in truth seen something of Mrs Verloc; only coming from the lighted thoroughfare at the other end of Brett Street, she had been no more to him than a flutter in the darkness. And he was not even quite sure that there had been a flutter. He had no reason to hurry up. On coming abreast of the shop he observed that it had been closed early. There was nothing very unusual in that. The men on duty had special instructions about that shop: what went on about there was not to be meddled with unless absolutely disorderly, but any observations made were to be reported. There were no observations to make; but from a sense of duty and for the peace of his conscience, owing also to that doubtful flutter of the darkness, the constable crossed the road, and tried the door. The spring latch, whose key was reposing for ever off duty in the late Mr Verloc’s waistcoat pocket, held as well as usual. While the conscientious officer was shaking the handle, Ossipon felt the cold lips of the woman stirring again creepily against his very ear:

“If he comes in kill me — kill me, Tom.”

The constable moved away, flashing as he passed the light of his dark lantern, merely for form’s sake, at the shop window. For a moment longer the man and the woman inside stood motionless, panting, breast to breast; then her fingers came unlocked, her arms fell by her side slowly. Ossipon leaned against the counter. The robust anarchist wanted support badly. This was awful. He was almost too disgusted for speech. Yet he managed to utter a plaintive thought, showing at least that he realised his position.

“Only a couple of minutes later and you’d have made me blunder against the fellow poking about here with his damned dark lantern.”

The widow of Mr Verloc, motionless in the middle of the shop, said insistently:

“Go in and put that light out, Tom. It will drive me crazy.”

She saw vaguely his vehement gesture of refusal. Nothing in the world would have induced Ossipon to go into the parlour. He was not superstitious, but there was too much blood on the floor; a beastly pool of it all round the hat. He judged he had been already far too near that corpse for his peace of mind — for the safety of his neck, perhaps!

“At the meter then! There. Look. In that corner.”

The robust form of Comrade Ossipon, striding brusque and shadowy across the shop, squatted in a corner obediently; but this obedience was without grace. He fumbled nervously — and suddenly in the sound of a muttered curse the light behind the glazed door flicked out to a gasping, hysterical sigh of a woman. Night, the inevitable

reward of men's faithful labours on this earth, night had fallen on Mr Verloc, the tried revolutionist — "one of the old lot" — the humble guardian of society; the invaluable Secret Agent [delta] of Baron Stott-Wartenheim's despatches; a servant of law and order, faithful, trusted, accurate, admirable, with perhaps one single amiable weakness: the idealistic belief in being loved for himself.

Ossipon groped his way back through the stuffy atmosphere, as black as ink now, to the counter. The voice of Mrs Verloc, standing in the middle of the shop, vibrated after him in that blackness with a desperate protest.

"I will not be hanged, Tom. I will not —"

She broke off. Ossipon from the counter issued a warning: "Don't shout like this," then seemed to reflect profoundly. "You did this thing quite by yourself?" he inquired in a hollow voice, but with an appearance of masterful calmness which filled Mrs Verloc's heart with grateful confidence in his protecting strength.

"Yes," she whispered, invisible.

"I wouldn't have believed it possible," he muttered. "Nobody would." She heard him move about and the snapping of a lock in the parlour door. Comrade Ossipon had turned the key on Mr Verloc's repose; and this he did not from reverence for its eternal nature or any other obscurely sentimental consideration, but for the precise reason that he was not at all sure that there was not someone else hiding somewhere in the house. He did not believe the woman, or rather he was incapable by now of judging what could be true, possible, or even probable in this astounding universe. He was terrified out of all capacity for belief or disbelief in regard of this extraordinary affair, which began with police inspectors and Embassies and would end goodness knows where — on the scaffold for someone. He was terrified at the thought that he could not prove the use he made of his time ever since seven o'clock, for he had been skulking about Brett Street. He was terrified at this savage woman who had brought him in there, and would probably saddle him with complicity, at least if he were not careful. He was terrified at the rapidity with which he had been involved in such dangers — decoyed into it. It was some twenty minutes since he had met her — not more.

The voice of Mrs Verloc rose subdued, pleading piteously: "Don't let them hang me, Tom! Take me out of the country. I'll work for you. I'll slave for you. I'll love you. I've no one in the world. . . . Who would look at me if you don't!" She ceased for a moment; then in the depths of the loneliness made round her by an insignificant thread of blood trickling off the handle of a knife, she found a dreadful inspiration to her — who had been the respectable girl of the Belgravian mansion, the loyal, respectable wife of Mr Verloc. "I won't ask you to marry me," she breathed out in shame-faced accents.

She moved a step forward in the darkness. He was terrified at her. He would not have been surprised if she had suddenly produced another knife destined for his breast. He certainly would have made no resistance. He had really not enough fortitude in him just then to tell her to keep back. But he inquired in a cavernous, strange tone: "Was he asleep?"

“No,” she cried, and went on rapidly. “He wasn’t. Not he. He had been telling me that nothing could touch him. After taking the boy away from under my very eyes to kill him — the loving, innocent, harmless lad. My own, I tell you. He was lying on the couch quite easy — after killing the boy — my boy. I would have gone on the streets to get out of his sight. And he says to me like this: ‘Come here,’ after telling me I had helped to kill the boy. You hear, Tom? He says like this: ‘Come here,’ after taking my very heart out of me along with the boy to smash in the dirt.”

She ceased, then dreamily repeated twice: “Blood and dirt. Blood and dirt.” A great light broke upon Comrade Ossipon. It was that half-witted lad then who had perished in the park. And the fooling of everybody all round appeared more complete than ever — colossal. He exclaimed scientifically, in the extremity of his astonishment: “The degenerate — by heavens!”

“Come here.” The voice of Mrs Verloc rose again. “What did he think I was made of? Tell me, Tom. Come here! Me! Like this! I had been looking at the knife, and I thought I would come then if he wanted me so much. Oh yes! I came — for the last time. . . . With the knife.”

He was excessively terrified at her — the sister of the degenerate — a degenerate herself of a murdering type . . . or else of the lying type. Comrade Ossipon might have been said to be terrified scientifically in addition to all other kinds of fear. It was an immeasurable and composite funk, which from its very excess gave him in the dark a false appearance of calm and thoughtful deliberation. For he moved and spoke with difficulty, being as if half frozen in his will and mind — and no one could see his ghastly face. He felt half dead.

He leaped a foot high. Unexpectedly Mrs Verloc had desecrated the unbroken reserved decency of her home by a shrill and terrible shriek.

“Help, Tom! Save me. I won’t be hanged!”

He rushed forward, groping for her mouth with a silencing hand, and the shriek died out. But in his rush he had knocked her over. He felt her now clinging round his legs, and his terror reached its culminating point, became a sort of intoxication, entertained delusions, acquired the characteristics of delirium tremens. He positively saw snakes now. He saw the woman twined round him like a snake, not to be shaken off. She was not deadly. She was death itself — the companion of life.

Mrs Verloc, as if relieved by the outburst, was very far from behaving noisily now. She was pitiful.

“Tom, you can’t throw me off now,” she murmured from the floor. “Not unless you crush my head under your heel. I won’t leave you.”

“Get up,” said Ossipon.

His face was so pale as to be quite visible in the profound black darkness of the shop; while Mrs Verloc, veiled, had no face, almost no discernible form. The trembling of something small and white, a flower in her hat, marked her place, her movements.

It rose in the blackness. She had got up from the floor, and Ossipon regretted not having, run out at once into the street. But he perceived easily that it would not do.

It would not do. She would run after him. She would pursue him shrieking till she sent every policeman within hearing in chase. And then goodness only knew what she would say of him. He was so frightened that for a moment the insane notion of strangling her in the dark passed through his mind. And he became more frightened than ever! She had him! He saw himself living in abject terror in some obscure hamlet in Spain or Italy; till some fine morning they found him dead too, with a knife in his breast — like Mr Verloc. He sighed deeply. He dared not move. And Mrs Verloc waited in silence the good pleasure of her saviour, deriving comfort from his reflective silence.

Suddenly he spoke up in an almost natural voice. His reflections had come to an end.

“Let’s get out, or we will lose the train.”

“Where are we going to, Tom?” she asked timidly. Mrs Verloc was no longer a free woman.

“Let’s get to Paris first, the best way we can. . . . Go out first, and see if the way’s clear.”

She obeyed. Her voice came subdued through the cautiously opened door.

“It’s all right.”

Ossipon came out. Notwithstanding his endeavours to be gentle, the cracked bell clattered behind the closed door in the empty shop, as if trying in vain to warn the reposing Mr Verloc of the final departure of his wife — accompanied by his friend.

In the hansom, they presently picked up, the robust anarchist became explanatory. He was still awfully pale, with eyes that seemed to have sunk a whole half-inch into his tense face. But he seemed to have thought of everything with extraordinary method.

“When we arrive,” he discoursed in a queer, monotonous tone, “you must go into the station ahead of me, as if we did not know each other. I will take the tickets, and slip in yours into your hand as I pass you. Then you will go into the first-class ladies’ waiting-room, and sit there till ten minutes before the train starts. Then you come out. I will be outside. You go in first on the platform, as if you did not know me. There may be eyes watching there that know what’s what. Alone you are only a woman going off by train. I am known. With me, you may be guessed at as Mrs Verloc running away. Do you understand, my dear?” he added, with an effort.

“Yes,” said Mrs Verloc, sitting there against him in the hansom all rigid with the dread of the gallows and the fear of death. “Yes, Tom.” And she added to herself, like an awful refrain: “The drop given was fourteen feet.”

Ossipon, not looking at her, and with a face like a fresh plaster cast of himself after a wasting illness, said: “By-the-by, I ought to have the money for the tickets now.”

Mrs Verloc, undoing some hooks of her bodice, while she went on staring ahead beyond the splashboard, handed over to him the new pigskin pocket-book. He received it without a word, and seemed to plunge it deep somewhere into his very breast. Then he slapped his coat on the outside.

All this was done without the exchange of a single glance; they were like two people looking out for the first sight of a desired goal. It was not till the hansom swung round a corner and towards the bridge that Ossipon opened his lips again.

“Do you know how much money there is in that thing?” he asked, as if addressing slowly some hobgoblin sitting between the ears of the horse.

“No,” said Mrs Verloc. “He gave it to me. I didn’t count. I thought nothing of it at the time. Afterwards — ”

She moved her right hand a little. It was so expressive that little movement of that right hand which had struck the deadly blow into a man’s heart less than an hour before that Ossipon could not repress a shudder. He exaggerated it then purposely, and muttered:

“I am cold. I got chilled through.”

Mrs Verloc looked straight ahead at the perspective of her escape. Now and then, like a sable streamer blown across a road, the words “The drop given was fourteen feet” got in the way of her tense stare. Through her black veil the whites of her big eyes gleamed lustroously like the eyes of a masked woman.

Ossipon’s rigidity had something business-like, a queer official expression. He was heard again all of a sudden, as though he had released a catch in order to speak.

“Look here! Do you know whether your — whether he kept his account at the bank in his own name or in some other name.”

Mrs Verloc turned upon him her masked face and the big white gleam of her eyes.

“Other name?” she said thoughtfully.

“Be exact in what you say,” Ossipon lectured in the swift motion of the hansom. “It’s extremely important. I will explain to you. The bank has the numbers of these notes. If they were paid to him in his own name, then when his — his death becomes known, the notes may serve to track us since we have no other money. You have no other money on you?”

She shook her head negatively.

“None whatever?” he insisted.

“A few coppers.”

“It would be dangerous in that case. The money would have then to be dealt specially with. Very specially. We’d have perhaps to lose more than half the amount in order to get these notes changed in a certain safe place I know of in Paris. In the other case I mean if he had his account and got paid out under some other name — say Smith, for instance — the money is perfectly safe to use. You understand? The bank has no means of knowing that Mr Verloc and, say, Smith are one and the same person. Do you see how important it is that you should make no mistake in answering me? Can you answer that query at all? Perhaps not. Eh?”

She said composedly:

“I remember now! He didn’t bank in his own name. He told me once that it was on deposit in the name of Prozor.”

“You are sure?”

“Certain.”

“You don’t think the bank had any knowledge of his real name? Or anybody in the bank or — ”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“How can I know? Is it likely, Tom?”

“No. I suppose it’s not likely. It would have been more comfortable to know. . . . Here we are. Get out first, and walk straight in. Move smartly.”

He remained behind, and paid the cabman out of his own loose silver. The programme traced by his minute foresight was carried out. When Mrs Verloc, with her ticket for St Malo in her hand, entered the ladies’ waiting-room, Comrade Ossipon walked into the bar, and in seven minutes absorbed three goes of hot brandy and water.

“Trying to drive out a cold,” he explained to the barmaid, with a friendly nod and a grimacing smile. Then he came out, bringing out from that festive interlude the face of a man who had drunk at the very Fountain of Sorrow. He raised his eyes to the clock. It was time. He waited.

Punctual, Mrs Verloc came out, with her veil down, and all black — black as commonplace death itself, crowned with a few cheap and pale flowers. She passed close to a little group of men who were laughing, but whose laughter could have been struck dead by a single word. Her walk was indolent, but her back was straight, and Comrade Ossipon looked after it in terror before making a start himself.

The train was drawn up, with hardly anybody about its row of open doors. Owing to the time of the year and to the abominable weather there were hardly any passengers. Mrs Verloc walked slowly along the line of empty compartments till Ossipon touched her elbow from behind.

“In here.”

She got in, and he remained on the platform looking about. She bent forward, and in a whisper:

“What is it, Tom? Is there any danger? Wait a moment. There’s the guard.”

She saw him accost the man in uniform. They talked for a while. She heard the guard say “Very well, sir,” and saw him touch his cap. Then Ossipon came back, saying: “I told him not to let anybody get into our compartment.”

She was leaning forward on her seat. “You think of everything. . . . You’ll get me off, Tom?” she asked in a gust of anguish, lifting her veil brusquely to look at her saviour.

She had uncovered a face like adamant. And out of this face the eyes looked on, big, dry, enlarged, lightless, burnt out like two black holes in the white, shining globes.

“There is no danger,” he said, gazing into them with an earnestness almost rapt, which to Mrs Verloc, flying from the gallows, seemed to be full of force and tenderness. This devotion deeply moved her — and the adamant face lost the stern rigidity of its terror. Comrade Ossipon gazed at it as no lover ever gazed at his mistress’s face. Alexander Ossipon, anarchist, nicknamed the Doctor, author of a medical (and improper) pamphlet, late lecturer on the social aspects of hygiene to working men’s

clubs, was free from the trammels of conventional morality — but he submitted to the rule of science. He was scientific, and he gazed scientifically at that woman, the sister of a degenerate, a degenerate herself — of a murdering type. He gazed at her, and invoked Lombroso, as an Italian peasant recommends himself to his favourite saint. He gazed scientifically. He gazed at her cheeks, at her nose, at her eyes, at her ears. . . . Bad! . . . Fatal! Mrs Verloc's pale lips parting, slightly relaxed under his passionately attentive gaze, he gazed also at her teeth. . . . Not a doubt remained . . . a murdering type. . . . If Comrade Ossipon did not recommend his terrified soul to Lombroso, it was only because on scientific grounds he could not believe that he carried about him such a thing as a soul. But he had in him the scientific spirit, which moved him to testify on the platform of a railway station in nervous jerky phrases.

“He was an extraordinary lad, that brother of yours. Most interesting to study. A perfect type in a way. Perfect!”

He spoke scientifically in his secret fear. And Mrs Verloc, hearing these words of commendation vouchsafed to her beloved dead, swayed forward with a flicker of light in her sombre eyes, like a ray of sunshine heralding a tempest of rain.

“He was that indeed,” she whispered softly, with quivering lips. “You took a lot of notice of him, Tom. I loved you for it.”

“It's almost incredible the resemblance there was between you two,” pursued Ossipon, giving a voice to his abiding dread, and trying to conceal his nervous, sickening impatience for the train to start. “Yes; he resembled you.”

These words were not especially touching or sympathetic. But the fact of that resemblance insisted upon was enough in itself to act upon her emotions powerfully. With a little faint cry, and throwing her arms out, Mrs Verloc burst into tears at last.

Ossipon entered the carriage, hastily closed the door and looked out to see the time by the station clock. Eight minutes more. For the first three of these Mrs Verloc wept violently and helplessly without pause or interruption. Then she recovered somewhat, and sobbed gently in an abundant fall of tears. She tried to talk to her saviour, to the man who was the messenger of life.

“Oh, Tom! How could I fear to die after he was taken away from me so cruelly! How could I! How could I be such a coward!”

She lamented aloud her love of life, that life without grace or charm, and almost without decency, but of an exalted faithfulness of purpose, even unto murder. And, as often happens in the lament of poor humanity, rich in suffering but indigent in words, the truth — the very cry of truth — was found in a worn and artificial shape picked up somewhere among the phrases of sham sentiment.

“How could I be so afraid of death! Tom, I tried. But I am afraid. I tried to do away with myself. And I couldn't. Am I hard? I suppose the cup of horrors was not full enough for such as me. Then when you came. . . .”

She paused. Then in a gust of confidence and gratitude, “I will live all my days for you, Tom!” she sobbed out.

“Go over into the other corner of the carriage, away from the platform,” said Ossipon solicitously. She let her saviour settle her comfortably, and he watched the coming on of another crisis of weeping, still more violent than the first. He watched the symptoms with a sort of medical air, as if counting seconds. He heard the guard’s whistle at last. An involuntary contraction of the upper lip bared his teeth with all the aspect of savage resolution as he felt the train beginning to move. Mrs Verloc heard and felt nothing, and Ossipon, her saviour, stood still. He felt the train roll quicker, rumbling heavily to the sound of the woman’s loud sobs, and then crossing the carriage in two long strides he opened the door deliberately, and leaped out.

He had leaped out at the very end of the platform; and such was his determination in sticking to his desperate plan that he managed by a sort of miracle, performed almost in the air, to slam to the door of the carriage. Only then did he find himself rolling head over heels like a shot rabbit. He was bruised, shaken, pale as death, and out of breath when he got up. But he was calm, and perfectly able to meet the excited crowd of railway men who had gathered round him in a moment. He explained, in gentle and convincing tones, that his wife had started at a moment’s notice for Brittany to her dying mother; that, of course, she was greatly up-set, and he considerably concerned at her state; that he was trying to cheer her up, and had absolutely failed to notice at first that the train was moving out. To the general exclamation, “Why didn’t you go on to Southampton, then, sir?” he objected the inexperience of a young sister-in-law left alone in the house with three small children, and her alarm at his absence, the telegraph offices being closed. He had acted on impulse. “But I don’t think I’ll ever try that again,” he concluded; smiled all round; distributed some small change, and marched without a limp out of the station.

Outside, Comrade Ossipon, flush of safe banknotes as never before in his life, refused the offer of a cab.

“I can walk,” he said, with a little friendly laugh to the civil driver.

He could walk. He walked. He crossed the bridge. Later on the towers of the Abbey saw in their massive immobility the yellow bush of his hair passing under the lamps. The lights of Victoria saw him too, and Sloane Square, and the railings of the park. And Comrade Ossipon once more found himself on a bridge. The river, a sinister marvel of still shadows and flowing gleams mingling below in a black silence, arrested his attention. He stood looking over the parapet for a long time. The clock tower boomed a brazen blast above his drooping head. He looked up at the dial. . . . Half-past twelve of a wild night in the Channel.

And again Comrade Ossipon walked. His robust form was seen that night in distant parts of the enormous town slumbering monstrously on a carpet of mud under a veil of raw mist. It was seen crossing the streets without life and sound, or diminishing in the interminable straight perspectives of shadowy houses bordering empty roadways lined by strings of gas lamps. He walked through Squares, Places, Ovals, Commons, through monotonous streets with unknown names where the dust of humanity settles inert and hopeless out of the stream of life. He walked. And suddenly turning into a

strip of a front garden with a mangy grass plot, he let himself into a small grimy house with a latch-key he took out of his pocket.

He threw himself down on his bed all dressed, and lay still for a whole quarter of an hour. Then he sat up suddenly, drawing up his knees, and clasping his legs. The first dawn found him open-eyed, in that same posture. This man who could walk so long, so far, so aimlessly, without showing a sign of fatigue, could also remain sitting still for hours without stirring a limb or an eyelid. But when the late sun sent its rays into the room he unclasped his hands, and fell back on the pillow. His eyes stared at the ceiling. And suddenly they closed. Comrade Ossipon slept in the sunlight.

Chapter 13

The enormous iron padlock on the doors of the wall cupboard was the only object in the room on which the eye could rest without becoming afflicted by the miserable unloveliness of forms and the poverty of material. Unsaleable in the ordinary course of business on account of its noble proportions, it had been ceded to the Professor for a few pence by a marine dealer in the east of London. The room was large, clean, respectable, and poor with that poverty suggesting the starvation of every human need except mere bread. There was nothing on the walls but the paper, an expanse of arsenical green, soiled with indelible smudges here and there, and with stains resembling faded maps of uninhabited continents.

At a deal table near a window sat Comrade Ossipon, holding his head between his fists. The Professor, dressed in his only suit of shoddy tweeds, but flapping to and fro on the bare boards a pair of incredibly dilapidated slippers, had thrust his hands deep into the overstrained pockets of his jacket. He was relating to his robust guest a visit he had lately been paying to the Apostle Michaelis. The Perfect Anarchist had even been unbending a little.

“The fellow didn’t know anything of Verloc’s death. Of course! He never looks at the newspapers. They make him too sad, he says. But never mind. I walked into his cottage. Not a soul anywhere. I had to shout half-a-dozen times before he answered me. I thought he was fast asleep yet, in bed. But not at all. He had been writing his book for four hours already. He sat in that tiny cage in a litter of manuscript. There was a half-eaten raw carrot on the table near him. His breakfast. He lives on a diet of raw carrots and a little milk now.”

“How does he look on it?” asked Comrade Ossipon listlessly.

“Angelic. . . . I picked up a handful of his pages from the floor. The poverty of reasoning is astonishing. He has no logic. He can’t think consecutively. But that’s nothing. He has divided his biography into three parts, entitled — ‘Faith, Hope, Charity.’ He is elaborating now the idea of a world planned out like an immense and nice hospital, with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak.”

The Professor paused.

“Conceive you this folly, Ossipon? The weak! The source of all evil on this earth!” he continued with his grim assurance. “I told him that I dreamt of a world like shambles, where the weak would be taken in hand for utter extermination.”

“Do you understand, Ossipon? The source of all evil! They are our sinister masters — the weak, the flabby, the silly, the cowardly, the faint of heart, and the slavish of

mind. They have power. They are the multitude. Theirs is the kingdom of the earth. Exterminate, exterminate! That is the only way of progress. It is! Follow me, Ossipon. First the great multitude of the weak must go, then the only relatively strong. You see? First the blind, then the deaf and the dumb, then the halt and the lame — and so on. Every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention must meet its doom.”

“And what remains?” asked Ossipon in a stifled voice.

“I remain — if I am strong enough,” asserted the sallow little Professor, whose large ears, thin like membranes, and standing far out from the sides of his frail skull, took on suddenly a deep red tint.

“Haven’t I suffered enough from this oppression of the weak?” he continued forcibly. Then tapping the breast-pocket of his jacket: “And yet I am the force,” he went on. “But the time! The time! Give me time! Ah! that multitude, too stupid to feel either pity or fear. Sometimes I think they have everything on their side. Everything — even death — my own weapon.”

“Come and drink some beer with me at the Silenus,” said the robust Ossipon after an interval of silence pervaded by the rapid flap, flap of the slippers on the feet of the Perfect Anarchist. This last accepted. He was jovial that day in his own peculiar way. He slapped Ossipon’s shoulder.

“Beer! So be it! Let us drink and be merry, for we are strong, and to-morrow we die.”

He busied himself with putting on his boots, and talked meanwhile in his curt, resolute tones.

“What’s the matter with you, Ossipon? You look glum and seek even my company. I hear that you are seen constantly in places where men utter foolish things over glasses of liquor. Why? Have you abandoned your collection of women? They are the weak who feed the strong — eh?”

He stamped one foot, and picked up his other laced boot, heavy, thick-soled, unblackened, mended many times. He smiled to himself grimly.

“Tell me, Ossipon, terrible man, has ever one of your victims killed herself for you — or are your triumphs so far incomplete — for blood alone puts a seal on greatness? Blood. Death. Look at history.”

“You be damned,” said Ossipon, without turning his head.

“Why? Let that be the hope of the weak, whose theology has invented hell for the strong. Ossipon, my feeling for you is amicable contempt. You couldn’t kill a fly.”

But rolling to the feast on the top of the omnibus the Professor lost his high spirits. The contemplation of the multitudes thronging the pavements extinguished his assurance under a load of doubt and uneasiness which he could only shake off after a period of seclusion in the room with the large cupboard closed by an enormous padlock.

“And so,” said over his shoulder Comrade Ossipon, who sat on the seat behind. “And so Michaelis dreams of a world like a beautiful and cheery hospital.”

“Just so. An immense charity for the healing of the weak,” assented the Professor sardonically.

“That’s silly,” admitted Ossipon. “You can’t heal weakness. But after all Michaelis may not be so far wrong. In two hundred years doctors will rule the world. Science reigns already. It reigns in the shade maybe — but it reigns. And all science must culminate at last in the science of healing — not the weak, but the strong. Mankind wants to live — to live.”

“Mankind,” asserted the Professor with a self-confident glitter of his iron-rimmed spectacles, “does not know what it wants.”

“But you do,” growled Ossipon. “Just now you’ve been crying for time — time. Well. The doctors will serve you out your time — if you are good. You profess yourself to be one of the strong — because you carry in your pocket enough stuff to send yourself and, say, twenty other people into eternity. But eternity is a damned hole. It’s time that you need. You — if you met a man who could give you for certain ten years of time, you would call him your master.”

“My device is: No God! No Master,” said the Professor sententiously as he rose to get off the ‘bus.

Ossipon followed. “Wait till you are lying flat on your back at the end of your time,” he retorted, jumping off the footboard after the other. “Your scurvy, shabby, mangy little bit of time,” he continued across the street, and hopping on to the curbstone.

“Ossipon, I think that you are a humbug,” the Professor said, opening masterfully the doors of the renowned Silenus. And when they had established themselves at a little table he developed further this gracious thought. “You are not even a doctor. But you are funny. Your notion of a humanity universally putting out the tongue and taking the pill from pole to pole at the bidding of a few solemn jokers is worthy of the prophet. Prophecy! What’s the good of thinking of what will be!” He raised his glass. “To the destruction of what is,” he said calmly.

He drank and relapsed into his peculiarly close manner of silence. The thought of a mankind as numerous as the sands of the sea-shore, as indestructible, as difficult to handle, oppressed him. The sound of exploding bombs was lost in their immensity of passive grains without an echo. For instance, this Verloc affair. Who thought of it now?

Ossipon, as if suddenly compelled by some mysterious force, pulled a much-folded newspaper out of his pocket. The Professor raised his head at the rustle.

“What’s that paper? Anything in it?” he asked.

Ossipon started like a scared somnambulist.

“Nothing. Nothing whatever. The thing’s ten days old. I forgot it in my pocket, I suppose.”

But he did not throw the old thing away. Before returning it to his pocket he stole a glance at the last lines of a paragraph. They ran thus: “An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act of madness or despair.”

Such were the end words of an item of news headed: “Suicide of Lady Passenger from a cross-Channel Boat.” Comrade Ossipon was familiar with the beauties of its

journalistic style. "An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever. . . ." He knew every word by heart. "An impenetrable mystery. . . ."

And the robust anarchist, hanging his head on his breast, fell into a long reverie.

He was menaced by this thing in the very sources of his existence. He could not issue forth to meet his various conquests, those that he courted on benches in Kensington Gardens, and those he met near area railings, without the dread of beginning to talk to them of an impenetrable mystery destined. . . . He was becoming scientifically afraid of insanity lying in wait for him amongst these lines. "To hang for ever over." It was an obsession, a torture. He had lately failed to keep several of these appointments, whose note used to be an unbounded trustfulness in the language of sentiment and manly tenderness. The confiding disposition of various classes of women satisfied the needs of his self-love, and put some material means into his hand. He needed it to live. It was there. But if he could no longer make use of it, he ran the risk of starving his ideals and his body . . . "This act of madness or despair."

"An impenetrable mystery" was sure "to hang for ever" as far as all mankind was concerned. But what of that if he alone of all men could never get rid of the cursed knowledge? And Comrade Ossipon's knowledge was as precise as the newspaper man could make it — up to the very threshold of the "mystery destined to hang for ever. . . ."

Comrade Ossipon was well informed. He knew what the gangway man of the steamer had seen: "A lady in a black dress and a black veil, wandering at midnight alongside, on the quay. 'Are you going by the boat, ma'am,' he had asked her encouragingly. 'This way.' She seemed not to know what to do. He helped her on board. She seemed weak."

And he knew also what the stewardess had seen: A lady in black with a white face standing in the middle of the empty ladies' cabin. The stewardess induced her to lie down there. The lady seemed quite unwilling to speak, and as if she were in some awful trouble. The next the stewardess knew she was gone from the ladies' cabin. The stewardess then went on deck to look for her, and Comrade Ossipon was informed that the good woman found the unhappy lady lying down in one of the hooded seats. Her eyes were open, but she would not answer anything that was said to her. She seemed very ill. The stewardess fetched the chief steward, and those two people stood by the side of the hooded seat consulting over their extraordinary and tragic passenger. They talked in audible whispers (for she seemed past hearing) of St Malo and the Consul there, of communicating with her people in England. Then they went away to arrange for her removal down below, for indeed by what they could see of her face she seemed to them to be dying. But Comrade Ossipon knew that behind that white mask of despair there was struggling against terror and despair a vigour of vitality, a love of life that could resist the furious anguish which drives to murder and the fear, the blind, mad fear of the gallows. He knew. But the stewardess and the chief steward knew nothing, except that when they came back for her in less than five minutes the lady in black was no longer in the hooded seat. She was nowhere. She was gone. It was then five o'clock in the morning, and it was no accident either. An hour afterwards one of the

steamer's hands found a wedding ring left lying on the seat. It had stuck to the wood in a bit of wet, and its glitter caught the man's eye. There was a date, 24th June 1879, engraved inside. "An impenetrable mystery is destined to hang for ever. . . ."

And Comrade Ossipon raised his bowed head, beloved of various humble women of these isles, Apollo-like in the sunniness of its bush of hair.

The Professor had grown restless meantime. He rose.

"Stay," said Ossipon hurriedly. "Here, what do you know of madness and despair?"

The Professor passed the tip of his tongue on his dry, thin lips, and said doctorally:

"There are no such things. All passion is lost now. The world is mediocre, limp, without force. And madness and despair are a force. And force is a crime in the eyes of the fools, the weak and the silly who rule the roost. You are mediocre. Verloc, whose affair the police has managed to smother so nicely, was mediocre. And the police murdered him. He was mediocre. Everybody is mediocre. Madness and despair! Give me that for a lever, and I'll move the world. Ossipon, you have my cordial scorn. You are incapable of conceiving even what the fat-fed citizen would call a crime. You have no force." He paused, smiling sardonically under the fierce glitter of his thick glasses.

"And let me tell you that this little legacy they say you've come into has not improved your intelligence. You sit at your beer like a dummy. Good-bye."

"Will you have it?" said Ossipon, looking up with an idiotic grin.

"Have what?"

"The legacy. All of it."

The incorruptible Professor only smiled. His clothes were all but falling off him, his boots, shapeless with repairs, heavy like lead, let water in at every step. He said:

"I will send you by-and-by a small bill for certain chemicals which I shall order to-morrow. I need them badly. Understood — eh?"

Ossipon lowered his head slowly. He was alone. "An impenetrable mystery. . . ." It seemed to him that suspended in the air before him he saw his own brain pulsating to the rhythm of an impenetrable mystery. It was diseased clearly. . . . "This act of madness or despair."

The mechanical piano near the door played through a valse cheekily, then fell silent all at once, as if gone grumpy.

Comrade Ossipon, nicknamed the Doctor, went out of the Silenus beer-hall. At the door he hesitated, blinking at a not too splendid sunlight — and the paper with the report of the suicide of a lady was in his pocket. His heart was beating against it. The suicide of a lady — this act of madness or despair.

He walked along the street without looking where he put his feet; and he walked in a direction which would not bring him to the place of appointment with another lady (an elderly nursery governess putting her trust in an Apollo-like ambrosial head). He was walking away from it. He could face no woman. It was ruin. He could neither think, work, sleep, nor eat. But he was beginning to drink with pleasure, with anticipation, with hope. It was ruin. His revolutionary career, sustained by the sentiment and trustfulness of many women, was menaced by an impenetrable mystery — the mystery of

a human brain pulsating wrongfully to the rhythm of journalistic phrases. “. . . Will hang for ever over this act. . . . It was inclining towards the gutter . . . of madness or despair.”

“I am seriously ill,” he muttered to himself with scientific insight. Already his robust form, with an Embassy’s secret-service money (inherited from Mr Verloc) in his pockets, was marching in the gutter as if in training for the task of an inevitable future. Already he bowed his broad shoulders, his head of ambrosial locks, as if ready to receive the leather yoke of the sandwich board. As on that night, more than a week ago, Comrade Ossipon walked without looking where he put his feet, feeling no fatigue, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, hearing not a sound. “An impenetrable mystery. . . .” He walked disregarded. . . . “This act of madness or despair.”

And the incorruptible Professor walked too, averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable — and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men.

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