

FICTION

Louis Tracy

The Stowaway Girl

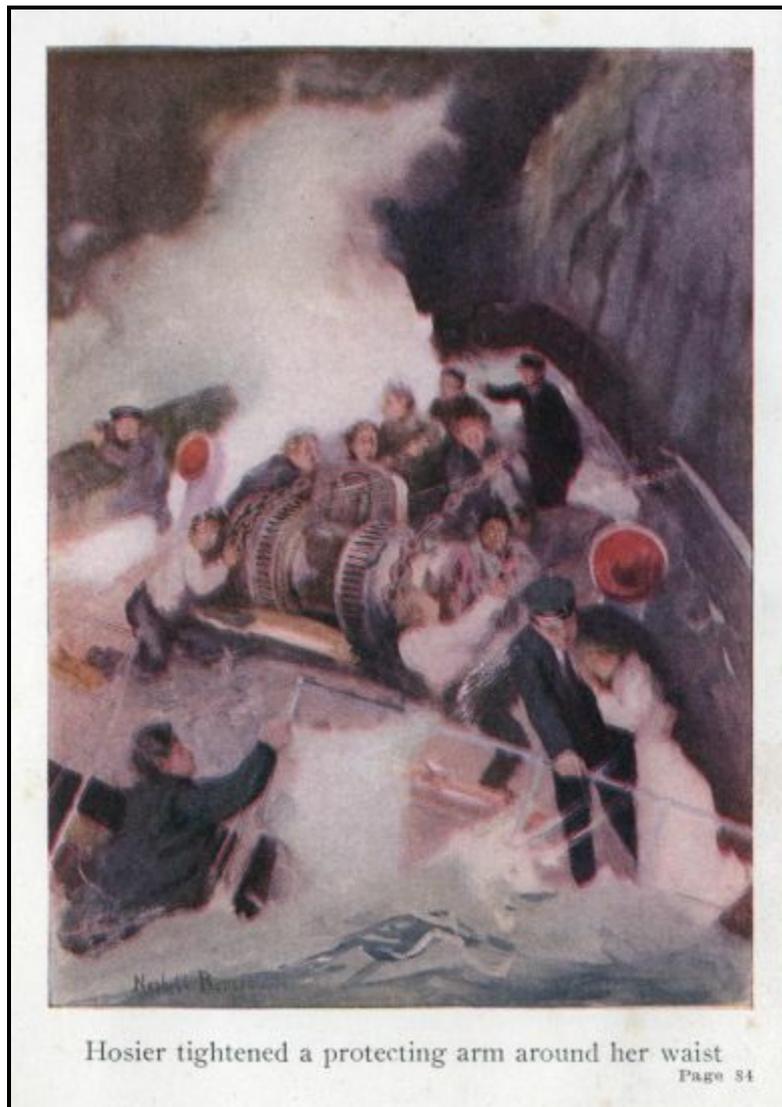
A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION



[Frontispiece: Hosier tightened a protecting arm around her waist]

THE STOWAWAY GIRL

By

LOUIS TRACY

AUTHOR OF
THE WINGS OF THE MORNING, SON OF THE IMMORTALS,
CYNTHIA'S CHAUFFEUR, THE MESSAGE, THE SILENT BARRIER, ETC.

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[Hosier tightened a protective arm around her waist . . . *Frontispiece*](#)

["Is that the Southern Cross?"](#)

"How did I come here?"

"Well, gimme your 'and on it"

A withering volley crashed through the window

THE STOWAWAY

CHAPTER I

THE "ANDROMEDA"

"Marry Mr. Bulmer! That horrid old man! Uncle, what *are* you saying?"

The girl sprang to her feet as if she were some timid creature of the wild aroused from sylvan broodings by knowledge of imminent danger. In her terror, she upset the three wineglasses that formed part of the display beside each *couvert* on the luncheon table. One, rose-tinted and ornate, crashed to the floor, and the noise seemed to irritate the owner of Linden House more than his niece's shrill terror.

"No need to bust up our best set of 'ock glasses just because I 'appen to mention owd Dickey Bulmer," he growled.

The color startled so suddenly out of the girl's face began to return. Her eyes lost their dilation of fear. Somehow, the comment on the broken glass seemed to deprive "owd Dickey Bulmer's" personality of its real menace.

"I'm sorry," she said, and stooped to pick up the fragments scattered over the carpet.

"Leave that alone," came the sharp order. "So long as I've the brass to pay for 'em, there's plenty more where that kem from, an' in any case, it's the 'ousemaid's job. Leave it alone, I tell you! An' sit down. It's 'igh time you an' me 'ad a straight talk, an' I can't do wi' folk bouncin' about like an injia-rubber ball when I've got things to say to 'em."

He stretched a fat hand toward a mahogany cigar-box, affected to choose a cigar with deliberative crackling, hacked at the selection with a fruit knife, and dropped the severed end into an unused finger-bowl; then he struck a match, and puffed furiously until a rim of white ash tipped the brown. This achieved, he helped himself to the port. Though he carefully avoided glancing at his companion, he knew quite well that she had drawn a chair to the opposite end of the table, and was looking at him intently; her chin was propped on her clenched hands; the skin on her white forehead was puckered into nervous lines; her lips, pressed close, had lost their Cupid's bow that seemed ever ready to bend into a smile. Meanwhile, the man who had caused these signs of distress gulped down some of the wine, held the glass up to the light as a tribute to the excellence of its contents, darted his tongue several times in and out between his teeth, smacked his lips, replaced the cigar in his mouth, and leaned back in his chair until it creaked.

Iris Yorke was accustomed to this ritual; she gave it the unobservant tolerance good breeding extends to the commonplace. But to-day, for the first time during the two years that had sped so happily since she came back to Linden House from a Brussels *pension*, she found herself, even in her present trouble, wondering how it was possible that David Verity could be her mother's brother. This coarse-mannered hog of a man, brother to the sweet-voiced, tender-hearted gentlewoman whose gracious wraith was left undimmed in the girl's memory by the lapse of years--it would be unbelievable if it were not true! He was so gross, so tubby, so manifestly over-fed, whereas her mother had ever been elegant and *bien soignee*. But he had shown kindness to her in his domineering way. He was not quite so illiterate as his accent and his general air of uncouthness seemed to imply. In his speech, the broad vowels of the Lancashire dialect were grafted on to the clipped staccato of a Cockney. He would scoff at anyone who told him that knives and forks had precise uses, or that table-napkins were not meant to be tucked under the chin. In England, especially in the provinces, some men of affairs cultivate these minor defects, deeming them tokens of bluff honesty, the hall-marks of the self-made; and David Verity thought, perhaps, that his pretty, well-spoken niece might be trusted

to maintain the social level of his household without any special effort on his part.

Shocked, almost, at the disloyalty of her thoughts, Iris tried to close the rift that had opened so unexpectedly.

"It was stupid of me to take you seriously," she said. "You cannot really mean that Mr. Bulmer wishes to marry me?"

Verity screwed up his features into an amiable grin. He pressed the tips of his fingers together until the joints bent backward. When he spoke, the cigar wagged with each syllable.

"I meant it right enough, my lass," he said.

"But, uncle dear----"

"Stop a bit. Listen to me first, an' say your say when I've finished. Like everybody else, you think I'm a rich man. David Verity, Esquire, ship-owner, of Linden House an' Exchange Buildings--it looks all right, don't it--like one of them furrin apples with rosy peel an' a maggot inside. You're the first I've told about the maggot. Fact is, I'm broke. Ship-ownin' is rotten nowadays, unless you've lots of capital. I've lost mine. Unless I get help, an' a thumpin' big slice of it, my name figures in the *Gazette*. I want fifty thousand pounds, an' oo's goin' to give it to me? Not the public. They're fed up on shippin'. They're not so silly as they used to be. I put it to owd Dickey yesterday, an' 'e said you couldn't raise money in Liverpool to-day to build a ferry-boat. But 'e said summat else. If you wed 'im, 'e makes you a partner in the firm of Verity, Bulmer an' Co. See? Wot's wrong with that? I've done everything for you up to date; now it's your turn. Simple, isn't it? P'raps I ought to have explained things differently, but it didn't occur to me you'd hobject to bein' the wife of a millionaire, even if 'e is a doddrin' owd idiot to talk of marryin' agin."

"Oh, uncle!"

With a wail of despair, the girl sank back and covered her face with her hands. Now that she believed the incredible, she could utter no protest. The sacrifice demanded was too great. In that bitter moment she would have welcomed poverty, prayed even for death, as the alternative to marriage with the man to whom she was being sold.

Verity leaned over the table again and finished the glass of port. This time there was no lip-smacking, or other aping of the connoisseur. He was angry, almost alarmed. Resistance, even of this passive sort, raised the savage in him. Hitherto, Iris had been ready to obey his slightest whim.

"There's no use cryin' 'Oh, uncle,' an' kicking up a fuss," he snapped viciously. "Where would you 'ave bin, I'd like to know, if it wasn't for me? In the gutter--that's where your precious fool of a father left your mother an' you. You're the best dressed, an' best lookin', an' best eddicated girl i' Bootle to-day--thanks to me. When your mother kem 'ere ten year ago, an' said her lit'rary gent of a 'usband was dead, neither of you 'ad 'ad a square meal for weeks--remember that, will you? It isn't my fault you've got to marry Bulmer. It's just a bit of infernal bad luck--the same for both of us, if it comes to that. An' why shouldn't you 'ave some of the sours after I've given you all the sweets? You'll 'ave money to burn; I'm not axin' you to give up some nice young feller for 'im. If you play your cards well, you can 'ave all the fun you want---"

The girl staggered to her feet. She could endure the man's coarseness but not his innuendoes.

"I will do what you ask," she murmured, though there was a pitiful quivering at the corners of her mouth that bespoke an agony beyond the relief of tears. "But please don't say any more, and never again allude to my dear father in that way, or I may--I may forget what I owe you."

She was unconscious of the contempt in her eyes, the scornful ring in her voice, and Verity had the good sense to restrain the wrath that bubbled up in him until the door closed, and he was alone. He grabbed the decanter and refilled his glass.

"Nice thing!" he growled. "I offer 'er a fortune an' a bald-'eaded owd devil for a 'usband, 'oo ought to die in a year or two an' leave 'er everything; yet she ain't satisfied. D--n 'er eyes, if I'd keep 'er as scullery-maid she'd 'ave different notions."

With the taste of the wine, however, came the consoling reflection that Iris as a scullery-maid might not tickle the fancy of the dotard who had undertaken to provide fifty thousand pounds for the new partnership. And she had promised--that was everything. His lack of diplomacy was obvious even to himself, but he had won where a man of finer temperament might have failed. Now, he must rush the wedding. Dickey Bulmer's Lancashire canniness might

stipulate for cash on delivery as the essence of the marriage contract. Not a penny would the old miser part with until he was sure of the girl.

So David Verity, having much to occupy his mind, lingered over the second glass of port, for this was a Sunday dinner, served at mid-day. At last he closed his eyes for his customary nap; but sleep was not to be wooed just then; instead of dozing, he felt exceedingly wide awake. Indeed, certain disquieting calculations were running through his brain, and he yielded forthwith to their insistence. Taking a small notebook from his pocket, he jotted down an array of figures. He was so absorbed in their analysis that he did not see Iris walk listlessly across the lawn that spread its summer greenery in front of the dining-room windows. And that was an ill thing for David. The sight of the girl at that instant meant a great deal to him.

He did happen to look out, a second too late.

Even then, he might have caught a glimpse of Iris's pink muslin skirt disappearing behind a clump of rhododendrons, were not his shifty eyes screwed up in calculation--or perchance, the gods blinded him in behalf of one who was named after Juno's bright messenger.

"Yes, that's it," he was thinking. "I must wheedle Dickey into the bank to-morrow. A word from 'im, an' they'll all grovel, d--n 'em!"

The door opened.

"Captain Coke to see you, sir," said a servant.

"Send 'im in; bring 'im in 'ere."

The memorandum book disappeared; Verity's hearty greeting was that of a man who had not a care in the world. His visitor's description was writ large on him by the sea. No one could possibly mistake Captain Coke for any other species of captain than that of master mariner. He was built on the lines of a capstan, short and squat and powerful. Though the weather was hot, he wore a suit of thick navy-blue serge that would have served his needs within the Arctic Circle. It clung tightly to his rounded contours; there was a purple line on his red brows that marked the exceeding tightness of the bowler hat he was carrying; and the shining protuberances on his black boots showed that they were tight, too. It was manifestly out of the question that he should be able to walk any distance. Though he had driven in a cab to the shipowner's house, he was already breathless with exertion, and he rolled so heavily in his gait that his shoulders hit both sides of the doorway while entering the room. Yet he was nimble withal, a man capable of swift and sure movement within a limited area, therein resembling a bull, or a hippopotamus.

The hospitable Verity pushed forward the mahogany box and the decanter.

"Glad to see you, Jimmie, my boy. Sit yourself down. 'Ave a cigar an' a glass o' port. I didn't expect you quite so soon, but you're just as welcome now as later."

Captain Coke placed his hat on top of a malacca cane, and balanced both against the back of a chair.

"I'll take a smoke but no wine, thankee, Mr. Verity," said he. "I kem along now 'coss I want to be aboard afore it's dark. We're moored in an awkward place."

"Poor owd *Andromeeda*! Just 'er usual luck, eh, Jimmie?"

"Well, she ain't wot you might call one of fortune's fav'rits, but she's afloat, an' that's more'n you can say for a good many daisy-cutters I've known."

Verity chuckled.

"Some ships are worth less afloat than ashore, an' she's one of 'em," he grinned. "You want a match. 'Ere you are!"

Whether Coke was wishful to deny or admit the *Andromeda's* shortcomings--even the ship herself might have protested against the horror of a long "e" in the penultimate syllable of her name--the other man's rapid proffer of a light stopped him. He puffed away in silence; there was an awkward pause; for once in his career, Verity regretted his cultivated trick of covering up a significant phrase by quickly adding some comment on a totally different subject. But the sailor smoked on, stolidly heedless of a sudden lapse in the conversation, and the shipowner was compelled to start afresh. He was far too shrewd to go straight back to the topic burked by his own error. His sledge-hammer

methods might be crude to the verge of brutality where Iris was concerned, but they were capable of nice adjustment in the case of wary old sea-dogs of the Coke type.

"It's stuffy in 'ere with the two of us smokin'--let's stroll into the garden," he said.

Coke was agreeable. He liked gardens; they were a change from the purple sea.

"It's the on'y bit of green stuff you seem to be fond of, Mr. Verity," he went on. "You keep us crool short of vegetables."

David's little eyes twinkled. Here was another opening; it would not be his fault if it led again up a *cul-de-sac*. He threw wide the window, and they crossed the lawn.

"Vegetables!" he cried. "Wish I could stock you from my place, an' I'd stuff you with 'em. I can grow 'em 'ere for next to nothing, but they cost a heap o' money in furrin ports, an' *your* crimson wave-catcher doesn't earn money--she eats it."

"Even that's one better'n her skipper, 'oo doesn't do neether," commented Coke gloomily.

His employer seemed to find much humor in the remark.

"Gad, we both look starved!" he guffawed. "To 'ear us, you'd think we was booked for the workhus or till you ran a tape round the contour, eh?"

But Coke was not to be cheered.

"I can see as far into a stone wall as 'ere a one an' there a one," he said, "an' there's no use blinkin' the fax. The *Andromeda* was a good ship in 'er day, but that day is gone. You ought to 'ave sold 'er to the Dutchmen five years ago, Mr. Verity. Times were better then, an' now you'd 'ave a fine steel ship instead of a box of scrap iron."

They were passing the rhododendrons, and Verity's quick eyes noted that a summer-house beneath the shade of two venerable elms was unoccupied. The structure consisted of a rustic roof carried on half a dozen uprights; it had a wooden floor, and held a table and some basket chairs. The roof and supports were laden with climbing roses, a Virginian creeper, and a passion flower. The day being Sunday, there were no gardeners in the adjoining shrubbery or rose garden, and anyone seated in the summer-house could see on all sides.

"Drop anchor in 'ere, Coke," said Verity. "It's cool an' breezy, an' we can 'ave a quiet confab without bein' bothered. Now, I reelly sent for you to-day to tell you I mean to better the supplies this trip--Yes, honest Injun!"--for the *Andromeda's* skipper had clutched the cigar out of his mouth with the expression of a man who vows to heaven that he cannot believe his ears--"I'm goin' to bung in an extry 'undred to-morrow in the way of stores. Funny, isn't it?"

"Funny! It's a meracle!"

Though not altogether gratified by this whole-hearted agreement with his own views, Verity was too anxious to keep his hearer on the present tack to resent any implied slur on his earlier efforts as a caterer.

"It's nothing to wot I'd do if I could afford it," he added graciously. "But, as you said, let's look at the fax. Wot chance 'as an iron ship, built twenty years ago, at a cost of sixteen pound a ton, ag'in a steel ship of to-day, at seven pound a ton, with twiced the cargo space, an' three feet less draught? W'y no earthly. We're dished every way. We cost more to run; we can't jump 'arf the bars; we can't carry 'arf the stuff; we pay double insurance; an' we're axed to find interest on more'n double the capital. As you say, Jimmie, wot bloomin' chanst 'ave we?"

Coke smoked silently; he had said none of these things, but when the shipowner's glance suddenly dwelt on him, he nodded. Silent acquiescence on his part, however, was not what Verity wanted. He, too, knew when to hold his tongue. After a long interval, during which a robin piped a merry roundelay from the depths of a neighboring pink hawthorn, Coke dug out a question.

"Premium gone up, then?" he inquired.

"She's on a twelve-month rate. It runs out in September. If you're lucky, an' fill up with nitrate soon, you may be 'ome again. If not, I'll 'ave to whack up a special quotation. After that, there'll be no insurance. The *Andromeeda* goes for wot she'll fetch."

Another pause; then Coke broached a new phase.

"Meanin' that I lose the two thousand pounds I put in 'er to get my berth?" he said huskily.

"An' wot about me? I lose eight times as much. Just think of it! Sixteen thousand pounds would give me a fair balance to go on wi' i' these hard times, an' your two thou' would make the skipper's job in my new ship a certainty."

Coke's brick-red face darkened. He breathed hard.

"Wot new ship?" he demanded.

Verity smiled knowingly.

"It's a secret, Jimmie, but I must stretch a point for a pal's sake. Dickey Bulmer's goin' to marry my niece, an' 'e 'as pledged himself to double the capital of the firm. Now I've let the cat out of the bag. I'm sorry, ole man--pon me soul, I am--but w'en Dickey's name crops up on 'Change you know as well as me 'ow many captain's tickets will be backed wi' t' brass."

This time, if so minded, the robin might have trilled his song *adagio con sostenuto* without fear of interruption by those harsh voices. Neither man spoke during so long a time that the break seemed to impose a test of endurance; in such a crisis, he who has all at stake will yield rather than he who only stakes a part.

"S'pose we talk plainly as man to man?" said Coke thickly, at last.

"I can't talk much plainer," said Verity.

"Yes, you can. Promise me the command of your next ship, an' the *Andromeda* goes on the rocks this side o' Monte Video."

Verity jumped as though he had been stung by an infuriated wasp.

"Coke, I'm surprised at you," he grunted, not without a sharp glance around to make sure no other was near.

"No, you ain't, not a bit surprised, on'y you don't like to 'ear it in cold English. That's wot you're drivin' at--the insurance."

"Shut up, you ijjit. Never 'eard such d--d rot in all me born days."

"Listen to it now, then. It's good to 'ave the truth tole you some times. Wot are you afraid of? I take all the risk an' precious little of the money. Write me a letter----"

"Write! Me! Coke, you're loony."

"Not me. Wait till I'm through. Write a letter sayin' you're sorry the *Andromeda* must be laid up this fall, but promisin' me the next vacancy. 'Ow does that 'urt you?"

Verity's cigar had gone out. He relighted it with due deliberation; it could not be denied that his nerve, at least, was superb.

"I'm willin' to do anything in reason," he said slowly. "I don't see where I can lay 'ands on a better man than you, Jimmie, even if you *do* talk nonsense at times. You know the South American trade, an' you know me. By gad, I'll do that. Anyhow, it's wot you deserve, but none the less, I'm actin' as a reel friend, now ain't I? Many a man would just lay you up alongside the *Andromeeda*."

"I'll call at your office in the mornin' for the letter," said Coke, whose red face shone like the setting sun seen through a haze.

"Yes, yes. I'll 'ave it ready."

"An' you won't back out of them extry stores? I must sweeten the crew on this run."

"I'll supply the best of stuff--enough to last for the round trip. But don't make any mistake. You must be back afore September 30th. That's the date of the policy. Now let's trot inside, an' my gal--Mrs. Dickey Bulmer that is to be--will

give you some tea."

"Tea!" snorted Coke.

"Well, there's whisky an' soda on tap if you prefer it. It *is* rather 'ot for tea. Whew! you're boilin'? W'y don't you wear looser clo'es? Look at me--cool as a cucumber. By the way, 'oo's the new man you've shipped as second? Watts is the chief, I know, but 'oo is Mr. Philip Hozier?"

"Youngster fillin' in sea-service to get a ticket an' qualify for the Cunard."

"Thoroughly reliable sort of chap, eh?"

"The best."

It was odd how these men left unsaid the really vital things. Again it was Coke who tried to fill in some part of the blank space.

"Just the right kind of second for the *Andromeda's* last cruise," he muttered. "Smart as a new pin. You could trust 'im on the bridge of a battleship. Now, Watts is a good man, but a tot of rum makes 'im fair daft."

"Ah!" purred Verity, "you must keep a tight 'and on Watts. I like an appetizer meself w'en I'm off dooty, so to speak, but it's no joke to 'ave a boozier in charge of a fine ship an' vallyble freight. Of course, you're responsible as master, but you can't be on deck mornin', noon, an' night. Choke Watts off the drink, an' you'll 'ave no trouble. So that's settled. My, but you're fair meltin'--wot is it they say--losin' adipose tisher. Well, come along. Let's lubricate."

The *Andromeda* sailed on the Tuesday afternoon's tide. She would drop the pilot off Holyhead, and, with fair weather, such as cheered her departure from the Mersey, daybreak on Thursday would find her pounding through the cross seas where St. George's Channel merges into the wide Atlantic. If she followed the beaten track on her long run to the River Plate--as sailors will persist in miscalling that wondrous Rio de la Plata--she might be signaled from Madeira or the Cape Verde Islands. But shipmasters often prefer to set a course clear of the land till they pick up the coast of South America. If she were not spoken by some passing steamer, there was every possibility that the sturdy old vessel would not be heard of again before reaching her destination.

But David Verity heard of her much sooner, and no thunderbolt that ever rent the heavens could have startled him more than the manner of that hearing.

Resolving to clinch matters with regard to Iris and her elderly suitor, he invited "Owd Dickey" to supper on Sunday evening. The girl endured the man's presence with a placid dignity that amazed her uncle. On the plea of a headache, she retired at an early hour, leaving Bulmer to gloat over his prospective happiness, and primed to the point of dementia.

He was quite willing to accompany Verity to the bank next morning; a pleasant-spoken manager sighed his relief when the visitors were gone, and he was free to look at the item "bills discounted" on Verity's page in the ledger. More than that, a lawyer was instructed to draw up a partnership deed, and the representatives of various ship-building firms were asked to supply estimates for two new vessels.

Altogether Dickey was complaisant, and David enjoyed a busy and successful day. He dined in town, came home at a late hour, and merely grinned when a servant told him that Mr. Bulmer had called twice but Miss Iris happened to be out on both occasions.

Nevertheless, at breakfast on Tuesday, he warned his niece not to keep her admirer dangling at arm's length.

"E's a queer owd codger," explained the philosopher. "Play up to 'im a bit, an' you'll be able to twist 'im round your little finger. I b'lieve he's goin' dotty, an' you can trust me to see that the marriage settlement is O. K."

"Will you be home to dinner?" was her response.

"No. Now that the firm is in smooth water again I must show myself a bit. It's all thanks to you, lass, an' I'll not forget it. Good-by!"

Iris smiled, and Verity was vastly pleased.

"I am sure you will not forget," she said. "Good-by."

"There's no understandin' wimmin," mused David, as his victoria swept through the gates of Linden House. "Sunday afternoon Dickey might ha' bin a dose of rat poison; now she's ready to swaller 'im as if 'e was a chocolate drop."

Again he returned some few minutes after midnight; again the servant announced Mr. Bulmer's visits, three of them; and again Miss Iris had been absent—in fact, she had not yet come home.

"Not 'ome!" cried David furiously. "W'y it's gone twelve. W'ere the--w'ere is she?"

No one knew. She had quitted the house soon after Verity himself, and had not been seen since. Storm and rage as he might, and did, David could not discover his niece's whereabouts. He spent a wearying and tortured night, a harassed and miserable day, devoted to frantic inquiries in every possible direction with interludes of specious lying to the infatuated Bulmer. But enlightenment came on Thursday morning. A letter arrived by the first post. It was from Iris.

"MY DEAR UNCLE," she wrote: "Neither you nor Mr. Bulmer should have any objection to my passing the few remaining weeks of my liberty in the manner best pleasing to myself. On Sunday evening, in your presence, Mr. Bulmer urged me to fix an early date for our marriage. Tell him that I shall marry him when the *Andromeda* returns to England from South America. You will remember that you promised last year to take me to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Ayres this summer; I have been learning Spanish so as to help our sight-seeing. Unfortunately, business prevents you from keeping that promise, but there is no reason why I should not go. I am on board the *Andromeda*, and will probably be able to explain matters satisfactorily to Captain Coke. The vessel is due back at the end of September, I believe, so Mr. Bulmer will not have long to wait. It is more than likely that Captain Coke will not know I am aboard until Thursday, and I have arranged with a friend that this letter shall reach you about the same time. Please convey my apologies to Mr. Bulmer, and accept my regret for any anxiety you may have felt owing to my unaccountable absence.

"Your affectionate niece,
"IRIS YORKE."

David narrowly escaped an apoplectic seizure. When he recovered his senses he looked ten years older. The instinct of self-preservation alone saved him in his frenzy from blurting forth the tidings of the girl's flight. Incoherent with fear and passion, he contrived to give orders for his carriage, and was driven to his office. Thence he dispatched telegrams to every signaling station in England, Ireland, and Spain, at which by the remotest possibility the *Andromeda* might be intercepted. He cabled to Madeira and Cape Verde, even to Fernando Noronha and Pernambuco; he sent urgent instructions to the pilotage authorities of the Bristol Channel, the southwest ports, and Lisbon; and the text of every message was: "*Andromeda* must return to Liverpool instantly."

But the wretched man realized that he was doomed. Fate had struck at him mercilessly. He could only wait in dumb despair, and mutter prayers too long forgotten, and concoct bogus letters from a cousin's address in the south of England for the benefit of Dickey Bulmer.

Never was ship more eagerly sought than the *Andromeda*, yet never was ship more completely engulfed in the mysterious silence of the great sea. The days passed, and the weeks, yet nothing was heard of her. She figured in the "overdue" list at Lloyd's; sharp-eyed underwriters did "specs" in her; woe-begone women began to haunt the Liverpool office for news of husbands and sons; the love-lorn Dickey wore Verity to a shadow of his former self by alternate pleadings and threats; but the *Andromeda* remained mute, and the fanciful letters from Iris became fewer and more fragmentary as David's imagination failed, and his excuses grew thinner.

And the odd thing was that if David had only known it, he could have saved himself all this heart-burning and misery by looking through the dining-room window on that Sunday afternoon when his prospects seemed to be so

rosy. He never thought of that. He cursed every circumstance and person impartially and fluently, but he omitted from the Satanic litany the one girlish prank of tree-climbing that led Iris to spring out of sight amid the sheltering arms of an elm when her uncle and Captain Coke deemed the summer-house a suitable place for "a plain talk as man to man."

So David learnt what it meant to wait, and listen, and start expectantly when postman's knock or telegraph messenger's imperative summons sounded on door of house or office.

But he waited long in vain. The *Andromeda*, like her namesake of old, might have been chained to a rock on some mythical island guarded by the father of all sea serpents. As for a new Perseus, well--David knew him not.

CHAPTER II

WHEREIN THE "ANDROMEDA" BEGINS HER VOYAGE

The second officer of the *Andromeda* was pacing the bridge with the slow alertness of responsibility. He would walk from port to starboard, glance forward and aft, peer at the wide crescent of the starlit sea, stroll back to port, and again scan ship and horizon. Sometimes he halted in front of the binnacle lamp to make certain that the man at the wheel was keeping the course, South 15 West, set by Captain Coke shortly before midnight. His ears listened mechanically to the steady pulse-beats of the propeller; his eyes swept the vague plain of the ocean for the sparkling white diamond that would betoken a mast-head light; he was watchful and prepared for any unforeseen emergency that might beset the vessel intrusted to his care. But his mind dwelt on something far removed from his duties, though, to be sure, every poet who ever scribbled four lines of verse has found rhyme and reason in comparing women with stars, and ships, and the sea.

If Philip Hozier was no poet, he was a sailor, and sailors are notoriously susceptible to the charms of the softer sex. But the only woman he loved was his mother, the only bride he could look for during many a year was a mermaid, though these sprites of the deep waters seem to be frequenting undiscovered haunts since mariners ceased to woo the wind. For all that, if perforce he was heart-whole, there was no just cause or impediment why he should not admire a pretty girl when he saw one, and an exceedingly pretty girl had honored him with her company during a brief minute of the previous day.

He was superintending the safe disposal of the last batch of cotton goods in the forward hold--and had just found it necessary to explain the correct principles of stowage with sailor-like fluency--when a young lady, accompanied by a dock laborer carrying a leather portmanteau, spoke to him from the quay.

"Is Captain Coke on board?" said she.

"No, madam," said he, lifting his cap with one hand, and restraining the clanking of a steam windlass with the other.

"I am Mr. Verity's niece, and I wish to send this parcel to Monte Video--may I put it in some place where it will be safe?" said she.

Hoping that the rattling winch had drowned his earlier remarks--which were couched in an *lingua franca* of the high seas--he began to tell her that it would give him the utmost pleasure to take charge of it on her account, but she nodded, bade the porter follow, ran along a somewhat precarious gangway, and was on deck before he could offer any assistance.

"You are Mr. Hozier, I suppose?" said Iris, gazing with frank brown eyes into his frank blue ones. She, of course, was severely self-possessed; he, as is the way of mere man, grew more confused each instant.

"Well, I will just pop the bag into Captain Coke's stateroom, and leave this note with it. I have explained everything fully. I wrote a line in case he might be absent."

All of which was so strictly accurate that it served its purpose admirably, though the said purpose, it is regrettable to state, was the misleading and utter bamboozling of Philip Hozier. Miss Iris Yorke knew quite well that Captain Coke was then closeted with David Verity in Exchange Buildings; she knew, because she had watched him pass through the

big swing doors of her uncle's office. She also knew, having made it her business to find out, that in fifteen minutes, or less, the crew would muster in the fo'c'sle for their mid-day meal. Not having heard a word of Hozier's free speech to the gentlemen of various nationalities at the bottom of the hold, she wondered why he was blushing.

"Shall I show you the way?" asked Philip, finding his tongue.

"No, thank you. I have been on board the *Andromeda* many times. Ah, Peter, I see you. What is it to-day, scouse or lobscouse?"

"Scouse, miss," said the ship's cook, grinning widely at her recollection of the line drawn by both his patrons and himself between ship's biscuit stewed with fresh meat and the same article flavored with salt junk.

Peter's recognition placed Iris's identity beyond doubt. She said nothing more to Hozier, but tripped up the companionway. Soon he saw her paying the man who had carried the portmanteau. She herself seemed to be in no hurry. She walked to the rails beneath the bridge, and found interest in watching the loading operations, which were resumed as soon as the second officer saw that his services were not wanted. Time was pressing, and a good deal yet remained to be done.

Mr. Watts, the chief officer, who was called ashore by urgent business five minutes after the "old man" left the vessel, chose this awkward moment to appear from behind a bonded warehouse. He was walking with unnatural steadiness, so Hozier made some excuse to meet him and whisper that the owner's niece was on board.

"Sun's zhot," remarked Mr. Watts cheerfully.

"Go and lie down for a spell," suggested Hozier, and Mr. Watts thought it was a "shpiffin' idee." When Hozier was free to glance a second time at the cross rail, Iris had vanished. He was annoyed. Evidently she did not wish to encounter any more of the ship's officers that morning.

The hatches were on, and everything was orderly before Coke's squat figure climbed the gangway. Hozier reported the young lady's visit, and the skipper was obviously surprised. As he hoisted himself up the steep ladder to the hurricane deck, the younger man heard him condemning someone under his breath as "a leery old beggar." The phrase was hardly applicable to Iris, but Coke came out of his cabin with an open letter in his hand, and bade a steward stow the portmanteau in some other more hallowed and less inconvenient place.

And there the incident ended. The *Andromeda* hauled down the Blue Peter for her long run of over 6,000 miles to Monte Video, and Hozier had routine work in plenty to occupy his mind during the first twenty-four hours at sea without perplexing it with memories of a pretty face. Soon after Holyhead was passed, it is true, a sailor reported to the second officer that he had seen a ghost between decks, in the region of the lazarette. It was then near midnight, a quiet hour on board ship, and Hozier told the man sharply to go to his bunk and endeavor to sleep off the effects of the bad beer imbibed earlier in the day.

Now, on this second night of the voyage, while the ship was plodding steadily southward with that fifteen point inclination to the west that would bring her far into the Atlantic soon after daybreak, Philip remembered Mr. Vèrity's niece, and felt sorry that when she paid those former visits to the *Andromeda*, fate had decreed that he should be serving his time on another vessel. For there was an expression in her eyes that haunted him. Though she addressed him with that absence of restraint which is a heaven-sent attribute of every young woman when circumstances compel her to speak to a strange young man--though her tone to the more favored cook was kindly, and even sprightly--though Philip himself was red and inclined to stammer--despite all these hindrances to clear judgment, he felt that she was troubled in spirit. His acquaintance with women was of the slightest, since a youth who is taught his business on the *Conway*, and means to attach himself to one of the great Trans-Atlantic shipping lines, has no time to spare for dalliance in boudoirs. But it gave him a thrill when he heard that this charming girl knew his name, and it seemed to him, for an instant, that she was looking into his very soul, analyzing him, searching for some sign that he was not as others, which meant that there were some whom she had bitter cause to distrust. Of course, that was mere day-dreaming, a nebulous fantasy brought by her gracious presence into a medley of hurrying windlasses, strenuous orders, and sulky, panting men.

At any rate, she had left a memento of her too brief appearance on board in the shape of the bag. He would contrive to take on his own shoulders its mission in Monte Video; then, on returning to Liverpool, he would have an excuse for calling on her. He did not know her name yet. Possibly, Captain Coke would mention that interesting fact when his temper lost its raw edge. As a last resource, the cook might enlighten him.

It was strange that he should be thinking of Iris--far stranger than he could guess--but his thoughts were subconscious, and he was in no wise neglecting the safety of the ship. The night was clear but dark, the stars blinked with the subdued radiance that betokens fine weather, and ever and anon their reflection glimmered from the long slope of a wave like the glint of spangles on a dress. But it was a garment of far-flung amplitude, woven on the shadowy loom of night and the sea, and from such mysterious warp and weft is often produced the sable robe of tragedy and death. It was so now, within an ace. At one instance, the restless plain of the ocean seemed to bear no other argosy than the *Andromeda*; in the next, Hozier's quick-moving glance had caught the pallid sheen of some small craft's starboard light. No need to tell him what might happen. A sailing vessel, probably a fishing smack, was crossing the steamer's course. He sprang to the telegraph, and signaled "Slow" to the engine-room. Simultaneously he shouted to the steersman to starboard the helm, and the siren trumpeted a single raucous blast into the silence. With the rattle of the chains and steering-rods in the gear-boxes came a yell from the lookout forward:

"Light on the port bow!"

Hozier repeated the hail, but promised the blear-eyed sentinels in the bows of the ship a lively five minutes when the watch was relieved. Slowly the *Andromeda* swung to the west. Even more slowly, or so it appeared to the anxious man on the bridge, a red eye peeped into being alongside the green one. A blacker smear showed up on the black sea, and a hoarse voice, presumably situated beneath the smear, expressed a desire for information.

"Arr ye all aslape on board that crimson collier?" it asked in a Waterford brogue.

"Got the hooker's wheel tied, I suppose?" retorted Hozier, for the now visible schooner had not attempted to change her course by half a point. She was now bowling along with every stitch set before a five-knot breeze from the east; the tilt of her sails was such that she practically presented only the outline of her spars when first sighted from the steamer; and her side lights probably had tallow candles in them.

"Bedad, it's aisier in moind we'd be if you were tied to it," shouted the voice, and Hozier felt, like many another Saxon, that an Irishman's last word is often the best one.

The engines resumed their cadence, and the *Andromeda* crept round again to South 15 West. She was back on her proper line when a heavy step sounded on the iron rungs of the bridge ladder.

"Wot's up?" demanded Coke, who was fully dressed, though Hozier thought he had retired two hours earlier. "Oh, the beer is frothin' up to their eyes, is it?" went on the skipper, after listening to a brief summary of events. "I thought, mebbe, the wheel had jammed. But those lazy swabs want talkin' to. I'll just give 'em a bit of me mind," and he went forward.

Hozier heard him reading the Riot Act to the shell-backs who were supposed to keep a sharp lookout ahead. But the captain did not monopolize the conversation. His deep notes rumbled only at intervals. The men had something to say. He returned to the bridge.

"One of them scallywags sez 'e 'as seen a ghost," he announced, with the calm air of a man who states that the moon will rise during the next hour.

"I wish he could see less remarkable things, such as schooners, sir," said Hozier.

"But 'e swears 'e sawr it twiced."

"Oh, is he the man who reported a ghost outside the lazarette last night?"

"I s'pose so. Did 'e tell you about it? That's where she walks."

"She!"

"That's his yam--a female ghost, a black 'un, black clo'es anyhow. He's a dashed fool, but he's no boozer, though his mate's tongue is a bit thick yet. I'll take the forenoon watch, an' you might overhaul the ship for stowaways after breakfast. Never heard of one on this journey--I've routed out as many as twenty at a time w'en I was runnin' between Wellington an' Sydney--but you never can tell, so 'ave a squint round."

"Yes, sir," said Hozier, and that is how it fell to his lot to discover Iris Yorke, looking very white and miserable, when the hatch of the lazarette was broken open at half-past eight o'clock on Thursday morning!

A tramp steamer is not a complex organism. She is made up of holds, bunkers, boilers and engines, with scanty accommodation for officers and crew grouped round the funnel or stuck in the bows. When the boats were stripped of their tarpaulins, and a few lockers and store-rooms examined, the only available hiding-places were the shaft tunnel, the holds, and the lazarette, a small space between decks, situated directly above the propeller, where a reserve supply of provisions is generally carried.

But the door of the lazarette was locked, and the key missing, though it ought to be hanging with others, all duly labeled, on a hook in the steward's cabin. A duplicate set of keys in the captain's possession was far from complete. As the steward was certain he had fastened the lazarette himself early on Tuesday morning, there was nothing for it but to force the lock.

Even that would not have been necessary had the carpenter slackened his efforts after the first assault. Iris cried loudly enough that she would open the door, but the noise of the shaft and the flapping of the screw drowned her voice, and she was compelled to stand clear when the stout planking began to yield.

It was dark in there, and Hozier was undeniably startled by the spectacle of a slim figure, wrapped in a long ulster, standing among the cases and packages. "Now, out you come!" he cried, with a gruffness that was intended only to cover his own amazement; but Iris, despite the horrors of sea-sickness and confinement in the dark, was not minded to suffer what she considered to be impertinence on the part of a second officer.

"I am Miss Yorke," she said, coming forward into the half light of the lower deck. "Any explanation of my presence here will be given to the captain, and to no other person."

That innocent word "person" is capable of many meanings. Hozier felt that its application to himself was distinctly unfavorable. And Iris was quite dignified and self-possessed. She had given a few deft touches to her hair. Her hat was set at the right angle. Her dark gray coat and brown boots looked neat and serviceable.

"Of course I did not know to whom I was speaking," he managed to say, for he now recognized the "ghost," and was more surprised than he had ever been in his life before.

"That is matterless," said Iris frigidly. "Where is Captain Coke?"

"On the bridge," said Philip.

"I will go to him. Please don't come with me. I tried to tell you that I would unlock the door, but you refused to listen. Will you let me pass?"

He obeyed in silence.

"Well, s'help me!" muttered a sailor, "talk about suffrigettes! Wot price 'er?"

Iris hurried to the deck. The light seemed to dazzle her, and her steps were so uncertain that Hozier sprang forward and caught her arm.

"Won't you sit down a moment, Miss Yorke?" he said. "If you searched the whole ship, you could not have chosen a worse place to travel in than the lazarette."

"I was driven out twice at night by the rats," she gasped, though she strove desperately to regain control of her trembling limbs.

"Too bad!" he whispered. "But it was your own fault. Why did you do it? At any rate, wait here a few minutes before you meet the captain."

"I am not afraid of meeting him. Why should I be? He knows me."

"I meant only that you are hardly able to walk, but I seem to say the wrong thing every time. There is nothing really to worry about. We are not far from Queenstown. We can put you ashore there by losing half a day."

The girl had been ill, wracked in body and distraught in mind, with the added horror of knowing that rats were scampering over the deck close to her in the noisy darkness, but she summoned a half laugh at his words.

"You are still saying the wrong thing, Mr. Hozier," she murmured. "The *Andromeda* will not put into Queenstown."

From this hour I become a passenger, not a stowaway. My uncle knows now that I am here. Thank you, you need not hold me any longer. I have quite recovered. Captain Coke is on the bridge, you said? I can find my way; this ship is no stranger to me."

And away she went, justifying her statements by tripping rapidly forward. The mere sight of her created boundless excitement among such members of the crew as were on deck, but the shock administered to Mr. Watts was of that intense variety often described as electric. In the matter of disposing of large quantities of ardent spirits he was a seasoned vessel, and, as a general rule, the first day at sea sufficed to clear his brain from the fumes of the last orgy on shore. But, to be effective, the cure must not be too drastic. This morning, after leaving the bridge, he had fortified his system with a liberal allowance of rum and milk. Breakfast ended, he took another dose of the same mixture as a "steadier," and he was just leaving the messroom when he set eyes on Iris. Of course, he refused to believe his eyes. Had they not deceived him many times?

"Ha!" said he, "a bit liverish," and he pressed a rough hand firmly downward from forehead to cheek-bones. When he looked again, the girl was much nearer.

"Lord luv' a duck, this time I've got 'em for sure!" he groaned.

His lower jaw dropped, he stared unblinkingly, and purple veins bulged crookedly on his seamed forehead. He was bereft of the power of movement. He stood stock-still, blocking the narrow gangway.

"Good morning, Mr. Watts. You remember me, don't you?" said Iris, showing by her manner that she wished to pass him.

A slight roll of the ship assisted in the disintegration of Watts. He collapsed sideways into the cook's galley, the door of which was hospitably open. Somewhat frightened by the wildness of his looks, Iris ran on, and dashed at the foot of the companion rather breathlessly. The keen air was already tingeing her cheeks with color. When she reached the bridge, where Captain Coke was propped against the chart-house, with a thick, black cigar sticking in his mouth and apparently trying to touch his nose, she had lost a good deal of the pallor and woe-begone semblance that had demoralized Hozier.

Coke heard the rapid, light footsteps, and turned his head. At all times slow of thought and slower of speech, he was galvanized into a sudden rigidity that differed only in degree from the symptoms displayed by his chief officer. Certainly he could not have been more stupefied had he seen the ghost reported overnight.

"They told me I should find you here, Captain," said she. "I must apologize for thrusting my company on you for a long voyage, but--circumstances--were--too much for me--and----"

Face to face with the commander of the ship, and startled anew by his expression of blank incredulity, the glib flow of words conned so often during the steadfast but dreadful hours spent in the lazarette failed her.

"You know me," she faltered. "I am Iris Yorke."

Not a syllable came from the irate and astonished man gazing at her with such a bovine stolidity. His shoulders had not abated a fraction of their stubborn thrust against the frame of the chart-house. His hands were immovable in the pockets of his reefer coat. The cigar still stuck out between his lips like a miniature jib-boom. Had he wished to terrify her by a hostile reception, he could not have succeeded more completely, though, to be just, he meant nothing of the sort; his wits being jumbled into chaos by the apparition of the last person then alive whom he expected or desired to see on board the *Andromeda*.

But Iris could not interpret his mood, and she strove vainly to conquer the fear welling up in her breast because of the grim anger that seemed to blaze at her from every line of Coke's brick-red countenance. In the struggle to pour forth the excuses and protestations that sounded so plausible in her own ears, while secured from observation behind the locked door of her retreat, she blundered unhappily on to the very topic that she had resolved to keep secret.

"Why are you so unwilling to acknowledge me?" she cried, with a nervous indignation that lent a tremor to her voice. "You have met me often enough. You saw me on Sunday at my uncle's house?"

"Did I?" said Coke, speaking at last, but really as much at a loss for something to say as the girl herself. He had recognized her instantly, just as he would recognize the moon if the luminary fell from the sky, and with as little comprehension of the cause of its falling.

Of course, she took the question as a forerunner of blank denial. This was not to be borne. She fired into a direct attack.

"If your memory is hazy concerning the events of Sunday afternoon, it may be helpful if I recall the conversation between my uncle and you in the summer-house," she snapped.

Some of the glow fled from Coke's face. He straightened himself and glanced at the sailor inside the wheel-house, whose attention was given instantly to the fact that the vessel's head had fallen away a full point or more from South 15 West owing to the easterly set of a strong tide. Vessels' heads are apt to turn when steersmen do not attend to their business.

"Wot's that you're sayin'?" demanded Coke, coming nearer, and looking her straight in the eyes.

"I heard every word of that interesting talk," she continued valiantly, though she was sensible of a numbness that seemed to envelop her in an ice-cold mist. "I know what you arranged to do--so I have promised--to marry Mr. Bulmer--when the *Andromeda*--comes back---"

A light broke on Coke's intelligence that irradiated his prominent eyes. His heavy lips relaxed into a cunning grin, and he flicked the ash off the end of the cigar with a confidential nod.

"Oh, is *that* it?" he said. "Artful old dog, Verity! But why in--why didn't 'e tell me you was comin' aboard this trip? We 'aven't the right fixin's for a lady, so you must put up with the best we can do for you, Miss Yorke. Nat'rally, we're tickled to death to 'ave your company, an' if on'y that blessed uncle of your's 'ad told me wot to expect, I'd 'ave made things ship-shape at Liverpool. But, my god-father, wot sort of ijjit axed you to stow yourself away in the lazareet? Steady now; you ain't a-goin' to faint, are you?"

Coke's amiability came too late. His squat figure and red face suddenly loomed into a gigantic indistinctness in the girl's eyes. She would have fallen to the deck had not the captain's strong hands clutched her by the shoulders.

"Hi! Below there!" he yelled. "Tumble up, some of you!"

Hozier was the first to gain the bridge. He had followed the progress of events with sufficient accuracy to realize that Miss Iris Yorke had met with a distinct rebuff by the skipper, and, judging from his own experience of her physical weakness when she emerged into daylight, he was not surprised to hear that she had fainted.

"'Ere, take 'old," gurgled Coke, who had nearly swallowed the cigar in his surprise at Iris's unforeseen collapse. "This kind of thing is more in your line than mine, young feller. Just lay 'er out in the saloon, an' ax Watts to 'elp. His missus goes orf regular w'en they bring 'im 'ome paralytic."

Philip took the girl into his arms. To carry her safely down the steep stairway he was compelled to place her head on his left shoulder and clasp her tightly round the waist with his left arm. Some loosened strands of her hair touched his face; he could feel the laboring of her breast, the wild beating of her heart, and he was exceeding wroth with that unknown man or woman who had driven this insensible girl to such straits that she was ready to dare the discomforts and deprivations of a voyage as a stowaway, rather than be persecuted further.

Iris was laid on a couch in the messroom, and the steward summoned Mr. Watts. The chief officer came, looking sheepish. It was manifestly a great relief when he found that the "ghost" was unconscious.

"Oh, that's nothing," he cried, in response to his junior's eager demand for information as to the treatment best fitted for such emergencies. "They all drop in a heap like that w'en they're worried. Fust you takes orf their gloves an' boots, then you undoes their stays an' rips open their dresses at the necks. One of you rubs their 'ands an' another their feet, an' you dabs cold water on their foreheads, an' burn brown paper under their noses. In between whiles you give 'em a drink, stiff as you can make it. It's dead easy. Them stays are a bit troublesome if they run to size, but she's thin enough as it is. Anyhow, I can show you a fine trick for that. Just turn her over till I cast a lashin' loose with my knife."

Watts was elbowed aside so unceremoniously that his temper gave way. Hozier lifted Iris's head gently and unfastened the neck-hooks of her blouse. He began to chafe her cold hands tenderly, and pressed back the hair from her damp forehead. The "chief," not flattered by his own reflections, thought fit to sneer at these half measures.

"She's on'y a woman like the rest of 'em," he growled, "even if she *is* the owner's niece, an' a good-lookin' gal at that. I s'pose now you think----"

"I think she will want some fresh air soon, so you had better clear out," said Philip.

His words were quiet, but he flashed a warning glance at the other man that sufficed. Watts retired, muttering sarcasms under his breath.

Iris revived, to find Philip supporting her with a degree of skill that was remarkable in one who had enjoyed so little experience in those matters. She heard his voice, coming, as it seemed, rapidly nearer, urging her to sip something very fiery and spirituous. Instantly she protested.

"What are you giving me?" she sobbed. "What has happened?"

Then the whole of her world opened up before her. Her hands flew to her throat, her hair. She flushed into vivid life as the marble Galatea incarnated under Pygmalion's kiss.

"Did I faint?" she asked confusedly.

"Yes, but you are all right now. You did not fall. Captain Coke caught you and handed you over to me. I wish you would drink the remainder of this brandy, and rest for a little while."

Iris pushed away the glass and sat up.

"You carried me?" she said.

"Well, I couldn't do anything else."

"I suppose you don't realize what it means to a woman to feel that she has been out of her senses under such conditions?"

"No, but in your case it only meant that you sighed deeply a few times and tried to bite my fingers when I wished to open your mouth."

"What for? Why did you want to open my mouth?"

"To give you a drink--you needed a stimulant."

"Oh!"

By this time a few dexterous twists and turns had restrained those wandering tresses within bounds. She held a hair-pin between her lips, and a woman can always say exactly what she means when a hairpin prevents discursiveness.

"I am all right now," she announced. "Will you please leave me, and tell the steward to bring me a cup of tea? If there is a cabin at liberty, he might put that portmanteau in it which I brought on board at Liverpool."

Hozier fulfilled her requests, and rejoined Coke on the bridge.

"Miss Yorke is quite well again, sir," he reported. "She wants a cabin--to change her clothes, I imagine. That bag you saw----"

"Pretty foxy, wasn't it?" broke in Coke, with a glee that was puzzling to his hearer.

"The whole affair seems to have been carefully planned," agreed Philip. "But, as I was saying, she asked for the use of a cabin, so I told the steward to give her mine until we put into Queenstown."

Coke, who had lighted another black and stumpy cigar, removed it in order to speak with due emphasis.

"Put into h--!" he said.

"But surely you will not take this young lady to the River Plate?" cried the astounded second officer.

"She knew where she was bound w'en she kem aboard the *Andromeda*," said the skipper, frowning now like a man who argues with himself. "There's her portmanter to prove it, with a label, an' all, in her own 'and-writin'. It's some game played on me by 'er an' 'er uncle. Any'ow, the fust time she sees land again it'll be the lovely 'arbor of Pemambuco--an'

that's straight. 'Ere she is, an' 'ere she'll stop, an' the best thing you can do is spread the notion among the crew that she's runnin' away to avoid marryin' a man she doesn't like. That sounds reasonable, an' it 'appens to be true. Vëryity an' me talked it over last Sunday, p.m."

"To avoid a marriage?" repeated Hozier, who discovered a bluff honesty, not to say candor, in the statement, not perceptible hitherto in his commander's utterances.

"Yes, that's it," said Coke, waving the cigar across an arc of the horizon as he warmed to the subject. "But look 'ere, me boy, this gal sails under my flag. I'm, wot d'ye call it, in locomotive parentibus, or something of the sort, while she's on the ship's books. You keep your mouth shut, an' wink the other eye, an' leave it to me to give you the chanst of your life--eh, wot?"

Philip Hozier did not strive to extract the precise meaning of the skipper's words. The process would have been difficult, since Coke himself could not have supplied any reasonable analysis. Somehow, to the commander's thinking, the presence of the girl seemed to make easier the casting away of the ship--exactly how, or what bearing her strangely-begun voyage might have on subsequent events, he was not yet in a position to say. But when the second officer left him, and he was steeped once more in the fresh breeze and the sunshine, with his shoulders braced against the chart-house, he looked at a smoke trail on the horizon far away to the west.

"Queenstown!" he chuckled. "Not this journey--not if my name's Jimmie Coke, the man 'oo is stannin' on all that is left of 'is 'ard-earned savin's. No, sir, I've got me orders an' I've got me letter, an' the pore old *Andromeda* gets ripped to pieces in the Recife, or I'll know the reason why. Wot a card to play at the inquiry! Owner's niece on board--bound to South America for the good of 'er health. 'Oo even 'eard of a man sendin' 'is pretty niece on a ship 'e meant to throw away? It's Providential, that's wot it is, reel Providential! I do believe ole Vëryity 'ad a 'and in it."

Which shows that Captain Coke confused Providence with David Vëryity, and goes far to prove how ill-fitted he was to theorize on the ways of Providence.

CHAPTER III

WHEREIN THE "ANDROMEDA" NEARS THE END OF HER VOYAGE

"Five bells, miss! It'll soon be daylight. If you wants to see the Cross, now's your time!"

Iris had been called from dreamless sleep by a thundering rat-tat on her cabin door. In reply to her half-awaked cry of "All right," the hoarse voice of a sailor told her that the Southern Cross had just risen above the horizon. She had a drowsy recollection of someone saying that the famous constellation would make its appearance at seven bells, not at five, and the difference of an hour, when the time happens to be 2:30 instead of 8:30 a.m. is a matter of some importance. But, perhaps that was a mistake; at any rate, here was the messenger, and she resolutely screwed her knuckles into her eyes and began to dress. In a few minutes she was on deck. A long coat, a Tam o' Shanter, and a pair of list slippers will go far in the way of costume at night in the tropics, and the *Andromeda's* seventeenth day at sea had brought the equator very near. At dinner on the previous evening--in honor of the owner's niece fashionable hours were observed for meals--Mr. Watts mentioned, by chance, that the Cross had been very distinct during the middle watch, or, in other words, between midnight and 4 a.m. Iris at once expressed a wish to see it, and Captain Coke offered a suggestion.

"Mr. Hozier takes the middle watch to-night," said he. "We can ax 'im to send a man to pound on your door as soon as it rises. Then you must run up to the bridge, an' 'e'll tell you all about it."

If Iris was conscious of a slight feeling of surprise, she did not show it. Hitherto, the burly skipper of the *Andromeda* had made it so clearly understood that none of the ship's company save himself was to enjoy the society of Miss Iris Yorke, that she had exchanged very few words with the one man whose manners and education obviously entitled him to meet her on an equal plane. Even at meals, he was often absent, for the captain and chief officer of a tramp steamer are not altruists where eating is concerned. She often visited the bridge, her favorite perch being the shady side of the wheel-house, but talking to the officer of the watch was strictly forbidden. In everything appertaining to the vessel's navigation the discipline of a man-of-war was observed on board the *Andromeda*. So Coke's complacency came now quite unexpectedly, but Iris was learning to school her tongue.

"Thank you very much," she said. "When shall I see him?"

"Oh, you needn't bother. I'll tell 'im meself."

She was somewhat disappointed at this. Hozier would be free for an hour before he turned in, and they might have enjoyed a nice chat while he smoked on the poop. In her heart of hearts, she was beginning to acknowledge that a voyage through summer seas on a cargo vessel, with no other society than that of unimaginative sailormen, savored of tedium, indeed, almost of deadly monotony. Her rare meetings with Hozier marked bright spots in a dull round of hours. During their small intercourse she had discovered that he was well informed. They had hit upon a few kindred tastes in books and music; they even differed sharply in their appreciation of favorite authors, and what could be more conducive to complete understanding than the attack and defense of the shrine of some tin god of literature?

While, therefore, it was strange that Captain Coke should actually propose a visit to the bridge at an unusual time--at a time, too, when Hozier would be on duty--it struck her as far more curious that he should endeavor to prevent an earlier meeting. But she had never lost her intuitive fear of Coke. His many faults certainly did not include a weak will. He meant what he said--also a good deal that he left unsaid--and his word was law to everyone on board the *Andromeda*. So Iris contented herself with meek agreement.

"I shall be delighted to come at any time. I have often read about the Southern Cross, yet three short weeks ago I little thought----"

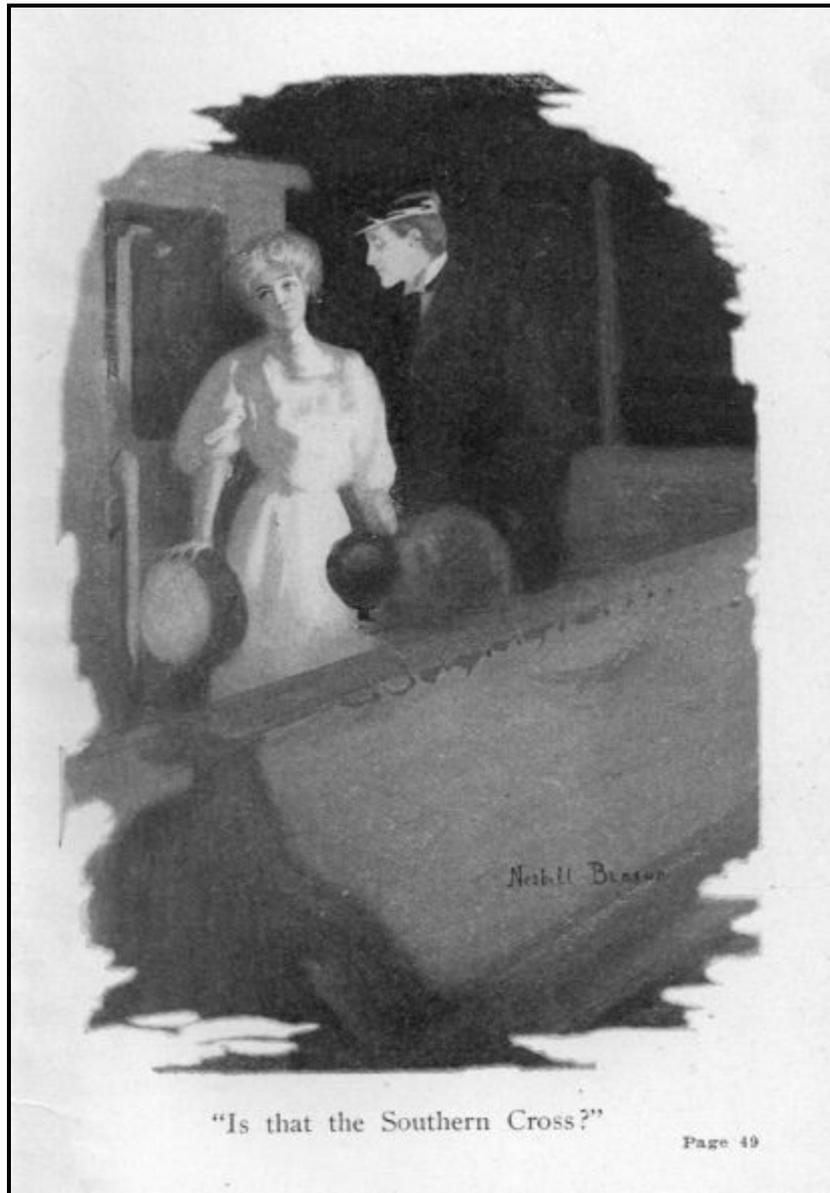
"You reely didn't think about it at all," broke in Coke. "If you 'ad, you'd 'ave known you couldn't cross the line without seein' it."

Here was another perplexing element in the skipper's conduct. That Iris was a stowaway was forgotten. She was treated with the attention and ceremony due to the owner's niece. Coke never lost an opportunity of dinning into the ears of Watts, or Hozier, or the steward, or any members of the crew who were listening, that Miss Yorke's presence in their midst was a preordained circumstance, a thing fully discussed and agreed on as between her uncle and himself, but carried out in an irregular manner, owing to some girlish freak on her part. The portmanteau, with its change of raiment, brought convincing testimony, and Iris's own words when discovered in the lazaretto supplied further proof, if that were needed. Her name figured in the ship's papers, and the time of her appearance on board was recorded in the log. Coke might be a man of one idea, but he held to it as though it were written in the Admiralty Sailing Directions; not his would be the fault if David Verity failed to appreciate the logic of his reasoning long before an official investigation became inevitable.

A keen, invigorating breeze swept the last mirage of sleep from the girl's brain as she flitted silently along the deck. A wondrous galaxy of stars blazed in the heavens. In that pellucid air the sky was a vivid ultramarine. The ship's track was marked by a trail of phosphorescent fire. Each revolution of the propeller drew from the ocean treasure-house opulent globes of golden light that danced and sparkled in the tumbling waters. It was a night that pulsated with the romance and abandon of the south, a night when the heart might throb with unutterable longings, and the blood tingle in the veins under the stress of an emotion at once passionate and mystic.

Iris, spurred on by no stronger impulse than that of the sight-seer, though not wholly unaware of an element of adventurous shyness in her expectation of a *tete-a-tete* with a good-looking young man of her own status, climbed to the bridge so speedily and noiselessly that Hozier did not know of her presence until he heard her dismayed cry:

"Is *that* the Southern Cross?"



[Illustration: "Is that the Southern Cross?"]

He turned quickly.

"You, Miss Yorke?" he exclaimed, and not even her wonder at the insignificance of the stellar display of which she had heard so much could cloak the fact that Hozier was unprepared for her appearance.

"Of course, it is I—who else?" she asked. "Did not Captain Coke tell you to expect me?"

"No."

"How odd! That is what he arranged. A man came and rapped at my door."

"Pardon me one moment."

He leaned over the bridge and hailed the watch. The same hoarse voice that had roused Iris answered his questions, and, in the faint light that came from the binnacle, she caught a flicker of amusement on his face.

"Our excellent skipper's intentions have been defeated," he said. "He told one of the men to call him at seven bells, but not to wake you until the Cross was visible. His orders have been obeyed quite literally. He will be summoned in another hour, and you have been dragged from bed to gaze at the False Cross, which every foremast hand persists in regarding as the real article. The true Cross, of which Alpha Crucis is the Southern Pole star, comes up over the horizon

an hour after the false one."

"But Captain Coke said he would see you and warn you of my visit."

"I can only assure you that he did not. Perhaps he thought it unnecessary--meaning to be on deck himself."

"Must I wait here a whole hour, then?"

Hozier laughed. It was amusing to find how Coke's marked effort to keep the girl and him apart had been defeated by a sailor's blunder.

"I hope the waiting will not weary you," he said. "It is a beautiful night. You will not catch cold if you are well wrapped up, and, no matter what you may think of the real Cross when you see it, you will never have a better chance of star-gazing. Look at Sirius up there, brighter than the moon; and Orion, too, incomparably grander than any star in southern latitudes. Our dear old Bear of the north ranks far beyond the Southern Cross in magnificence; but mist and smoke and dust contrive to rob our home atmosphere of the clearness which adds such luster to the firmament nearer the equator."

Under other circumstances, Iris would have reveled in just such an opportunity of acquiring knowledge easily. Astronomy, despite its limitations, is one of the exact sciences; it has the charm of wonderland; it makes to awe-stricken humanity the mysterious appeal of the infinite; but to-night, when the heart fluttered, and the soul pined for sympathy, she was in a mood to regard with indifference the instant extinction of the Milky Way.

"I am glad of the accident that brought me on deck somewhat earlier than was necessary," she said. "You and I have not said much to each other since you routed me out of the lazaretto, Mr. Hozier."

"Our friends at table are somewhat--difficult. If only you knew how I regretted----"

"Oh, what of that? When I became a stowaway I fully expected to be treated as one. I suppose, though, that you have often asked yourself why I was guilty of such a mad trick?"

"Not exactly mad, Miss Yorke, but needless, since Captain Coke partly expected to have your company."

"That is absurd. He had not the remotest notion----"

"Forgive me, but there you are wrong. He says that your uncle and he discussed the matter on the Sunday before we left Liverpool. His theory is rather borne out by the present state of the ship's larder. I assure you that few tramp steamers spread a table like the *Andromeda's* mess during this voyage."

Iris laughed, with a spontaneous merriment that was rather astonishing in her own ears.

"Being the owner's niece, I am well catered for?" she cried.

"Something of the sort. It is only natural."

"But I think I have read in the newspapers that when some unhappy creature is condemned to death by the law, he is supplied with luxuries that would certainly be denied to any ordinary criminal?"

"Such doubtful clemency can hardly apply to you, Miss Yorke."

"It might apply to the ship, or to that human part of her that thinks, and remembers, and is capable of--of giving evidence."

She paused, fearing lest, perhaps, she might have spoken too plainly. Coke's counter-stroke in alluding to her dread of the proposed marriage was hidden from her ken; Hozier, of course, was thinking of nothing else. For the moment, then, they were at cross purposes.

"Things are not so bad as that," he said gently. "I hope I am not trespassing on forbidden ground, but it is only fair to tell you that the skipper was quite explicit, up to a point. He said you were being forced into some matrimonial arrangement that was distasteful----"

"And to escape from an undesirable suitor I ran away?"

"Well, the story sounded all right."

"Hid myself on my uncle's ship when I wished to avoid marrying the man of his choice?"

Hozier was not neglecting his work, but he did then take his eyes off the starlit sea for a few amazed seconds. There was no mistaking the scornful ring in the girl's words. He could see the deep color that flooded her cheeks; the glance that met his sparkled with an intensity of feeling that thrilled while it perplexed.

"Please pardon me if the question hurts, but if that is not your motive, and there never was any real notion of your coming with us on the this trip, why are you here?" he said.

"Because I am a foolish girl, I suppose; because I thought that my presence might interpose a serious obstacle between a criminal and the crime he had planned to commit. If one wants to avoid hateful people a change of climate is a most effectual means, and I had not the money for ordinary travel. Believe me, Mr. Hozier, I am not on board the *Andromeda* without good reason. I have often wished to have a talk with you. I think you are a man who would not betray a confidence. If you agree to help me, something may yet be done. At first, I was sure that Captain Coke would abandon his wicked project as soon as he discovered that I knew what was in his mind. But now, I am beginning to doubt. Each day brings us nearer South America, and--and----"

She was breathless with excitement. She drew nearer to the silent, and impassive man at her side; dropping her voice almost to a whisper, she caught his arm with an appealing hand.

"I am afraid that my presence will offer no hindrance to his scheme," she murmured. "I am terrified to say such a thing, but I am certain, quite *certain*, that the ship will be lost within the next few days."

Hozier, though incredulous, could not but realize that the girl was saying that which she honestly thought to be true.

"Lost! Do you mean that, she will be purposely thrown away?" he asked, and his own voice was not wholly under control, for he was called on to repress a sudden temptation to kiss away the tears that glistened in her brown eyes.

"Yes, that is what he said--on the rocks, this side of Monte Video."

"He said--who?"

"The--the captain."

"To whom did he say it?"

"Oh, Mr. Hozier, do not ask that, but believe me and help me."

"How?"

"I do not know. I am half distracted with thinking. What can we do? Captain Coke simply swept aside my first attempt to speak plainly to him. But, make no mistake--he knows that I heard his very words, and there is something in his manner, a curious sort of quiet confidence, that frightens me."

After that, neither spoke during many minutes. The *Andromeda* jogged along steadily south by west, and the thrashing of the propeller beat time to the placid hum of her engines. The sturdy old ship could seemingly go on in that humdrum way forever, forging ahead through the living waters, marking her track with a golden furrow.

"That is a very serious thing you have told me, Miss Yorke," muttered Hozier at last, not without a backward glance at the sailor in the wheel-house to assure himself that the man could not, by any chance, overhear their conversation.

"But it is true--dreadfully true," said Iris, clasping her hands together and resting them on the high railing of the bridge.

"It is all the more serious inasmuch as we are helpless," he went on. "Don't you see how impossible it is even to hint at it in any discussion with the man principally concerned? I want to say this, though--you are in no danger. There is no ship so safe as one that is picked out for wilful destruction. Men will not sacrifice their own lives even to make good an insurance policy, and I suppose that is what is intended. So you can sleep sound o' nights--at any rate until

we near the coast of Brazil. I can only promise you if any watchfulness on my part can stop this piece of villainy--- Hello, there! What's up? Why is the ship falling away from her course?"

The sudden change in his voice startled the girl so greatly that she uttered a slight shriek. It took her an appreciable time to understand that he was speaking to the man at the wheel. But the sailor knew what he meant.

"Something's gone wrong with the wheel, sir," he bawled. "I wasn't certain at first, so I tried to put her over a bit to s'uth'ard. Then she jammed for sure."

Hozier leaped to the telegraph and signaled "slow" to the engine-room. Already the golden pathway behind the *Andromeda* had changed from a wavering yet generally straight line to a well-defined curve. There was a hiss and snort of escaping steam as the sailor inside the chart-house endeavored to force the machinery into action.

"Steady there!" bellowed Hozier. "Wait until we have examined the gear-boxes. There may be a kink in a chain."

A loud order brought the watch scurrying along the deck. Some of the men ran to examine the bearings of the huge fan-shaped casting that governed the movements of the rudder, while others began to tap the wooden shields which protected the steering rods and chains. In the midst of the hammering and excitement, Captain Coke swung himself up to the bridge.

"Well, I'm blowed! *You* here?" he said, looking at Iris. "Wot is it now?" he asked, turning sharply to Hozier. "Wheel stuck again?"

"Yes, sir. Has it happened before?"

"Well--er--not this trip. But it 'as 'appened. Just for a minnit I was mixin' it up with the night you nearly ran down that bloomin' hooker off the Irish coast. Ah, there she goes! Everything O.K. now. W'en daylight comes we'll overhaul the fixin's. Nice thing if the wheel jammed just as we was crossin' the Recife!"

Hozier tried to ascertain from the watch if they had found the cause of the disturbance, but the men could only guess that a chance blow with an adze had straightened a kink in one of the casings. Coke treated the incident with nonchalance.

"Thought you was to be called w'en the Cross hove in sight, Miss Yorke?" he said abruptly.

"I am sorry to have to inform you that some people on board cannot distinguish between falsity and truth," she answered. "But please don't be angry with any of the men on my account. Mr. Hozier tells me they often confuse the False Cross with the real one, and the mistake has been enjoyable. Now I know all about it--what were those stars you were telling me the names of, Mr. Hozier?"

Philip took the cue she offered.

"Sirius, and Orion, and Ursa Major. I shall write the names and particulars for you after breakfast," he said with a smile.

"Reg'lar 'umbug the Southern Cross," grunted Coke; "it ain't a patch on the Bear."

"Mr. Hozier said something like that," put in Iris mischievously.

"Did 'e? Well 'e's right for once. But don't you go an' take as Gospel most things 'e says. Every shipmaster knows that the second officer simply can't speak the truth. It ain't natural. W'y, it 'ud bust a steam pipe if 'e tole you wot 'e really thought of the ole man."

Coke grinned at his own pleasantry. To one of his hearers, at least, it seemed to be passing strange that he was so ready to forget such a vital defect in the steering gear as had manifested its existence a few minutes earlier.

At any rate, he remained on the bridge until long after Iris had seen and admired the cluster of stars which oldtime navigators used to regard with awe. When shafts of white light began to taper, pennon-like, in the eastern sky, the girl went back to her cabin. Contrary to Hozier's expectation, Coke did not attempt to draw from him any account of their conversation prior to the inexplicable mishap to the wheel. He examined a couple of charts, made a slight alteration in the course, and at four o'clock took charge of the bridge.

"Just 'ave a look round now while things is quiet," he said, nodding to Hozier confidentially. "I'll tell you wot I fancy: a rat dragged a bit of bone into a gear-box. If the plankin' is badly worn anywhere, get the carpenter to see to it. I do 'ate to 'ave a feelin' that the wheel can let you down. S'pose we was makin' Bahia on the homeward run, an' that 'appened! It 'ud be the end of the pore ole ship; an' oo'd credit it? Not a soul. They'd all say 'Jimmie threw 'er away!' Oh, I know 'em, the swine--never a good word for a man while 'e keeps straight, but tar an' feathers the minnit 'e 'as a misforchun!"

Hozier found a gnawed piece of ham-bone lying in the exact position anticipated by Coke. An elderly salt who had served with the P. & O. recalled a similar incident as having occurred on board an Indian mail steamer while passing through the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. He drew a lurid picture of the captain's dash across the forms of lady passengers sleeping inside a curtained space on deck, and his location of the area of disturbance with an ax just in time to prevent a disaster.

The carpenter busied himself with sawing and hammering during the whole of the next two days, for the *Andromeda* revealed many gaps in her woodwork, but the escapade of an errant ham-bone was utterly eclipsed by a new sensation. At daybreak one morning every drop of water in the vessel's tanks suddenly assumed a rich, blood-red tint. This unnerving discovery was made by the cook, who was horrified to see a ruby stream pouring into the earliest kettle. Thinking that an iron pipe had become oxidized with startling rapidity, he tried another tap. Finally, there could be no blinking the fact that, by some uncanny means, the whole of the fresh water on board had acquired the color if not the taste of a thin Burgundy.

Coke was summoned hastily. *Noblesse oblige*; being captain, he valiantly essayed the task of sampling this strange beverage.

"It ain't p'ison," he announced, gazing suspiciously at the little group of anxious-faced men who awaited his verdict. "It sartinly ain't p'ison, but it's wuss nor any teetotal brew I've tackled in all me born days. 'Ere, Watts, you know the tang of every kind o' likker--'ave a sup?"

"Not me!" said Watts. "I don't like the look of it. First time I've ever seen red ink on tap. For the rest of this trip I stick to bottled beer, or somethink with a label."

"It smells like an infusion of permanganate of potash," volunteered Hozier.

"Does it?" growled Coke, who seemed to be greatly annoyed. "Wot a pity it ain't an infusion of whisky an' potash!" and he glared vindictively at Watts. "Some ijjit 'as bin playin' a trick on us, that's wot it is--some blank soaker 'oo don't give a hooraw in Hades for tea an' corfee an' cocoa, but wants a tonic. Stooard!"

"Yes, sir," said the messroom attendant.

"Portion out all the soda water in the lockers, an' whack it on the table every meal till it gives out. See that nobody puts away more'n 'is proper allowance, too. I'm not goin' to cry hush-baby w'en the *Andromeda* gets this sort of kid's dodge worked off on 'er."

"If you're alloodin' to me," put in the incensed "chief," whose temper rose on this direct provocation, "I want to tell you now----"

"Does the cap fit?" sneered Coke.

"No, it doesn't. I never 'eard of that kind of potash in me life. D'ye take me for a--chemist's shop?"

"Never 'eard of it!" cried the incensed skipper, who had obviously made up his mind as to the person responsible for the outrage. "There's 'arf a dozen cases of it in the after hold--or there was, w'en we put the hatches on."

"Even if some of the cases were broken, sir, the contents could not reach the tanks," said Hozier, who fancied that Coke's attack on the bibulous Watts was wholly unwarranted. But the commander's wrath could not be appeased.

"Get this stuff pumped out, an' 'ave the tanks scoured. We'll put into Fernando Noronha, an' refill there. It's on'y a day lost, an' I guess the other liquor on board 'll last till we make the island. Sink me, if this ain't the queerest run this crimson ship 'as ever 'ad. I'll be glad w'en it's ended."

Coke lurched away in the direction of the chart-room. Hozier found him there later, poring over a chart of Fernando Noronha. Iris, on hearing the steward's version of the affair, came to the bridge for further enlightenment, but Coke

merely told her that the island was a Lloyd's signal station, so she could cable to her uncle.

"Can I go ashore?" she asked.

"I dunno. We'll see. It's a convict settlement for the Brazils, an' they're mighty partic'lar about lettin' people land, but they'll 'ardly object to a nice young lady like you 'avin' a peep at 'em."

As his tone was unusually gruff, not to say jeering, she resolved to find an opportunity of seeking Hozier's advice on the cablegram problem. But the portent of the blood-red water was not to be disregarded. Never was Delphic oracle better served by nature. The *Andromeda* began to roll ominously; masses of black cloud climbed over the southwest horizon; at midday the ship was driving through a heavy sea. As the day wore, the weather became even more threatening. A sky and ocean that had striven during three weeks to produce in splendid rivalry blends of sapphire blue and emerald green and tenderest pink, were now draped in a shroud of gray mist. With increasing frequency and venom, vaulting seas curled over the bows, and sent stinging showers of spray against the canvas shield of the bridge. Instead of the natty white drill uniform and canvas shoes of the tropics, the ship's officers donned oilskins, sou'westers, and sea-boots. Torrents swept the decks, and an occasional giant among waves smote the hull with a thunderous blow under which every rivet rattled and every plank creaked. Despite these drawbacks, the *Andromeda* wormed her way south. She behaved like the stanch old sea-prowler that she was, and labored complainingly but with stubborn zeal in the teeth of a stiff gale.

Iris, of course, thought that she was experiencing the storm of a century. Badly scared at first, she regained some stock of courage when Hozier came twice to her cabin, pounded on the door, and shouted to her such news as he thought would take her mind off the outer furies! The first time he announced that they were just "crossing the line," and the girl smiled at the thought that Neptune's chosen lair was uncommonly like the English Channel at its worst. On the second occasion her visitor brought the cheering news that they would be under the lee of Fernando Noronha early next morning. She had sufficient sea lore to understand that this implied shelter from wind and wave, but Hozier omitted to tell her that the only practicable roadstead in the island, being on the weather side, would be rendered unsafe by the present adverse combination of the elements. In fact, Coke had already called both Watts and Hozier into council, and they had agreed with him that the wiser plan would be to bear in towards the island from the east, and anchor in smooth water as close to South Point as the lead would permit.

As for Iris's wild foreboding that the ship was intended to be lost, Philip did not give it other than a passing thought. Coke was navigating the *Andromeda* with exceeding care and no little skill. He was a first-rate practical sailor, and it was an education to the younger man to watch his handling of the vessel throughout the worst part of the blow. About midnight the weather moderated. It improved steadily until a troubled dawn heralded some fitful gleams of the sun. By that time the magnificent Peak of Fernando Noronha was plainly visible. Coke came to the bridge and set a new course, almost due west. The sun struggled with increasing success against the cloud battalions, and patches of blue appeared in sky and sea. Soon it was possible to distinguish the full extent of the coast line. Houses appeared, and trees, and green oases of cultivation, but these were mere spots of color amid the arid blackness of a land of bleak rock and stone-strewed hills.

There was a strong current setting from the southeast, and the dying gale left its aftermath in a long swell, but the *Andromeda* rolled on with ever-increasing comfort. Even Iris was tempted forth by the continued sunshine.

Coke was not on the bridge at the moment. Mr. Watts was taking the watch; Hozier was on deck forrard, looking for gravel and shells on the instrument that picks up these valuable indications from the floor of the sea. Suddenly the captain appeared. He greeted Iris with a genial nod.

"Ah, there you are," he cried. "Not seen you since this time yesterday. Sorry, but there'll be no goin' ashore to-day. We're on the wrong side of the island, an' it 'ud toss you a bit if you was to try an' land in eether of the boats. Take 'er in easy now, Mr. Watts. That's our anchorage--over there," and he pointed to the mouth of a narrow channel between South Point and the Ile des Fregates, the latter a tiny islet that almost blocks the entrance to a shallow bay into which runs a rivulet of good but slightly brackish water.

The ship slowed perceptibly, and Hozier busied himself with the lead, which a sailor was swinging on the starboard side from the small platform of the accommodation ladder. Iris did not know what was said, but the queer figures repeated to Coke seemed to be satisfactory. Headlands and hills crept nearer. The rocky arms of the island closed in on them. A faint scent as of sweet grasses reached them from the shore. Iris could see several people, nearly all of them men in uniform, hurrying about with an air of excitement that betokened the unusual. Perhaps a steamer's advent on the south side of the island was a novelty.

Now they were in a fairly smooth roadstead; the remnants of the gale were shouldered away from the ship by the towering cliff that jutted out on the left of the bay. The crew were mostly occupied in clearing blocks and tackle and swinging two life-boats outward on their davits.

"All ready foward?" roared Coke. Hozier ran to the forecastle. He found the carpenter there, standing by the windlass brake.

"All ready, sir!" he cried.

Coke nodded to him.

"Give her thirty-five," he said, meaning thereby that the anchor should be allowed thirty-five fathoms of chain.

From the bridge, where Iris was standing, she could follow each movement of the commander's hands as he signaled in dumbshow to the steersman or telegraphed instructions to the engine-room. It was interesting to watch the alertness of the men on duty. They were a scratch crew, garnered from the four quarters of the globe at the Liverpool shipping office, but they moved smartly under officers who knew their work, and the *Andromeda* was well equipped in that respect.

The turbulent current was surging across the bows with the speed of a mill-race, so Coke brought the vessel round until she lay broadside with the land and headed straight against the set of the stream. It was his intent to drop anchor while in that position, and help any undue strain on the cable by an occasional turn of the propeller.

"Keep her there!" he said, half turning to the man at the wheel; he changed the indicator from "Full speed" to "Slow ahead"; in a few seconds the anchor chain would have rattled through the hawse-hole--when something happened that was incomprehensible, stupefying--something utterly remote and strange from the ways of civilized men.

The *Andromeda* quivered under a tremendous buffet. There was a crash of rending iron and an instant stoppage of the engines. Almost merging into the noise of the blow came a loud report from the land, but that, in its turn, was drowned by the hiss of steam from the exhaust.

Coke appeared to be dumfounded for an instant. Recovering himself, he ran to the starboard side, leaned over, looked down at a torn plate that showed its jagged edges just above the water-line, and then lifted a blazing face toward a point half-way up the neighboring cliff, where a haze lay like a veil of gauze on the weather-scarred rocks.

"You d--d pirates!" he yelled, raising both clenched fists at the hidden battery which had fired a twelve-pound shell into the doomed ship.

The *Andromeda* herself seemed to recognize that she was stricken unto death. She fell away before the current with the aimless drift of a log.

"Let go!" bellowed Coke with frenzied pantomime of action to Hozier. It was too late. Before the lever controlling the steam windlass that released the anchor could be shoved over, another shell plunged through the thin iron plates in the bows, smashing a steam pipe, and jamming the hawser gear by its impact. The missile burst with a terrific report. A sailor was knocked overboard, the carpenter was killed outright, two other men were seriously wounded, and Hozier received a blow on the forehead from a flying scrap of metal that stretched him on the deck.

The gunners on shore had not allowed for the drifting of the ship. That second shell was meant to demolish the chart-house and clear the bridge of its occupants. Striking high and forward, it had robbed the *Andromeda* of her last chance. Now she was rolling in the full grip of the tidal stream. It could only be a matter of a minute or less before she struck.

CHAPTER IV

SHOWING WHAT BECAME OF THE "ANDROMEDA"

The island artillery did not succeed in hitting the crippled ship again. Three more shells were fired, but each projectile screamed harmlessly far out to sea. A trained gunner, noting these facts, would reason that the shore battery made good practice in the first instance solely because its ordnance was trained at a known range. Indeed, he might even hazard a guess that the *Andromeda's* warm reception was arranged long before her masts and funnel rose over the horizon. That the islanders intended nothing less than her complete destruction was self-evident. Without the slightest warning they had tried to sink her; and now that she was escaping the further attentions of the field pieces, a number of troops stationed on South Point and the Isle des Fregates began to pelt her with bullets.

Iris, when the first paralysis of fear had passed, when her stricken senses resumed their sway and her limbs lost their palsy, flinched from this new danger, and sank sobbing to her knees behind the canvas shield of the bridge. Somehow, this flimsy shelter, which sailors call the "dodger," gave some sense of safety. Her throbbing brain was incapable of lucid thought, but it was borne in on her mistily that the world and its occupants had suddenly gone mad. The omen of the blood-red water had justified itself most horribly. The dead carpenter was sprawling over the fore-castle windlass. His hand still clutched the brake. The sailor at the wheel had been shot through the throat, and had fallen limply through the open doorway of the chart-room; he lay there, coughing up blood and froth, and gasping his life out. The two men wounded by the second shell were creeping down the forward companion in the effort to avoid the hail of lead that was beating on the ship. Hozier was raising himself on hands and knees, his attitude that of a man who is dazed, almost insensible. Watts had gone from the bridge—he might have been whirled to death over the side like the unfortunate fore-mast hand she had seen tossed from off the fore-castle; but Coke, whose charmed life apparently entitled him to act like a lunatic, was actually balancing himself on top of the starboard rails of the bridge by clinging to a stay, having climbed to that exposed position in order to hurl oaths at the soldiers on shore. He had gone berserk with rage. His cap had either fallen off or been torn from his head by a bullet; his squat, powerful figure was shaking with frenzy; he emphasized each curse with a passionate gesture of the free hand and arm; he said among other things, and with no lack of forceful adjectives, that if he could only come to close quarters with some of the Portygee assassins on the island he would tear their sanguinary livers out. It is an odd thing that men made animal by fury often use that trope. They do really mean it. The liver is the earliest spoil of the successful tiger.

The *Andromeda*, uncontrollable as destiny, and quite as heedless of her human freight, swung round with the current until her bows pointed to the islet occupied by the marksmen. All at once, Coke suspended his flow of invectives and rushed into the chart-room, where Iris heard him tearing lockers open and throwing their contents on the deck. To enter, he was obliged to leap over the body of the dying man. The action was grotesque, callous, almost inhuman; it jarred the girl's agonized transports back into a species of spiritual calm, a mental state akin to the fatalism often exhibited by Asiatics when death is imminent and not to be denied. The apparent madness of the captain was now more distressing to her than the certain loss of the ship or the invisible missiles that clanged into white patches on the iron plates, cut sudden holes and scars in the woodwork, or whirred through the air with a buzzing whistle of singularly menacing sound. She began to be afraid of remaining on the bridge; her fear was not due to the really vital fact that it was so exposed; it arose from the purely feminine consideration that she was sure Coke had become a raving maniac, and she dreaded meeting him when, if ever, he reappeared.

A bullet struck the front frame of the chart-room, and several panes of glass were shattered with a fearful din. That decided her. Coke, if he were not killed, would surely be driven out. She sprang to her feet, and literally ran down the steep ladder to the saloon deck. Through the open door of the officers' mess she witnessed another bizarre act—an act quite as extraordinary in its way as Coke's jump over the steersman's body. In the midst of this drama of death and destruction, Watts was standing there, with head thrown back and uplifted arm, gulping down a tumblerful of some dark-colored liquid, draining it to the dregs, while he held a black bottle in the other hand. That a man should fly to rum for solace when existence itself might be measured by minutes or seconds, was, to Iris, not the least amazing experience of an episode crammed with all that was new, and strange, and horrible in her life. She raced on, wholly unaware that the drifting ship was now presenting her port bow to the death-dealing fusillade.

Then, from somewhere, she heard a gruff voice:

"Hev' ye shut off steam, Macfarlane?"

"Ou ay. It's a' snug below till the watter reaches the furnaces," came the answer.

So some of the men were doing their duty. Thank God for that! Undeterred by the fact that a live shell had burst among the engines, the oil-stained, grim-looking engineers had not quitted their post until they had taken such precautions as lay in their power to insure the ship's safety. A light broke in on the fog in the girl's mind. Even now, at the very gate of eternity, one might try to help others! The thought brought a ray of comfort. She was about to look for the speakers when a bullet drilled a hole in a panel close to her side. She began to run again, for a terrified glance

through the forward gangway showed that the ship was quite close to the land, where men in blue uniforms, wearing curiously shaped hats and white gaiters, were scattered among the rocks, some standing, some kneeling, some prone, but all taking steady aim.

But it showed something more. Hozier was now lying sideways on the raised deck of the forecastle; he partly supported himself on his right arm; his left hand was pressed to his forehead; he was trying to rise. With an intuition that was phenomenal under the circumstances, Iris realized that he was screened from observation for the moment by the windlass and the corpse that lay across it. But the ship's ever increasing speed, and the curving course of her drifting, would soon bring him into sight, and then those merciless riflemen would shoot him down.

"Oh, not that! Not that!" she wailed aloud.

An impulse stronger than the instinct of self-preservation caused the blood to tingle in her veins. She had waited to take that one look, and now, bent double so as to avoid being seen by the soldiers, she sped back through the gangway, gained the open deck, crouched close to the bulwarks on the port side, and thus reached unscathed the foot of the companion down which the wounded men had crawled. The zinc plates on the steps were slippery with their blood, but she did not falter at the sight. Up she went, stooped over Hozier, and placed her strong young arms round his body.

"Quick!" she panted, "let me help you! You will be killed if you remain here!"

Her voice seemed to rouse him as from troubled sleep.

"I was hit," he muttered. "What is it? What is wrong?"

"Oh, come, come!" she screamed, for some unseen agency tore a transverse gash in the planking not a foot in front of them.

He yielded with broken expostulations. She dragged him to the top of the stairs. Clinging to him, she half walked, half fell down the few steps. But she did not quite fall; Hozier's weight was almost more than she could manage, but she clung to him desperately, saved him from a headlong plunge to the deck, and literally carried him into the forecastle, where she found some of the crew who had scurried there like rabbits to their burrow when the first shell crashed into the engine-room.

Iris's fine eyes darted lightning at them.

"You call yourselves men," she cried shrilly, "yet you leave one of your officers lying on deck to be shot at by those fiends!"

"We didn't know he was there, miss," said one. "We'd ha' fetched him right enough if we did."

Even in her present stress of mixed emotions, the sailor's words sounded reasonable. Every other person on board was just as greatly stunned by this monstrous attack as she herself, and the firing now appeared to increase in volume and accuracy. Several bullets clanged against the funnel or broke huge splinters off the boats.

"Gord A'mighty, listen to that," growled a voice. "An' we cooped up here, blazed at by a lot of rotten Dagos, with not a gun to our name!"

Iris was still supporting Hozier, whose head and shoulders were pillowed against her breast as she knelt behind him.

"Can nothing be done?" she asked. "I believe Captain Coke has been killed. Mr. Hozier is badly injured, I fear. Bring some water, if possible."

"Yes, yes, water... Only a knock on the head.... How did it happen? And what is that noise of firing?"

Hozier's scattered wits were returning, though neither he nor Iris remembered that the *Andromeda* was waterless. He looked up at her, then at the men, and he smiled as his eyes met hers again.

"Funny thing!" he said, with a natural tone that was reassuring. "I thought the windlass smashed itself into smithereens. But it couldn't. What was it that banged?"

"A shell, fired from the island," said the girl.

Hozier straightened himself a little. He was hearing marvels, though far from understanding them, as yet.

"A shell!" he repeated vacantly. Had she said "a comet" it could not have sounded more incredible.

"Yes. It might have killed you. Several of the men are dead. I myself saw three of them killed outright, and two others are badly wounded."

"Here you are, sir--drink this," said a fireman, offering a pannikin of beer. It was unpalatable stuff, but it tasted like the nectar of the gods to one who had sustained a blow that would have felled an ox. Hozier had almost emptied the tin when an exclamation from an Irish stoker drew all eyes to the after part of the ship.

"Holy war! Will ye look at that!" shouted the man. "Sure the skipper isn't dead, at all, at all."

Iris had failed to grasp the meaning of Coke's antics in the chart-room, but they were now fully explained. The bulldog breed of this self-confessed rascal had taken the upper hand of him. Though he had not scrupled to plot the destruction of the ship, and thus rob a marine insurance company of a considerable sum of money--though at that very instant there was actual proof of his scheme in the preparations he had made to jam the steering-gear when the anchor was raised after the tanks were replenished--it was not in the man's nature to skulk into comparative safety because a foreigner, a pirate, a not-to-be-mentioned-in-polite-society Portygee, opened fire on him in this murderous fashion. Moreover, Coke's villainy would have sacrificed no lives. The *Andromeda* might be converted into scrap iron, and thereby give back, by perverted arithmetic, the money invested in her. But her white decks would not be stained with blood. Whatever risk was incurred would be his, the responsible captain's, his only. It was a vastly different thing that shot and shell should be rained on an unarmed ship by the troops of a civilized power when she was seeking the lowest form of hospitality. No wonder if the bull-necked skipper foamed at the mouth and used words forbidden by the catechism; no wonder if he tried to express his helpless fury in one last act of defiance.

He rummaged the lockers for a Union Jack and the four flags that showed the ship's name in signal letters. The red ensign was already fluttering from a staff at the stern, and the house flag of David Verity & Co. was at the fore, but these emblems did not satisfy Coke's fighting mettle. The *Andromeda* would probably crack like an eggshell the instant she touched the reef towards which she was hurrying; he determined that she would go down with colors flying if he were not put out of action by a bullet before he could reach the main halyard.

The swerve in the ship's course as she passed the island gave him an opportunity. In justice to Coke it should be said that he recked naught of this, but it would have been humanly impossible otherwise for the soldiers to have missed him. And now, while the vessel lay with straight keel in the set of the current, the national emblem of Britain, with the *Andromeda's* code flags beneath, fluttered up the mainmast.

There are many imaginable conditions under which Coke's deed would be regarded as sublime; there are none which could deny his splendid audacity. The soldiers, who seemed to be actuated by the utmost malevolence, redoubled their efforts to hit the squat Hercules who had bellowed at them and their fellow artillerists from the bridge. Bullets struck the deck, lodged in the masts, splintered the roof and panels of the upper structure, but not one touched Coke. He coolly made fast each flag in its turn, and hauled away till the Union Jack had reached the truck; then, drawn forward by a hoarse cheer that came from the fore-castle, he turned his back on the enemy and swung himself down to the fore-deck.

He was still wearing the heavy garments demanded by the gale; his recent exertions, joined to the fact that the normal temperature of a sub-tropical island was making itself felt, had induced a violent perspiration. As he lumbered along the deck he mopped his face vigorously with a pocket handkerchief, and this homely action helped to convince Iris that she was mistaken in thinking him mad. His words, too, when he caught sight of her, were not those of a maniac.

"Well, missy," he cried, "wot'll they say in Liverpool now? I s'pose they'll 'ear of this some day," and he jerked a thumb backwards to indicate the unceasing hail of bullets that poured into the after part of the ship.

The girl looked at him with an air of surprise that would have been comical under less grievous conditions. She knew, with a vague definiteness, that death was near, perhaps unavoidable, and it had never occurred to her that she or any other person on board need feel any concern about the view entertained by Liverpool as to their fate. Before she could frame a reply, however, Hozier seemed to recover his faculties. He stood up, walked unaided to the side of the ship, and glanced ahead.

"Shouldn't we try to lower a boat, sir?" he asked instantly.

"Wot's the use?" growled Coke. "Oo's goin' to lower boats while them blighters on the island are pumpin' lead into us? And wot good are the boats w'en they're lowered? They've been drilled full of holes. You might as well try to float a sieve. Look at that," he added sarcastically, as the side of the cutter was ripped open by a ricocheting shot, and splinters were littered on the deck, "they know wot they want an' they mean to get it. Dead men tell no tales. It won't be anybody 'ere now who'll 'ave the job of lettin' the folk at 'ome know 'ow the pore ole *Andromeda* went under."

"Are none of the boats seaworthy?"

"Not one. They're knocked to pieces. Sorry for you, Miss Yorke. But we're all booked for Kingdom Come. In 'arf a minnit, or less, we'll be on the reef, an' the ship must begin to break up."

Coke was telling the plain truth, but Hozier ran aft to make sure that he was right in assuming the extent of the boats' damages. One of the men, an Italian, climbed to the forecandle deck in order to see more clearly what sort of danger they were running into. He came back instantly, and his swarthy face was green with terror. Though he spoke English well enough, he began to jabber wildly in his mother tongue. None paid heed to him. It was common knowledge that the vessel must be lost, and that those who still lived when she struck would have the alternatives of being drowned, or beaten to pieces against the frowning rocks, or shot from the mainland like so many stranded seals, if some alliance of luck and strength secured a momentary foothold on one of the tiny islets that barred the way. And at such moments, when the mind is driven into a swift-running channel that ends in a cataract, elemental passions are apt to strive with elemental fears. Few among these rough sailors had ever given thought to the future. They had lived from hand to mouth, the demands of a hard and dangerous profession alternating with bouts of foolish revelry. Most of them had looked on death in the tempest, in the swirling seas, in the uplifted knife. But then, there was always a chance of escape, an open door for the stout heart and ready hand; whereas, under present conditions, there was nothing to be done but pray, or curse, or wait in stoic silence until the first ominous quiver ran through the swift-moving ship. So, all unknowingly, they grouped themselves according to their nationalities, for the Latins knelt and supplicated the saints and the Virgin Mother, the Celts roared insensate threats at the islanders who had thrown them into the very jaws of eternity, and the Saxons stood motionless, with grim jaws and frowning brows, disdaining alike both frenzied appeal and useless execration.

Someone threw a cork jacket over the girl's shoulders, and bade her fasten its straps around her waist. She obeyed without a word. Indeed, she seemed to have lost the power of speech. Everything had suddenly assumed such a crystal clear aspect that her eyes were gifted with unnatural vision though her remaining senses were benumbed. The blue and white of the sky, the emerald green of the water, the russet brown and cold gray of the land--these shone now with a beauty vivid beyond any of nature's tints she had ever before seen. She was conscious, too, of an awful aloofness. Her spirit was entrenched in its own citadel. She seemed to be brooding, solitary and remote, yet shrinking ever within herself; quite unknowing, she offered a piteous example of the old Hebrew's dire truism that man came naked into the world and naked shall he depart.

In a curiously detached way she wondered why Hozier did not return. The prayers and curses of the men surrounding her fell unheeded on her ears. Where was Hozier? What was he doing? Why did he not come to her? She felt a strange confidence in him. If he had not been struck down by that calamitous shell he would have saved the ship--assuredly he would have devised some means of saving their lives! Perhaps, even now, he was attempting some desperate expedient!... The thought nerved her for an instant. Then a rending, grinding noise was followed by a sudden swerve and roll of the ship that sent her staggering against a bulkhead. An outburst of cries and shouting rang through her brain, and a shriek was wrung from her parched throat.

But the *Andromeda* righted herself again, though there was another sound of tearing metal, and the deck heaved perceptibly under a shock.

Ah, kind Heaven! here came Hozier, running, thundering some loud order.

"The port life-boat ... seaworthy!"

There was a fierce rush, in which she joined. She was knocked down. A strong hand dragged her to her feet. It was Coke, swearing horribly. She saw Hozier leap against the flood of men.

"D--n you, the woman first!" she heard him say, and he sent the leaders of the mob sprawling over the hatches of the forehold.

Coke, almost carrying her in his left arm, butted in among the crew like an infuriated bull. Some of the men, shamefaced, made way for them. Hosier reached her. She thought he said to the captain:

"There's a chance, if we can swing her clear."

Then the ship struck, and they were all flung to the deck. They rose, somehow, anyhow, but the *Andromeda*, apparently resenting the check, lifted herself bodily, tilted bow upward, and struck again. A mass of spray dashed down upon the struggling figures who had been driven a second time to their knees. There was a terrific explosion in the after-hold, for the deck had burst under the pressure of air, and another ominous roar announced that the water had reached the furnaces. Steam and smoke and dust mingled with the incessant lashing of sheets of spray, and Iris was torn from Coke's grip.

She fancied she heard Hosier cry, "Too late!" and a lightning glimpse down the sloping deck showed some of the engineers and stokers crawling up toward the quivering forecastle. She felt herself clasped in Hosier's arms, and knew that he was climbing. After a few breathless seconds she realized that they were standing on the forecastle, where the captain and many of the crew were clinging to the windlass, and anchor, and cable, and bulwarks, to maintain their footing. Below, beyond a stretch of unbroken deck, the sea raged against all that was left of the ship. The bridge just showed above the froth and spume of sea level. The funnel still held by its stays, but the mainmast was gone, and with it the string of flags.

The noise was deafening, overpowering. It sounded like the rattle of some immense factory; yet a voice was audible through the din, for Hosier was telling her not to abandon hope, as the fore part of the ship was firmly wedged into a cleft in the rocks: they might still have a chance when the tide dropped.

So that explained why it was so dark where a few moments ago all was light. Iris pressed the salt water out of her burning eyes, and tried to look up. On both sides of the narrow triangle of the forecastle rose smooth overhanging walls, black and dripping. They were festooned with seaweed, and every wave that curled up between the ship's plates and the rocks was thrown back over the deck, while streams of water fell constantly from the masses of weed. She gasped for breath. The mere sight of this dismal cleft with its super-saturated air space made active the choking sensation of which she was just beginning to be aware.

"I--cannot breathe!" she sobbed, and she would have slipped off into the welter of angry foam beneath had not Hosier tightened a protecting arm round her waist.

"Stoop down!" he said.

She had a dim knowledge that he unbuttoned his coat and drew one of its folds over her head. Ah, the blessed relief of it! Freed from the stifling showers of spray, she drew a deep breath or two. How good he was to her! How sure she was now that if he had been spared by that disabling shell he would have saved them all!

Bent and shrouded as she was, she could see quite clearly downward. The ship was breaking up with inconceivable rapidity. Already there was a huge irregular vent between the fore deck and the central block of cabins topped by the bridge. And a new horror was added to all that had gone before. Swarms of rats were skimming up the slippery planks. They were invading the forecastle and the forecastle deck. They came in an irresistible army, though, fortunately for Iris's continued sanity, the greater number scurried into the darkness of the men's quarters.

She was watching them with fascinated eyes, though not daring to withdraw her head from under the coat, when she heard a ghastly yell from beneath, and an erie face appeared above the stairway. It was Watts, mad with fright and drink.

"Save me! save me!" he screamed, and the girl shuddered as she realized that the man did not fear death so much as he loathed the scampering rats. He had no difficulty in climbing the steep companion, though, by reason of the present position of all that was left of the *Andromeda*, its pitch was thrown back to an unusual angle. He scrambled up, a pitiable object. A couple of rats ran over his body, and as each whisked across his shoulders and past his cheek he uttered a blood-curdling yell. A big wave surged up into the recesses of the cleft and was flung off in a drenching shower on to the forecastle. It nearly swept Watts into the next world, and it drove every rodent in that exposed place back to the dry interior.

To return, they had to use the unhappy chief officer as a causeway, and the poor wretch's despairing cries were heartrending. He was clinging for dear life to a bolt in the deck when Coke joined hands with a sailor and was thus enabled to reach him. Once the skipper's strong fingers had clutched his collar he was rescued--at least from the instant

death that might have been the outcome of his abject terror, for there could be little doubt in the minds of those who saw his glistening eyes and drawn lips that it would have needed the passage of but one more rat and he would have relaxed his hold.

Coke pulled him up until he was lodged in safety in front of the windlass. The manner of the welcome given by the captain to his *aide* need not be recorded here. It was curt and lurid; it would serve as a sorry passport if proffered on his entry to another world; but the tragi-comedy of Watts's appearance among the close-packed gathering on the fore-castle was forthwith blotted out of existence by a thing so amazing, so utterly unlooked for that during a couple of spellbound seconds not a man moved nor spoke.

CHAPTER V

THE REFUGEES

Watts was whimpering some broken excuse to his angry skipper when a coil of stout rope fell on top of the windlass and rebounded to the deck. More than that, one end of it stretched into the infinity of dripping rock and flying spray overhead. And it had been thrown by friendly hands. Though it dangled from some unseen ledge, its purpose seemed to be that of help rather than slaughter, whereas every other act of the inhabitants of Fernando Noronha had been suggestive of homicidal mania in its worst form.

Coke and Hozier recovered the use of their faculties simultaneously. The eyes of the two men met, but Coke was the first to find his voice.

"Salvage, by G--d!" he cried. "Up you go, Hozier! I'll sling the girl behind you. She can't manage it alone, an' it needs someone with brains to fix things up there for the rest of us." And he added hoarsely in Philip's ear: "Sharp's the word. We 'aven't many minutes!"

Philip made no demur. The captain's strong common sense had suggested the best step that could be taken in the interests of all. Iris, who was nearer yielding now that there was a prospect of being rescued than when death was clamoring at her feet among the trembling remains of the ship, silently permitted Coke and a sailor to strip off a life-belt and tie her and Hozier back to back. It was wonderful, though hidden from her ken in that supreme moment, to see how they devised a double sling in order to distribute the strain. When each knot was securely fastened, Coke vociferated a mighty "Heave away!"

But his powerful voice was drowned by the incessant roar of the breakers; not even the united clamor of every man present, fifteen all told, including the drunken chief officer, could make itself heard above the din. Then Hozier tugged sharply at the rope three times, and it grew taut. Amid a jubilant cry from the others, he and Iris were lifted clear of the deck. At once they were carried fully twenty feet to seaward. As they swung back, not quite so far, and now well above the level of the windlass from which their perilous journey had started, a ready-witted sailor seized a few coils of a thin rope that lay tucked up in the angle of the bulwarks, and flung them across Hozier's arms.

"Take a whip with you, sir!" he yelled, and Philip showed that he understood by gripping the rope between his teeth. It was obvious that the rescuers were working from a point well overhanging the recess into which the *Andromeda* had driven her bows, and there might still be the utmost difficulty in throwing a rope accurately from the rock to the wreck. As a matter of fact, no less than six previous attempts had been made, and the success of the seventh was due solely to a favorable gust of wind hurtling into the cleft at the very instant it was needed. The sailor's quick thought solved this problem for the future. By tying the small rope to the heavier one, those who remained below could haul it back when some sort of signal code was established. At present, all they could do was to pay out the whip, and take care that it did not interfere with Hozier's ascent. They soon lost sight of him and the girl, for the spray and froth overhead formed an impenetrable canopy, but they reasoned that the distance to be traveled could not be great; otherwise the throwing of a rope would have been a physical impossibility in the first instance.

Once there was a check. They waited anxiously, but there was no sign given by the frail rope that they were to haul in again. Then the upward movement continued.

"Chunk o' rock in the way," announced Coke, glaring round at the survivors as if to challenge contradiction. No

one answered. These men were beginning to measure their lives against the life of the wedge of iron and timber kept in position by the crumbling frame of the ship. It was a fast-diminishing scale. The figures painted on the *Andromeda's* bows represented minutes rather than feet.

Watts was lying crouched on deck, with his arms thrown round the windlass. Looking ever for a fresh incursion of rats, he seemed to be cheered by the fact that his dreaded assailants preferred the interior of the forecastle to the wave-swept deck. He was the only man there who had no fear of death. Suddenly he began to croon a long-forgotten sailor's chanty. Perhaps, in some dim way, a notion of his true predicament had dawned on him, for there was a sinister purport to the verse.

"Now, me lads, sing a stave of the Dead Man's Mass;
Ye'll never sail 'ome again, O.
We're twelve old salts an' the skipper's lass,
Marooned in the Spanish Main, O.
Sing hay---
Sing ho---
A nikker is Davy Jones,
Just one more plug, an' a swig at the jug,
An' up with the skull an' bones."

After a longer and faster haul than had been noticed previously, the rope stopped a second time. Everyone, except Watts, was watching the whip intently. His eyes peered around, wide-open, lusterless. The pounding of the seas, the grating of iron on rock, left him unmoved.

"Wy don't you jine in the chorus, you swabs?" he cried, and forthwith plunged into the second stanza.

"The *Alice* brig sailed out of the Pool
For the other side of the world, O,
An' our ole man brought 'is gal f'rom school,
With 'er 'air so brown an' curled, O.
Sing hum---
Sing hum---
Of death no man's a dodger,
An' we squared our rig for a yardam jig
When we sighted the Jolly Roger."

He grew quite uproarious because the lilting tune evoked neither applause nor vocal efforts from the others.

"Lord luv' a duck!" he shouted. "Can't any of ye lend a hand? Cheer O, maties--'ere's a bit more---"

The brig was becalmed in a sea like glass,
An' it gev' us all the creeps, O,
Wen the sun went down like a ball o' brass,
An' the pirate rigged 'is sweeps---"

"There she goes!" yelled the sailor in charge of the line; he began to haul in the slack like a madman; Coke's fist fell heavily on the singer's right ear.

"Wen your turn comes, I'll tie the rope round your bloomin' neck!" he growled vindictively, though his eyes continued to search the dark shroud overhead that inclosed them as in a tomb. A dark form loomed downward through the mist. It was Hozier, alone, coming back to them. A frenzied cheer broke from the lips of those overwrought men. They knew what that meant. Somewhere, high above the black rocks and the flying scud, was hope throned in the blessed sunshine. They drew him in cautiously until Coke was able to grasp his hand. They were quick to see that he brought a second rope and a spare whip.

"Two at a time on both ropes," was his inspiring message. "They're friendly Portuguese up there, but no one must be seen if a boat is sent from the island to find out what has become of the ship. So step lively! Now, Captain, tell 'em off in pairs."

Coke's method was characteristic. He literally fell on the two nearest men and began to truss them. Hozier followed his example, and tied two others back to back. They vanished, and the ropes returned, much more speedily this time. Four, and four again, were drawn up to safety. There were left the captain, Hozier, and the unhappy Watts, who was

now crying because the skipper had "set about" him, just for singin' a reel ole wind-jammer song.

"You must take up this swine," said Coke to Hozier, dragging Watts to his feet with scant ceremony. "If I lay me 'ands on 'im I'll be tempted to throttle 'im."

Watts protested vigorously against being tied. He vowed that it was contrary to articles for a chief officer to be treated in such a fashion. He howled most dolorously during his transit through mid-air, but was happily quieted by another sharp rap on the head resulting from his inability to climb over the obstructing rock.

Before quitting the deck, Hozier helped to adjust the remaining rope around the captain's portly person. They were lifted clear of the trembling forecandle almost simultaneously, and in the very nick of time. Already the skeleton of the ship's hull was beginning to slip off into deep water. The deck was several feet lower than at the moment of the vessel's final impact against the rocks. Even before the three reached the ledge from which their rescuers were working, the bridge and funnel were swept away, the foremast fell, the forehold and forecandle were riotously flooded by the sea, and Watts, were he capable of using his eyes, might have seen his deadly enemies, the rats, swarming in hundreds to the tiny platform that still rose above the destroying waves. Soon, even that frail ark was shattered. When keel and garboard stroke plates snapped, all that was left of the *Andromeda* toppled over, and the cavern she had invaded rang with a fierce note of triumph as the next wave thundered in without hindrance.

It was, indeed, a new and strange world on which Iris looked when able to breathe and see once more. During that terrible ascent she had retained but slight consciousness of her surroundings. She knew that Hozier and herself were drawn close to a bulging rock, that her companion clutched at it with hands and knees, and thus fended her delicate limbs from off its broken surface; she felt herself half carried, half lifted, up into free air and dazzling light; she heard voices in a musical foreign tongue uttering words that had the ring of sympathy. And that was all for a little while. Friendly hands placed her in a warm and sunlit cleft, and she lay there, unable to think or move. By degrees, the numbness of body and mind gave way to clearer impressions. But she took much for granted. For instance, it did not seem an unreasonable thing that the familiar faces of men from the *Andromeda* should gather near her on an uneven shelf of rock strewn with broken boulders and the litter of sea-birds. She recognized them vaguely, and their presence brought a new confidence. They increased in number; sailor-like, they began to take part instantly in the work of rescue; but she wondered dully why Hozier did not come to her, nor did she understand that he had gone back to that raging inferno beneath until she saw his blood-stained face appear over the lip of the precipice.

Then she screamed wildly: "Thank God! Oh, thank God!" and staggered to her feet in the frantic desire to help in unfastening the ropes that bound him to the insensible Watts. One of the men tried to persuade her to sit down again, but she would not be denied. Her unaccustomed fingers strove vainly against the stiff strands, swollen as they were with wet, and drawn taut by the strain to which they had been subjected. Tears gushed forth at her own helplessness. The pain in her eyes blinded her. She shrank away again. Not until Philip himself spoke did she dare to look at him, to find that he was bending over her, and endeavoring to allay her agitation by repeated assurance of their common well-being.

But her distraught brain was not yet equal to a complexity of thought. Watts was lying close to her feet, and it thrilled her with dread and contempt when Coke bestowed a well-considered kick on his chief officer's prostrate form.

"Oh, how dare you?" she cried, indignant as an offended goddess.

"Sorry, miss," said Coke, scowling as if he were inclined to repeat the assault, though he was not then aware of the more strenuous method adopted by the rock as a sobering agent. "I didn't know you was there. But 'e fair gev' me a turn, 'e did, singin' 'is pot-ouse crambos w'en we was in the very jors of death, so to speak."

"He must not sing," she announced gravely, "but really you should not kick him."

"Come, Miss Yorke," broke in Hozier, who was choking back a laugh that was nearer hysteria than he dreamed, "our Portuguese friends say we must not remain here an instant longer than is necessary."

"Yes," said a strange voice, "the sea is moderating. At any moment a boat may appear. Follow me, all of you. The road is a rough one, but it is not far."

The speaker was an elderly man, long-haired and bearded, of whose personality the girl caught no other details than the patriarchal beard, a pair of remarkably bright eyes, a long, pointed nose, and a red scar that ran diagonally across a domed forehead. He turned away without further explanation, and began to climb a natural pathway that wound itself up the side of an almost perpendicular wall of rock.

Hozier caught Iris by the arm, and would have assisted her, but she shook herself free. She felt, and conducted herself, like a fractious child.

"I can manage quite well," she said with an odd petulance. "Please look after that unfortunate Mr. Watts. I am not surprised that he should have been frightened by the rats. They terrified me, too. Oh, how awful they were--in the dark--when their eyes shone!"

Her mind had traveled back to the two nights and a day passed in the lazaretto. She sobbed bitterly, and stumbled over a steep ledge. She would have fallen were it not for Philip's help.

"Watts is all right," he soothed her. "Two of the men are seeing to him. And the rats are all gone now. There are none here!"

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"What became of them?"

"They are all--we left them behind on the ship."

Suddenly she clung to him.

"Don't let them send me back to the ship," she implored.

"No, no. You are safe now."

"Of course I am safe, but I dread that ship. Why did I ever come on board? Captain Coke said he would sink her. I told you----"

"Steady! Keep a little nearer the rocks on your left. The passage is narrow here."

Hozier raised his voice somewhat, and purposely hurried her. But she was not to be repressed.

"Poor ship! What had she done that she should be battered on the rocks?" she wailed.

"You must not talk," he said firmly, well knowing that if the sailors and firemen lumbering close behind had not heard her earlier comment it was due solely to the blustering wind. They were skirting the seaward face of the rocky islet on which they had found salvation. The sun was blazing at them sideways from a wide expanse of blue sky. The rear guard clouds of the gale were scurrying away over the horizon in front of their upward path. Somehow, Philip's sailor's brain was befogged. Those clouds must have blown to the northeast. If that were so, what was the sun doing in the southeast at this time of the day? It had hardly budged a point from the quarter in which some fitful gleams shone when that mad thing happened near the windlass. Thinking he was still dizzy from the effects of the blow, which the girl had ascribed to the bursting of a shell, Philip glanced at his watch. It was twenty-five minutes past eight! Yet he distinctly remembered eight bells being struck while Coke was telling him from the bridge to give the anchor thirty-five fathoms of cable. Was it possible that they had gone through so much during those few minutes? If he were really light-headed, then sun and clouds and watch were conspiring to keep him so.

Iris, chilled by his stern tone, nevertheless noted his action. Still unable to concentrate her thoughts on more than one topic, and that to the exclusion of all else, she asked the time. He told her. He awaited some expression of surprise on her part, provided it were, indeed, true that only twenty-five minutes had sped since the *Andromeda* was quietly preparing to drop anchor off South Point. But she received his news without comment. She would have been equally undisturbed if told it was midnight, and that the vessel had gone ashore on the coast of China.

Just then the track turned sharply away from the sea. A dry water-course cut deeply into the cliff where torrential rains had found an upright layer of soft scoria imbedded in the mass of basalt. Their guide was standing on the sky-line of the cleft, some forty feet above them.

"Tell the others to make haste," he said. "This is the end of your journey."

It did not strike either Hozier or the girl as being specially remarkable that a man should meet them in this extraordinary place and address them in good English. Iris, at any rate, gave no heed to this most amazing fact. She merely observed for the first time that the elderly stranger, while dressed in a beggar's rags, assumed an air of command that was almost ludicrous.

"Who is he?" she asked, being rather breathless now after a steep climb.

"I don't know," said Hozier.

"How absurd!" she gasped. "I--I think I'm dreaming. Why--have we--come here?"

She heard a coarse chuckle from Coke, not far below.

"Let 'im cough it up," the skipper was saying. "It'll do 'im good. I've seen 'im blind many a time, but 'ow any man could dope 'isself in that shape in less'n two minutes!---- Well, it fair gives me the go-by!"

Two minutes! Hozier listened, and he was recovering his wits far more rapidly than Iris. Was the skipper, then, in league with nature herself to perplex him? And Watts, too? Why did Coke hint so coarsely that he was drunk? He was on the bridge while he, Philip, was attending to the lead, and at that time the chief officer was perfectly sober.

Iris, once again, was deeply incensed by Coke's brutality.

"Horrid man!" she murmured, but she had no breath left for louder protest. It was hot as a furnace in this narrow ravine; each upward step demanded an effort. She would have slipped and hurt herself many times were it not for Hozier's firm grasp, nor did she realize the sheer exhaustion that forced him to seek support from the neighboring wall with his disengaged hand. The man in front, however, was alive to their dangerous plight. He said something in his own language--for his English had the precise staccato accent of the well-educated foreigner--and another man appeared. The sight of the newcomer startled Iris more than any other event that had happened since the *Andromeda* reached the end of her last voyage. He wore the uniform of those dreadful beings whom she had seen on the island.

She shrieked; Hozier fancied she had sprained an ankle; but before she could utter any sort of explanation the apparition in uniform was by her side, and murmuring words that were evidently meant to be reassuring. Seeing that he was not understood, he broke into halting French.

"Courage, madame!" he said. "Il faut monter--encore un peu--et donc--vous etes arrive ... Ca y est! Voila! Comptez sur moi. Juste ciel, mais c'est affreux l'escalier."

But he worked while he poured out this medley, and Iris was standing on level ground ere he made an end. He was a handsome youngster, evidently an officer, and his eyes dwelt on the girl's face with no lack of animation as he led her into a cave which seemed to have been excavated from the inner side of a small crater.

"You can rest here in absolute safety, madame," he said. "Permit me to arrange a seat. Then I shall bring you some wine."

Iris flung off the hand which held her arm so persuasively.

"Please do not attend to me. There are wounded men who need attention far more than I," she said, speaking in English, since it never entered her mind that the Portuguese officer had been addressing her in French.

He was puzzled more by her action than her words, but Hozier, who had followed close behind, explained in sentences built on the Ollendorffian plan that mademoiselle was disturbed, mademoiselle required rest, mademoiselle hardly understood that which had arrived, *et voila tout*.

The other man smiled comprehension, though he scanned Hozier with a quick underlook.

"Is monsieur the captain?" he asked.

"No, monsieur the captain comes now. Here he is."

"Mademoiselle, without doubt, is the daughter of monsieur the captain?"

"No," said Hozier, rather curtly, turning to ascertain how Iris had disposed of herself in the interior of the cavern. It was his first experience of a South American dandy's pose towards women, or, to be exact, toward women who are young and pretty, and it seemed to him not the least marvelous event of an hour crammed with marvels that any man should endeavor to begin an active flirtation under such circumstances.

He saw that Iris was seated on a camp stool. Her face was buried in her hands. A wealth of brown hair was tumbled over her neck and shoulders; the constant showers of spray had loosened her tresses, and the unavoidable rigors of the passage from ship to ledge had shaken out every hairpin. The Tam o' Shanter cap she was wearing early in the day had disappeared at some unknown stage of the adventure. Her attitude bespoke a mood of overwhelming dejection. Like the remainder of her companions in misfortune, she was drenched to the skin. That physical drawback, however, was only a minor evil in this almost unpleasantly hot retreat; but Hozier, able now to focus matters in fairly accurate proportion, felt that Iris had not yet plumbed the depths of suffering. Their trials were far from ended when their feet rested on the solid rock. There was every indication that their rescuers were refugees like themselves. The scanty resources visible in the cave, the intense anxiety of the elderly Portuguese to avoid observation from the chief island of the group, the very nature of the apparently inaccessible crag in which he and his associates were hiding--each and all of these things spoke volumes.

Hozier did not attempt to disturb the girl until the dapper officer produced a goatskin, and poured a small quantity of wine into a tin cup. With a curious eagerness, he anticipated the other's obvious intent.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he said, seizing the vessel, and his direct Anglo-Saxon manner quite robbed his French of its politeness. Then his vocabulary broke down, and he added more suavely in English: "I will persuade her to drink a little. She is rather hysterical, you know."

The Portuguese nodded as though he understood. Iris looked up when Hozier brought her the cup. The mere suggestion of something to drink made active the parched agony of mouth and throat, but her wry face when she found that the liquid was wine might have been amusing if the conditions of life were less desperate.

"Is there no water?" she asked plaintively.

The officer, who was following the little by-play with his eyes, realized the meaning of her words.

"We have no water, mademoiselle," he said. Then he glanced at the group of bedraggled sailors. "And very little wine," he added.

"Please drink it," urged Hozier. "You are greatly run down, you know, though you really ought to feel cheerful, since you have escaped with your life."

"I feel quite brave," said Iris simply. "I would never have believed that I could go through--all that," and her childish trick of listening to the booming of the distant breakers told him how vivid was her recollection of the horrors crowded into those few brief minutes.

"Be quick, please," put in the elderly Portuguese with a tinge of impatience. "We have no second cup, and there are wounded men----"

"Give it to them," said Iris, lifting her face again for an instant. "I do not need it. I have told you that once already. I suppose you think I should not be here."

"I am sure our friend did not mean that," said Hozier, looking squarely into those singularly bright eyes. He caught and held them.

"I did not mean that the lady should be left to die if that is the interpretation put on my remark," came the quiet answer. "But it was an act of the utmost folly to bring a delicate girl on such an errand. I cannot imagine what your captain was thinking of when he agreed to it."

"Wot's that, mister?" demanded Coke. Now that his fit of rage had passed, the bulky skipper of the *Andromeda* was red-faced and imperturbable as usual. The manifold perils he had passed through showed no more lasting effect on him than a shower of sleet on the thick hide of the animal he so closely resembled.

"Are *you* the captain?" said the other.

"Yes, sir. An' I'd like to 'ear w'y my ship or 'er present trip wasn't fit for enny young leddy, let alone----"

"That is a matter for you to determine. I suppose you know best how to conduct your own business. My only concern is with the outcome of your rashness. Why did you deliberately sacrifice your ship in that manner?"

The speaker's cut-glass style of English left his hearers in no doubt as to what he had said. During the tense silence that reigned for a few seconds even some among the crew pricked their ears, while Hozier and Iris forgot other troubles in their new bewilderment. There were reasons why the drift of the stranger's words should be laid deeply to heart by three people present. Coke, at any rate, found himself nearer a state of pallid nervousness than ever before in the course of a variegated life. It was impossible that he should actually grow pale, but his brick-red features assumed a purple tint, and his fiery little eyes glinted.

"Wot are you a-drivin' at, mister?" he growled at last, after trying vainly to expectorate and compromising the effort in a husky gargle.

"Do you deny, then, that you acted like a madman? Do you say that you did not know quite well the risk you ran in bringing your vessel to the island in broad daylight?"

Then Coke found his breath.

"Risk!" he roared. "Risk in steamin' to an anchorage an' sendin' a boat ashore for water? There seems to be a lot of mad folk loose just now on Fernando Noronha, but I'm not one of 'em, an' that's as much as I can say for enny of you--damme if it ain't."

Evidently the Portuguese was not accustomed to the direct form of conversation in vogue among British master mariners. He bent his piercing gaze on Coke's angry if somewhat flustered countenance, and there was a perceptible stiffening of voice and manner when he said:

"Who are you, then? Who sent you here?"

"I'm Captain James Coke, of the British ship *Andromeda*, that's 'oo I am, an' I was sent 'ere, or leastways to the River Plate, by David Verity an' Co., of Liverpool."

It must not be forgotten that Coke shared with his employer a certain unclassical freedom in the pronunciation of the ship's name; the long "e" apparently puzzled the other man.

"*Andromeeda*?" he muttered. "Spell it!"

"My godfather, this is an asylum for sure," grunted Coke, in a spasm of furious mirth. "A-n-d-r-o-m-e-d-a. Now you've got it. Ain't it up to Portygee standard? A-n-d-r-o-m-e-d-a! 'Ow's that for the bloomin' spellin' bee?"

But Coke's humor made no appeal. The staring, brilliant eyes fixed on him did not relax their vigilance, nor did any trace of emotion exhibit itself in that calm voice.

"You are unlucky, Captain Coke, most unlucky," it said. "I regret my natural mistake, which, it seems, was shared by the authorities of Fernando do Noronha. You have blundered into a nest of hornets, and, as a result, you have been badly stung. Let me explain matters. I am Dom Corria Antonio De Sylva, ex-President of the Republic of Brazil. There is, at this moment, a determined movement on foot on the mainland to replace me in power, and, with that object in view, efforts are being made to secure my escape from the convict settlement in which my enemies have imprisoned me. I and two faithful followers are here in hiding. My friend, Capitano Salvador De San Benavides," and he bowed with much dignity toward the uniformed officer, "came here two days ago in a felucca to warn me that a steamer would lie to about a mile south of the island to-night. The steamer's name is *Andros-y-Mela*--it is rather like the name of your unhappy vessel--so much alike that the *Andromeda* has been sunk by mistake. That is all."

Coke, listening to this explanation with the virtuous wrath of a knave who discovers that he has been wrongfully suspected, bristled now with indignation.

"Oh, that's all, is it?" he cried sarcastically. "No, sir, it ain't all, nor 'arf, nor quarter. Let me tell you that no crimson pirate on Gawd's earth can blow a British ship off the 'igh seas an' then do the dancin'-master act, with 'is 'and on 'is 'eart, an' say it was just a flamin' mistake. All! says you? Don't you believe it. There's a lot more to come yet, take my tip--a devil of a lot, or I'm the biggest lunatic within a ten-mile circle of w'ere I'm stannin', which is givin' long odds to any other crank in the whole creation."

And Coke was right, though he little guessed then why he was so thoroughly justified in assuming that he and

the other survivors of the *Andromeda* had not yet gone through half, or quarter, or more than a mere curtain-raising prelude to the strange human drama in which they were destined to be the chief actors.

CHAPTER VI

BETWEEN THE BRAZILIAN DEVIL AND THE DEEP ATLANTIC

There was an awkward pause. Coke, rascal though he was, and pot-bellied withal, was no Falstaff. Rather did he suggest the present-day atavism of some robber baron of the Middle Ages, whose hectoring speech bubbled forth from a stout heart. But the ragged ex-President heeded him not. After a moment of placid scrutiny of his enraged countenance by those bright, watchful eyes, Coke might have been non-existent so far as recognition of his outburst was apparent during the sonorous discussion that ensued between Dom Corria Antonio De Sylva and the Senor Capitano Salvador De San Benavides.

The latter, it is true, betrayed excitement. At first he favored Iris with a deprecatingly admiring glance, as one who would say, "Dear lady, accept my profound regret and respectful homage." But that phase quickly passed. His leader was not a man to waste words, and the gallant captain's expressive face soon showed that he had grasped the essential facts. They did not please him. In fact, he was distinctly cowed, almost stunned, by his companion's revelations.

It fell to De Sylva to explain matters to his unexpected guests.

"My friend agrees with me that it is only fair that the exact position should be revealed to you," he said, addressing Coke, though a dignified gesture invited the others to share his confidence.

"It don't take much tellin'," began Coke. De Sylva silenced him with an emphatic hand.

"Please attend. The situation is not so simple as you seem to imagine. The loss of your ship cannot be dealt with here. It raises issues of international law which can only be settled by courts and governments. You know, I suppose, that nothing will be done until a complaint is lodged by a British minister, and that hinges upon the very doubtful fact that you will ever again see your own country."

The ex-President certainly had the knack of expressing himself clearly. Those concluding words rang like a knell. They even called Watts back from the slumber of unconsciousness; the "chief" stirred himself where he lay on the floor of the cavern, and began to quaver.

"----twelve old salts an' the skipper's lass
Marooned in the Spanish Main, O.
Sing hay----"

Coke, taken by surprise, was unable to stop this warbling earlier. But his hand clutched Watts's shoulder, and his venomous whisper of "Shut up, you ijjit!" was so unmistakable that the lyric ceased.

De Sylva seemed to be aware of some peculiarity in the symptoms of the wounded man's recovery, but he continued speaking in the same balanced tone.

"It happens, by idle chance, that my enemies have become yours. The men who destroyed your ship thought they were injuring me. I have just pointed out to Capitano De San Benavides the precise outcome of this attack. Until a few moments ago we shared the delusion that the troops on Fernando de Noronha believed we were now on our way to a Brazilian port. We were mistaken. More than that, we know now that they have obtained news--probably through a traitor to our cause--of the *Andros-y-Mela's* voyage. They were prepared for her coming. They had made arrangements to receive her--almost at the place decided on by our friends in Brazil. It is more than likely that the *Andros-y-Mela* is now lying under the guns of some coast fortress, since the presence of troops and cannon on this side of the island is unprecedented."

"I don't see wot all this 'as to do with me," blurted out Coke determinedly.

"No. It would not concern you in the least if you were safe at sea. But, since you are here, it does concern you most gravely. From one point of view, you served my cause well by preparing to lower a boat. You misled my persecutors as to locality, at least. Of course, I saw you, and thought you were mad, but your action did help to conceal from the soldiers the secret of my true hiding-place. I wish to be candid with you. If my friends and I had realized that you were here by accident, we ought to have taken no steps to save you."

"Really!" snarled Coke, eyeing the unruffled Brazilian much as an Andalusian bull might glare at a picador. A buzz of angry whispering came from the crew. Even Iris flashed a disdainful glance at the man who uttered this atrocious sentiment. De Sylva raised his hand. He permitted himself the luxury of a wintry smile.

"Pray, do not misunderstand me," he said. "I am humane as most others, but it is difficult to decide whether or not mere humanity, setting aside self-interest, would not rather condemn you to the speedy death of the wreck than drag you to the worse fate that awaits you here. And please remember that we did succor you, thus risking observation and a visit by the troops when the sea permits a landing. But that is not the true issue. An hour ago there were four people on this bare rock--four of us who looked for escape to-night. We were supplied with such small necessities of existence as would enable us to live if our rescuers were delayed for a day, or even two. Now, there will be no rescue. We are--" he looked slowly around--"twenty instead of four; but we have the same quantity of stores, which consist of a half-emptied skin of wine, a bunch of bananas, a few scraps of maize bread, and some strips of dried meat. Do you follow me?"

Coke, who had been holding Watts in a sitting posture by a firm grip on his collar, allowed the limp figure to sprawl headlong again. He wanted to plunge both hands deeply into his trousers pockets, because men of his type associate attitude so closely with thought that the one is apt to become almost dependent on the other. And so, for the moment, the safeguarding of Watts was of no consequence. But Watts had benefited much by the sousing of the spray, while his recovery was expedited by the forcible ejection of the salt water he had swallowed. He raised himself on one hand, and looked about with an inquiring eye. The Brazilian officer's uniform seemed to fascinate him.

"Ello!" he gurgled. "Run in? Well I'm----"

"Is not that man wounded? I thought I saw him dashed against the rocks," said De Sylva.

"E ought to be," said Coke, "but 'e's on'y drunk. A skin o' rum, 'arf empty, too, just like your skin o' wine, mister."

"Let him be taken outside and gagged if he resists."

There was an uneasy movement among the men. Their common impulse was to obey. Coke spread his feet a little apart.

"Leave 'im alone. 'E'll do no 'arm now," he said.

"I cannot be interrupted," cried De Sylva, whose iron self-restraint seemed to be yielding before British truculence.

"I'll keep 'im quiet but I can't 'ave 'im roasted afore 'is time, an' that's wot's 'ul 'appen if you tied him up in that gully."

"Thanke'ee, skipper. You allus were a reel pal," murmured Watts.

Coke bent over him.

"If your tongue don't stop waggin' it'll soon be stickin' out between yer teeth," he hissed. "This ain't no fancy lock-up in the East Injia Dock Road, Arthur, me boy. They won't bring you a pint of cocoa 'ere, an' ax if you're comfortable. You 'aven't long to live accordin' to all accounts, so just close your mouth an' open your ears, an' mebbe you'll know w'y."

De Sylva regained his self-possession with a rapidity that was significant. He had not climbed to the presidential chair of the Republic from a clerkship in the London Embassy of the Empire without acquiring the habit of estimating his fellow men speedily and accurately. Here was one who might be led, but would never permit himself to be driven. Moreover, this dethroned ruler was by way of being a philosopher.

"I hate drunkards," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "You cannot trust them. If I had been surrounded by trustworthy men, I should not----"

He broke off. There was a sound of hurrying footsteps on the steep pathway. A figure, clad in rags that surpassed even De Sylva's, appeared in the entrance. A brief colloquy took place. De Sylva's eager questions were answered in monosyllables, or the nearest approach thereto.

"Marcel tells me that one of your boats is drifting away with a man lying in the bottom," came the uneasy explanation.

Coke's face showed a degree of surprise, which, in his case, was almost invariably akin to disbelief, but an exclamation from Hozier drew all eyes.

"Good Lord!" he cried, "that must be the lifeboat I was trying to clear when the ship struck. Macfarlane was helping me, but he was hit by a bullet and dropped across the thwarts. I thought he was dead!"

"Dead or alive, he is better off than we," said De Sylva. He questioned Marcel again briefly. "There can be no doubt that the man in the boat cast off the lashings when he found that the ship was sinking," he continued in English. "Marcel saw him doing that, and wondered why he was alone. At any rate, if he is carried beyond the reef, he has a fighting chance. We have none."

"Why not? Are these men on the island so deaf to human sympathies that they would murder all of us in cold blood?"

The girl's sweet, low-pitched voice sounded inexpressibly sad in that vaulted place. Even De Sylva's studied control gave way before its music. He uttered some anguished appeal to the deity in his own tongue, and flung out his hands impulsively.

"What would you have me say?" he cried, and his eyes blazed, while the scar on his forehead darkened with the gust of passion that swept over his strong features. "I might lie to you, and try to persuade you that we can exist here without food or water, whereas to-morrow, or next day at the utmost, will see most of us dead. But in a few hours you will realize what it means to be kept on this bare rock under a tropical sun. You can do one thing. Your party greatly outnumbers mine. Climb to the top-most pinnacle and signal to the island. You will soon be seen."

He laughed with a savage irony that was not good to hear, but Coke caught at the suggestion.

"Even that is better'n tearin' one another like mad dogs," he growled. "I know wot's comin'. I've seen it wonst."

Hozier made for the exit, where Marcel stood, irresolute, apparently waiting for orders.

"Where are you going?" demanded De Sylva.

"To see what is becoming of the lifeboat."

"Better not. You cannot help your friend, and the instant it becomes known to the troops that there is a living soul on the Grand-pere rock they will come in a steam launch and shoot everyone at sight."

"Will that be the answer to our signal?"

It was Iris who asked the question, and the Brazilian's voice softened again.

"Yes," he said.

"Why, then, do you advise us to seek our own destruction?"

He bowed. His manner was almost humble.

"It is the easier way," he murmured.

"Is there no other?"

"None--unless we attack two hundred soldiers with sticks, and stones, and three revolvers, and a sword."

Hozier came back. He had merely stepped a pace or two into the sunlight. Through the northerly dip of the gully he had seen the ship's boat whirled past an islet by the fierce current. Macfarlane was not visible. Perhaps that was better so. At any rate, the sight of the small craft vanishing behind one of the island barriers brought home with telling

force the predicament of those who remained. Now that the sheer frenzy of the wreck had relaxed, Philip's head was like to split with the throbbing anguish of the blow he had received. But his mind was clearer. De Sylva's words, amplifying his own vague recollection of the scene on board the *Andromeda*, enabled him to construct a picture of events as they were. And his blood boiled when he thought of Iris, snatched many times from death, only to face it once more in the ravening form of starvation and thirst.

"Attack!" he said hoarsely. "How is that possible? A deep and wide channel separates us from the main island."

The Brazilian, who seemed to have argued himself into a state of stoic despair, gave a startling answer.

"We have a boat, a sort of boat," he said quietly.

"How many will it hold?"

"Three, in a smooth sea, and with skilled handling. It nearly overturned when I and two others crossed from the island, a distance of three hundred yards."

"But we have ropes, clothes, perhaps some few pieces of wreckage. Can nothing be done to repair it?"

"Meaning that we draw lots to see who shall endeavor to escape to-night?"

"The men might even do that."

"Ah, yes--the men, of course. I think it hopeless. But, try it! Yes, certainly, try it!"

A pause, more eloquent than the most impassioned speech, showed how this frail straw, eddying in the vortex of their fate, might yet be clutched at. San Benavides, trying vainly to guess what was being said, blurted forth an anxious inquiry. His compatriot explained briefly. Somehow, the measured cadence of their talk had a less reliable sound than the vigorous Anglo-Saxon. They were both brave men. They had not scrupled to risk their lives in an enterprise where success beckoned even doubtfully. But they were lacking when all that remained to be settled was how best to die; in such an hour the men of an English speaking race will ever choose a fighting death.

This time, it was a woman who decided.

Iris rose to her feet. She brushed back the strands of damp hair from her face, and with deft hands made a rough-and-ready coil of her abundant tresses.

"Are you planning to send me with two others adrift in a boat, while seventeen men are left here?" she asked.

The Brazilian ceased speaking. There was another uneasy pause. Hozier felt that the question was addressed to him, but he was tongue-tied, almost shame-faced. Coke, however, did not shirk the task of enlightening her.

"Something like that," he said. "We can't let you cut in with the rest of us, missy. That wouldn't be reasonable. But it's best to fix the business fair an' square. We ain't agoin' to try any other way, not so long as *I'm* skipper," and he looked with brutal frankness at De Sylva and the anxious but uncomprehending San Benavides.

The ex-President knew what he meant; even in his despondency he resented the implied slur on his good faith.

"You cannot examine the boat until darkness sets in," he said. "Then you will find out how frail a foundation you are building on. It is absolutely ridiculous to assume that she can be made seaworthy. Her occupants would be drowned before they were clear of the islands."

"In any case, I refuse to go," said Iris.

De Sylva smiled gloomily.

"You are courageous, senhora, and, in some respects, you are wise," he said. "Yet ... I must admit it ... I would urge you to select the boat--in preference ..."

Marcel, the Brazilian who had come to tell them of the drifting life-boat, turned away from the mouth of the cavern, and scrambled down the ravine.

"Wot's 'e after?" demanded Coke, suddenly suspicious.

"He and Domingo are keeping a lookout," said De Sylva. "If the soldiers intend to visit us we should at least be warned. The boat is hidden among the rocks on the landward side," he added, not without a touch of scorn.

"That man has taught us our own duty," cried Iris. "The boat that brought these men to this rock can bring nineteen men and a woman to Fernando Noronha. We must land there to-night. With those to guide us who know the coast, surely that should be possible. We have a right to struggle for our lives. We, of the *Andromeda*, at least, have done no wrong to the cruel wretches who sought to kill us without mercy to-day. Why should we not endeavor to defend ourselves? There is food there, and guns in plenty. Let us take them. Above all, let us not dream of any such useless device as this proposal to send three to drown somewhere in the sea and leave seventeen to perish miserably here. We are in God's hands. Let us trust to Him, but while doing that fully and fearlessly, we must seek life, not death."

"Bully for you, miss!" roared a sailor, and a growl of admiration rang through the cave. Instantly a hubbub of talk showed how intent the crew had been on the previous discussion, but Coke shouted them into silence.

"Oo axed wot *you* think, you swabs?" he bellowed. "Stow your lip! Sink me, if you don't all do as you're bid, an' keep still tongues in your 'eds, I'll want to know w'y--P.D.Q."

A big, blond Norwegian, Hans Olsen by name, strode forward. Unlike the usual self-contained Norseman, he was reputed a "sea-lawyer" in the fore-castle.

"We haf somedings ter zay for our lifes, yez," he protested. Coke bent and butted him violently in the stomach with his head. The man crashed against the rocky wall, and sat dazed where he had fallen.

"You've got to obey orders--savvy?" growled Coke.

"Yez," gasped Olsen, evidently fearing a further assault.

The incident ended. Its outstanding feature was the amazing activity displayed by the burly skipper, who had rammed his man before the big fellow could lift a finger. It might be expected that Iris would show some sign of dismay, owing to this unlooked-for violence. But she was now beyond the reach of merely feminine emotions. She had protested against the kicking of Watts because it seemed to lack motive, because Watts was helpless, and because she herself was half-delirious at the time. Olsen's attitude, on the other hand, hinted at mutiny, and mutiny must be repressed at any cost.

De Sylva's incisive accents helped to bridge a moment fraught with possibilities, for it would be idle to assume that this polyglot gathering was composed of Bayards. Self-preservation is apt to prove stronger than chivalry under such circumstances. Let it be assumed that three among the twenty could escape that night, and it was horribly true that the field of selection might be narrowed by a wild-beast struggle long before the sun went down.

"The young lady has at least given us a project," he said. "It is a desperate one, Heaven knows! It offers a fantastic chance, and I can see no other, but--what can we do without arms?"

"Use our heads," put in Hozier. He had not the slightest intention of making a light-hearted joke at that crisis in their affairs, but he happened to look at Coke, and an involuntary smile gleamed through the crust of clotted blood and perspiration that gave his good-looking face a most sinister aspect. The Irishman cackled with laughter.

"Begob, that's wan for the skipper," he crowed; then some of the others grinned, and the *Andromeda's* little company stood four-square again to the winds of adversity. Having blundered into prominence, the second mate was quick to see that he must hammer home the facts, though in more serious vein.

"Bring us to the island, Senhor De Sylva," he said, "and we will make a fight of it. In any case, even if we fail, they will not deliberately kill a woman. There must be other women there who will intervene in behalf of one of their own sex. But we may succeed. It is improbable that the whole of the troops will be gathered in one spot. Why should we not take some small detachment by surprise and secure their weapons? If we can land unobserved, we ought to be able to drop on them apparently from the skies. I take it that the presence here of Captain San Benavides is unknown, and the leadership of an officer in the enemy's own uniform should turn the scale in our favor. Have you no followers among the troops or islanders? Suppose we make good our first attack, and seize a strong position--isn't it probable we may receive assistance from your partisans?"

"Perhaps--among the convicts," was De Sylva's grim reply.

"No officials, or soldiers?"

"Not one. They are chosen for this service on account of their animosity against the former Government. How else could you account for their treatment of unarmed men on a ship crippled by their first shell?"

"You spoke of a steam launch. Where is that kept?"

"At a wharf under the walls of the citadel which commands the town and anchorage."

"Assuming we have a stroke of luck and rush some outpost, would it be possible to cross the island before dawn and board the launch or some other craft in which we can put to sea?"

"There is only the launch, and some small fishing catamarans. No other boats are allowed to exist on the island, in order to prevent the escape of convicts. The boat we possess is really a badly-constructed catamaran, without a sail, and minus the out-rigger which alone renders it safe for the shortest voyage."

"Wy didn't you say that sooner, mister?" put in Coke. "If some of these jokers knew wot sort of craft it was, mebber it wouldn't 'ave needed a shove in the stommick to bring Hans Olsen to heel."

"I am sorry," said De Sylva. "You see, I realized the utter folly of trying to escape in that fashion."

The two men looked each other squarely in the eye. The ex-President of a great republic and the master of a worn-out tramp steamer were both born leaders of men. Whatsoever prospect of a cabal existed previously, it was scotched now, beyond doubt. Henceforth, no matter what ills threatened, surely the little army mustered on the Grand-pere rock would stand or fall together!

An unerring token of unity was forthcoming at once.

"Please, miss, an' gents all, may we smoke?" pleaded a voice.

Iris was for an immediate permission, but De Sylva shook his head.

"Not until the tide falls," he said. "There is a very real fear of a visit from the launch. It has passed this spot four times during the past two days--ever since my absence was discovered, in fact. The soldiers have searched every outlying island, but they have avoided Grand-pere because it is believed that a landing is highly dangerous if not quite impracticable. My friend Marcel, a fisherman, discovered by accident the only safe means of reaching the path which winds round the island. Happily, the wretch who betrayed the mission of the *Andros-y-Mela* did not know the secret of my refuge. And I see now that the Governor must be convinced that I am still hiding among the cliffs, or your vessel would not have appeared off South Point this morning. No, there must be no smoking as yet. In this clear air the slightest cloud might be seen rising above the rocks from without."

Marcel reappeared at the entrance. With him was another man, whom Hozier remembered seeing when he was hauled up from the ship with Iris.

"Ah, I was not mistaken," went on De Sylva. "Here comes news of the launch! They have signaled for it across the island."

Marcel entered the cave with an expressive gesture, for long habit had almost robbed him of his native vivacity. His companion, Domingo, climbed the opposite wall of the ravine and stretched himself at full length in a niche where there was room for a man to lie. Some tufts of rough grass grew there in sufficient density to conceal his head while he peered between the stalks. They could see him quite plainly, but no one wanted to speak. Though the unceasing wash of a heavy swell against the rocks would have drowned the noise had they shouted in unison, there was no need to tell anyone present that a very real and dangerous crisis had arrived. The slow change in the direction of Domingo's gaze showed the approach and passing of the hostile vessel. It was evident that a long halt was made in the channel close to the wreck, of which some fragments remained above water. Still, curiously enough, it was impossible for those on board the launch to read the ship's name, since the word "*Andromeda*," twice embossed on the sharp cut-water, was hidden by the jutting rocks on both sides of the cleft.

But it was not the fear of instant death following on the discovery that the Grand-pere islet was inhabited that kept tongues mute and ears on the alert during a quarter of an hour that seemed to be protracted to a quarter of a day. At present they were shut off from hostile bullets by the walls of a fortress stronger than any that could be built by men's hands. The greater danger was that the enemy's suspicions might be aroused. Let those who held Fernando Noronha with the armed forces of Brazil once come to regard the isolated rock in mid channel as providing even a possible refuge for the ex-President and his friends, and it would mean the complete overthrow of the slender chance of saving

their lives that still offered itself.

So they waited in silence, watching the rigid figure of the prostrate Brazilian, just as those among them who were saved from the *Andromeda* had watched the arch of spray and spindrift from the slowly sinking forecastle.

At last Domingo turned his head slightly, and gave them a reassuring little nod. He said something, which De Sylva translated.

"They have a photograph of the wreck," he said, "and are now steaming through the northerly channel to the anchorage on the west side of the island. Most fortunately, they do not seem to be aware of your drifting boat."

Then he added, with a courtliness that was so incongruous with his unkempt appearance and patched and tattered garments;—"If the Senhora permits, the men may smoke now. In another hour the channel will not be navigable. We have a hot and tiring day before us, and I advise sleep for those to whom it is vouchsafed. If the weather continues to improve, the next tide will bring us a smooth sea. Given that, and a dark night--well--we may make history. Who knows?"

CHAPTER VII

CROSS PURPOSES

Though Iris gave such warlike counsel, it would be doing her a grave injustice to assume that her gentle disposition was changed because of the day's sufferings. The erstwhile light-hearted schoolgirl and youthful mistress of her uncle's house had been subjected to dynamic influences. The ordeal through which she had passed, unscathed bodily but seared in spirit, had left her strung to a tense pitch. Relaxation had not come--as yet. She only knew that she resented to the uttermost the Brazilians' malevolent fury. Hers was a nature that could not endure unfairness. It was unfair of David Verity to seek to mend his shattered fortunes by forcing her into a hateful marriage; unfair of both Verity and Coke to found their new venture on a great fraud; and monstrously unfair of these island factionaries to vent their spite on an innocent ship. So, for the hour, she was inspired. It is the high-souled enthusiast who devotes life itself to a cause; those who practice oppression have ever most to beware of in the man or woman whose conscience will not condone a wrong.

Of course, in this present clash of emotions, Iris little understood what her advice really meant. She was appealing to heaven rather than to the force of arms. To one of her temperament, it seemed incredible that a number of inoffensive strangers should be slaughtered because a South American republic could not agree in choosing a president. Such a thing was unheard of in her previous experience, built on no more solid foundation than the humdrum existence of Brussels and Bootle. And the inhabitants of neither Brussels nor Bootle settle their political differences by shooting casual visitors at sight.

Oddly enough, the only professional soldier present condemned her project roundly when it was mooted.

"In leaving the island to-night you are acting on an assumption," protested Captain San Benavides to his chief. "You cannot be sure that the *Andros-y-Mela* will not appear. The arrangement is that she is to send a boat here soon after midnight, yet, if this mad scheme of an attack on armed troops by unarmed men is persisted in, we must begin to ferry to the island long before that hour. In all probability, we shall be discovered at once. At the very moment that our friends are eagerly awaiting us on board the ship we may be lying dead on the island. The notion is preposterous. Be guided by me, Dom Corria, and decline to have anything to do with it. Better still, let these English boors promise to forget that we are alive; then Marcel can guide them to the landing-place, where they will be shot speedily and comfortably. There is no sense in sacrificing the girl. She must be kept here on some pretext."

The ex-President took thought before he answered. He did not deny himself that the confident air of these hard-bitten sailors made strong appeal to his judgment. He had his own reasons for distrusting some among his professed supporters, and he did not share his military aide's opinion as to the coming of the promised vessel.

"There is a good deal in what you say, senhor adjudante," he announced after his bright eyes had dwelt on San Benavides' expressive face in thoughtful scrutiny. "In England they have a proverb that a man cannot both run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, but such maxims are not framed for would-be Presidents. I fear we must fall in with our

allies' views, *faute de mieux*. You and I have to lead a headstrong army. That little Hercules of a commander is stubborn as a mule--a mule that has the strength and courage of a wild boar. The younger man thinks only of the girl's safety. He, at least, will not consent to leave her. Both, backed by their crew, will not scruple to sacrifice us if their interests point that way. Trust me to twist them into the course that shall best serve our own needs. I am now going to tell them that you approve of their plan."

Forthwith he launched out into an English version of the excellent captain's comments. His precise, well-turned periods were admirable. Their marked defect was that he said the exact contrary to San Benavides.

Iris, having a born aptitude for languages, spoke French and German with some proficiency. She had also devoted many hours to the study of Spanish during the past winter, and it happens that the Portuguese of Brazil is less unlike Spanish than the Portuguese of Lisbon. In Europe, national antipathies serve to accentuate existing differences between the two tongues, but the peoples of the South American seaboard feel the need of a common speech, and local conditions have standardized many words. Hence, the Spanish language will serve all ordinary purposes among the Latin races who have made their own the vast continent that stretches from Panama to Tierra del Fuego.

So the girl's super-active brain was puzzled by De Sylva's rendering of his military friend's remarks. With the vaguest knowledge of what was actually said, she suspected that San Benavides had opposed the very project which, according to the President, he favored. She had caught the name of the relief vessel, the words *bote*, "boat," *las doce*, "twelve o'clock," *a bordo de buque*, "on board the ship," and others which did not figure in the translation. She wondered why.

The long day wore slowly. The heat was intense. Even the hardened sailors soon found that if the atmosphere of the cavern were to remain endurable they might not smoke. So pipes were extinguished, and they tried to better their condition. Water-soaked coats and boots placed in the sun were dry in a few minutes. Iris was persuaded to allow her dress to be treated in this manner. She was still wearing the heavy ulster of the early morning--when the aftermath of the gale was chill and searching--and the possession of this outer wrap made easy the temporary discarding of a skirt and blouse.

Unhappily, she answered in French some simple query of the dapper officer's. Thenceforth, to her great bewilderment and Hozier's manifest annoyance, he pestered her with compliments and inquiries. To avoid both, she expressed a longing for sleep. It seemed to her excited imagination that she would never be able to sleep again, yet her limbs were scarcely composed in comfort on a litter of coarse grass and parched seaweed than her eyes closed in the drowsiness of sheer exhaustion. This respite was altogether helpful. She had slept but little during the gale, and its tremendous climax had surprised her vitality at a low ebb.

When she awoke, the ravine was in shadow and the interior of the cave was dark. Her first conscious sensation was that of almost intolerable thirst. Her lips were blistered, her tongue and palate sore, and she asked herself in alarm what new evil was afflicting her, until she remembered the drenching she had received and the amount of salt-laden air that had passed into her lungs. Nevertheless, she cried involuntarily for water, and again she was offered wine. She managed to smile in a strained fashion at this malicious humor of fortune. By a freak of memory she called to mind the somewhat similar predicament of the crew of a storm-tossed ship that she had once read about. They ran short of water, but the vessel carried hundreds of cases of bottled stout. During three long weeks of boating against the wind those wretched men were compelled to drink stout morning, noon, and night, and never did temperance argument apply with greater force to the seafaring community than toward the end of that enforced regimen of malt liquor.

Hozier, who had aroused her by touching her shoulder, fancied he saw the gleam of merriment in her face.

"What is amusing you?" he asked.

She told him, though she spoke with difficulty.

"It is not quite so bad as that," he said. "If there is no hitch in our plans, we should be on the island within five hours. We have everything thought out as far as may be in view of the unknown. At any rate, Miss Yorke, if we succeed in getting you safely ashore, you personally will have but slight cause for further anxiety. The proposal is that Marcel shall take you at once to the hut of an old convict whom he can trust----"

"A convict!" she gasped. The word was ominous, and she was hardly awake.

"The population of Fernando Noronha is almost entirely made of convicts and soldiers," he explained.

"But am I to be left there alone?"

"What else is there to be done? You cannot join in the attack on a fort--and that offers our only chance, it would seem. Granted an effective surprise, we may carry it. Then your guardian will bring you to us."

"What if you fail?"

"We must not fail," he said quietly.

"Please do not hide the alternative from me," she pleaded. "I have endured so much----"

"Well, don't you see, this man--who, by the way, is married, and has a daughter aged fourteen--will, if necessary, reveal your presence to the Governor. By that time, say, in a day or two, the excitement will have died down, the news of your escape will be cabled to England, you will be sent to the coast on the Government steamer, and you can travel home by the next mail."

"That sounds very simple--and European," she said, and the pathetic sarcasm was not lost on him.

"It is reasonable enough. Unfortunately for us, all the bother centers round Senhor De Sylva, to whom we owe our lives. He is outside at the moment, showing our skipper the lay of the land before the light fails, so I am free to speak plainly. When he is dead there will be no further trouble, till the next revolution. But why endeavor to look ahead when seeing is impossible? At present, what really presses is the necessity that you should eat and drink. We have shared out the whole of the available food. Here is your portion. We deemed it best to give the men one square meal. They know now that they must earn the next one."

With each instant her perceptive powers were quickening. She was aware that he had deliberately avoided the main issue. De Sylva's probable death implied a good deal, but it was the supreme test of her courage that she refrained from useless questioning. Yet she thrust aside the two bananas and supply of dried meat and crusts that Hozier placed before her.

"I cannot eat," she murmured, striving to control her voice.

"But you must. It is imperative. You would not wish to break down at the very moment your best energies will be in demand. Our lives, as well as your own, may depend on your strength. Come, Miss Yorke, no woman could have been pluckier than you. Don't fail us now."

The gloom was deepening momentarily. Hozier's back was turned to the entrance, and, in the ever-growing darkness, she was unable to see his face; but his anxious protest in no wise deceived her; she even smiled again at the ruse that attempted to saddle her with some measure of responsibility for the success or failure of the raid.

"If I promise to eat--and drink this sour wine--will you be candid?" she asked.

"Well----"

"One must bargain. There is no other way.... Promise!"

"I suppose you mean that I must agree to please you by wild guessing about events that may turn out quite differently."

"Candid, I said."

"Yes--that most certainly."

"In the first place, may we go into the fresh air? I must have slept many hours. What time is it?"

"About seven o'clock."

"Seven! Have I been lying here since goodness knows what time this morning?"

"You were thoroughly used up," he said, and he added, with a laugh: "If it is any consolation, I may tell you that, to the best of my belief, you never moved nor uttered a sound."

"For instance, I didn't snore," she cried, rising to her feet, and thanking the kindly night that veiled her untidiness.

"I--don't--think so."

"Oh, please be more positive than that. You send a cold shiver down my back."

"Several members of the *Andromeda's* crew also indulged in a prolonged siesta," he said. "I assure you it was almost out of the question to divide the sleepers into snorers and non-snorers."

A man will talk harmless nonsense of that sort when he is at his wit's end to wriggle out of a perplexing situation. Hozier was deputed to obtain the girl's consent to the proposal he had already put before her. He feared that she would refuse compliance, for he understood her fine temper better than the others. He was a young man--one but little versed in the ways of women--yet some instinct warned him that there was a nobility in Iris Yorke's nature that might set self at naught and urge her to share her companions' lot, even though certain death were the outcome.

They passed together through the cavern. Watts, sound asleep, was lying there. The majority of the men were seated on the rocks without, or lounging near the entrance. They were smoking now freely, the only stipulation being that matches were not to be struck in the open. Their whispered talk ceased when they saw the girl. Absorbed in the prospect of a fight for life, for the moment they had forgotten her, but a murmured tribute of sympathy and recognition greeted her appearance.

The Irishman found his tongue first.

"Begorrah, miss," he said, "but it's the proud man I'll be the next time I see you smilin' from the kay side at Liverpool, no matter whether I'm there meself or not."

No one laughed at the absurd phrase which so clearly expressed its meaning. But the ship's cook, Peter, noting the strips of dried meat in her hands, raised a grin by saying:

"Sorry the galley fire is out, miss, or I'd 'ave stewed 'em a bit."

This kindly badinage was gratifying, though it helped to reveal the interrupted topic of their conversation. There was no hiding the desperate character of the coming adventure. The *Andromeda's* crew did not attempt to minimize it. The choice offered lay only in the manner of their death. As to the prospect of ultimate escape, they hardly gave it a thought. Some among them had served in the armies of Europe, and they, at least, were under no delusion concerning the issue of an attack on a fort by less than a score of unarmed men--seventeen to be exact, since two of the ship's company were so maimed by the bursting of the shell on the forecastle as to be practically helpless; it was by the rarest good fortune that they were able to walk.

Iris smiled at them in her frank way.

"I hope you will all be spared to ship on a new *Andromeda*," she said. No sooner had the words left her lips than the thought came unbidden: "If my uncle and Captain Coke wished the ship to be thrown away, nothing could have better suited their purposes than this tragic error."

For the instant, the unforeseen outcome of that Sunday afternoon's plotting in the peaceful garden of Linden House held her imagination. She recalled each syllable of it, and there throbbed in her brain the hitherto undreamed of possibility that Coke had brought the *Andromeda* to Fernando Noronha in pursuance of his thievish project.

At once she whispered to Hozier:

"Is there anyone on the path below?"

"No," he said. "The Brazilians are with Coke at the top of the gully."

"Is it safe for us to go the other way?"

"I think so. But you must be careful not to slip."

She caught his arm, little knowing the thrill her clasp sent through his frame. This simple gesture of her confidence was bitter-sweet. He resolutely closed his eyes to the knowledge that this might be their last talk.

"I shall not fall," she said. "I am a good mountaineer. I learnt the trick of it in Cumberland. Come with me. There is a pleasant breeze blowing from the sea."

They climbed down. Neither spoke until they stood on the curving ledge that had proved their salvation. Though the tide was rising again, the heavy sea was gone. The current still created some spume and noise as it swept past the reef, but its anger had vanished with the gale. Beyond the fringe of broken water a slight swell only served to mirror in countless facets the tender light of a perfect sunset. The eastern horizon was a broad line of silver. Nearer, the shadow of the island created bands of purest green and ultramarine.

They reached the place from which the Brazilians had thrown the rope. They could hear the quiet plash of the water in the cleft. Piled against a low-lying rock were the funnel and other debris of the *Andromeda*. The black hull was plainly visible beneath the surface. Even while they were looking at the wreck a huge fish curled his ten feet of length with stealthy grace from out some dim recess; it might be, perhaps, from out the crushed shell of the chart-room.

Hozier glanced at his companion. He half expected her to shrink back appalled at this sinister sight; it was her destiny to surprise him not once but many times during that amazing period.

"Is that a shark?" she asked quietly.

"Yes.... You stipulated for candor, you know."

"I had no notion that such a monster could move with so great elegance. I think I would rather be eaten by a shark than lie at the bottom of the sea like our poor vessel there."

"Even a shark would appreciate the compliment," he said.

Her eyes continued to watch the terrifying apparition until it prowled into hidden depths again.

"I am not sorry I have seen it," she murmured. "It helps one to understand. We are glib concerning the laws of nature, and seem to regard them much as the printed regulations stuck on hackney carriages, whatsoever they may be. Yet, how cruelly just they are! I suppose that the finding of the ship's booty by that huge creature has given a new span of life to some weaker fish."

Hozier did not know whether or not she had realized the shark's real quest. Her next words enlightened him.

"If we follow the others, will the soldiers throw our dead bodies into the sea?" she asked.

"I want you to believe that you will be absolutely safe if we escape being discovered during the crossing of the narrow strip of water that separates this rock from the island," he hastened to say. "That is your only risk, and it is a light one. Senhor De Sylva is sure that the troops will not keep the keenest lookout to-night. They are still convinced that the insurgent steamer is sunk. Our chief danger will date from to-morrow's dawn. Marcel reports that a systematic search of the island was begun to-day. It will be continued to-morrow, but on new lines, because, by that time, they will have learnt the truth. The *Andros-y-Mela* is not lying in pieces at the foot of this rock, the President has not escaped, and every practicable inch of Fernando Noronha and the adjacent islands will be scoured in the hope of finding him. At first sight, that looks like being in our favor; in reality, it means the end if we are discovered here. The soldiers will shoot first and inquire afterwards. I have not the slightest doubt but that plenty of evidence will be forthcoming that we were a set of desperadoes who had unlawfully interfered in the affairs of a foreign state."

She appeared to be weighing this argument, sitting in judgment on De Sylva and his theories.

"I want to do that which is for the good of all," she said at length. "Do you ask me to go to this convict's house, Mr. Hozier?"

"I urge it on you with the utmost conviction. With you off our hands, we can act freely. We must deliver an attack to-night. God in Heaven, you cannot think that we would expose you to the perils of a desperate fight!"

His sudden outburst was unexpected, even by himself. He trembled in an agony of passion. Iris placed a timid hand on his shoulder.

"I will go," she whispered. "Please do not be distressed on my account. I will go. I brought you here, not to discuss my own fate, but yours. These Brazilians will not scruple to make use of you, and then throw you aside if it suits their purpose. That man, De Sylva, does not care how he attains power, and I know that he and the officer entertain some plan which they have not revealed to you."

"You ... *know*."

"Yes. I understand a little of their language. I have a mere glimpse of its sense, as one sees a landscape through a mist. When De Sylva told you to-day that San Benavides was with you heart and soul, he was lying. There were things said about a ship, and midnight, and a boat. I watched the officer's face. He was wholly opposed to the landing to-night. My mind is not so vague now. I think I can grasp his meaning. Was it not to-night that the *Andros-y-Mela* was to appear?"

"Yes."

"Well, may they not hope secretly that she will keep to the fixed hour? Once you and I and the others are on the island, and an alarm is given, the Brazilians could slip away unnoticed. Yes, that is it. I do not trust them any more than I trusted Captain Coke. Don't you realize that he brought the *Andromeda* to this place in order to wreck her more easily? It was to supply a pretext for the visit that he made undrinkable the water in the ship's tanks."

That appealing hand still rested on Philip's shoulder. Its touch affected him profoundly. With a lightning dart of memory his thoughts went back to the moment when she lay, inert and half-fainting, in his arms on the bridge, after he had taken her from the lazarette. But he controlled his voice sufficiently to say:

"You may be right; indeed, I know you are right, so far as Coke is concerned. When I went aft to find out if one of the boats could not be cleared, I noticed that a steering-gear box had been prised open again. I had time for only a second's glance, but I was sure the damage had not been done by a bullet. So the *Andromeda* was doomed to be lost, no matter what happened. By ----, forgive me, Miss Yorke, but this kind of thing makes one savage."

"Perhaps it is matterless now. Coke will stand by the rest of us in our struggle for life, at any rate. But the Brazilians----"

"Have no fear of them. I, too, have watched San Benavides. I don't like the fellow, and wouldn't place an ounce of faith in him, but De Sylva has brains, and he knows well enough that no ship from Brazil will come to Fernando Noronha in his behalf. In fact, he dreads a visit by a Government vessel, in which event our frail chance of seizing that launch----"

She felt, rather than saw, that he had suddenly grown rigid. His right arm flew out and drew her to him.

"Sh-s-s-h!" he breathed, and pulled her behind a rock. Her woman's heart yielded to dread of the unseen. It pulsed violently, and she was tempted to scream. Despite his warning, she must at least have whispered a question, but her ears caught a sound to which they were now well accustomed. The light chug-chug of an engine and the flapping of a propeller came up to them from the sea. The steam launch was approaching. Perhaps they had been seen already! As if to emphasize this new peril, there was an interval of silence. Steam had been shut off. Philip touched the girl's lips lightly with a finger. Then he lay flat on the ledge and began to creep forward. It was impossible that he should run and warn the others, but it was essential, above all else, that he should ascertain what the men on the launch were doing, and the extent of their knowledge.

He found a tuft of the grass that clung to a crevice where its roots drew hardy sustenance from the crumbling rock; he ventured to thrust his head through this screen, following Domingo's example some hours earlier. Almost directly beneath, his eager glance found the little vessel. She was floating past with the current. He peered down on to her deck as if from the top of a mast. A few cigarette-smoking officers were grouped in her bows. Apparently, they were more interested in the remains of the *Andromeda* than in the natural fortress overhead. Clustered round the hatch were some twenty soldiers, also smoking.

One of the officers pointed to the ledge; he was excited and emphatic. Philip could not imagine that they had detected him, but he feared lest Iris, in her agitation, might have moved. In that clear, calm air, not even the growing dusk would hide the flutter of a skirt or the altered position of a white face. A man in charge of the wheel replied to the officer with a laugh. The first speaker turned, glanced at the Brothers reef, behind which the *Andromeda's* boat had vanished that morning, and nodded dubiously. The man at the wheel growled an order, and the engine started again. Though Hozier knew not what was said, the significance of this pantomime was not lost on him. The local pilot was afraid of these treacherous waters in the dark, but next day Frade de Francez (which is the islanders' name for the Grand-pere Rock) would surely be explored if a landing could be made. At a guess, the silent watcher took it that the steersman had declined to make a circuit of the rock until the light was good.

Away bustled the launch, but Hozier did not move until there was no risk of his figure being silhouetted against the sky. Even then, he wormed his way backward with slow caution. Iris was crouched where he had left her, wide-eyed, motionless.

"Good job we came here," he said. "It is evident they mean to maintain a patrol until there is news of De Sylva one way or the other. It will be interesting now to hear what the gallant San Benavides says. If any ship comes to Fernando Noronha to-night she will be seen from the island long before any signal is visible at this point."

"Do you think the others saw the launch?" she asked.

"No--not unless some of the men strayed down the gully, which they were told not to do. The breakers would drown the noise of the engines and screw."

There was a slight pause.

"Will you tell them?" she went on.

"Why not?"

This time the pause was more eloquent than words. Quite unconsciously, Iris replied to her own question.

"Of course, as you said a little while ago, we owe our lives to Dom Corria De Sylva," she murmured, as if she were reasoning with herself.

By chance, probably because Hozier stooped to help her to her feet, his arm rested lightly across her shoulders.

"I will not pretend to misunderstand you," he said. "If the Brazilians do not mean to play the game, it would be a just punishment to let them rush on their own doom. But De Sylva may not agree with this fop of an officer, and, in any event, we must go straight with him until he shows his teeth."

"You seem to dislike Captain San Benavides," she said inconsequently.

"I regard him as a brainless ass," he exclaimed.

"Somehow, that sounds like a description of a dead donkey, which one never sees."

"Mademoiselle!" came a voice from the lip of the ravine.

"One can hear him, though," laughed Hozier, with a warning pressure that suspiciously resembled a hug. These two were children, in some respects, quicker to jest than to grieve, better fitted for mirth than tragedy.

They moved out from their niche, and San Benavides blustered into vehement French.

"We are going to the landing-place before it is too dark," he muttered angrily. "We must not show a light; in a few minutes the path will be most dangerous. Please make haste, mademoiselle. We did not know where you had gone."

"The men knew," suggested Hozier in the girl's ear. He dared not trust either his temper or his vocabulary.

"We shall lose no time, now, monsieur," said Iris, hurrying on.

"This way then. No, we do not pass the cave. We go right round the cliff. Permit me, mademoiselle. I am acquainted with each step."

He took her hand. Philip followed. He was young enough to long for an opportunity to tell San Benavides that he was a puppy, a mongrel puppy. Just then he would have given a gun-metal case, filled with cigars--the only treasure he possessed--for a Portuguese dictionary.

After a really difficult and hazardous descent, they found the others awaiting them in a rock-shrouded cove. The barest standing-room was afforded by a patch of shingle and detritus. Alongside a flat stone lay three broad planks tied together with cowhide. The center plank was turned up at one end. This was the catamaran, which de Sylva had dignified by the name of boat. The primitive craft rested in a black pool in which the stars trembled, though they were hardly visible as yet in the brighter sky. The water murmured in response to the movement of the tide, but to the unaided eye there was no vestige of a passage through the volcanic barrier that reared itself on every hand.

"Were 'ave you bin?" growled Coke. "We've lost a good ten minnits. You ought to 'ave known, Hozier, that it's darkest just after sunset."

"We could not have started sooner, sir."

"W'y not? We were kep' waitin' up there, searchin' for you."

"That was our best slice of luck to-day. Had any of you appeared on the ledge you would have been seen from the launch."

"Wot launch?"

"The launch that visited us this morning. Ten minutes ago she was standing by at the foot of the rock."

Philip spoke slowly and clearly. He meant his news to strike home. As he anticipated, De Sylva broke in.

"You *saw* it?" he asked, and his deep voice vibrated with dismay.

"Yes. I even made out, by actions rather than words, that the darkness alone prevented the soldiers from coming here to-night. The skipper would not risk it."

De Sylva said something under his breath. He spoke rapidly to San Benavides, and the latter seemed to be cowed, for his reply was brief. Then the ex-President reverted to English.

"I have decided to send Marcel and Domingo ashore first," he said. "They will select the safest place for a landing. Marcel will bring back the catamaran, and take off Mr. Hozier and the young lady. Captain Coke and I will follow, and the others in such order as Senhor Benavides thinks fit. The catamaran will only hold three with safety, but Marcel believes he can find another for Domingo. Remember, all of you, silence is essential. If there is an accident, some of us may be called on to drown without a cry. We must be ready to do it for the sake of those who are left. Are we all agreed?"

A hum of voices answered him. De Sylva was, at least, a born leader.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIGOR OF THE GAME

In obedience to their leader's order, Marcel, the taciturn, and Domingo, from whose lips the Britons had scarce heard a syllable, squatted on the catamaran. Marcel wielded a short paddle, and an almost imperceptible dip of its broad blade sent the strangely-built craft across the pool. Once in the shadow, it disappeared completely. There was no visible outlet. The rocks thrust their stark ridge against the sky in a seemingly impassable barrier. Some of the men stared at the jagged crests as though they half expected to see the Brazilians making a portage, just as travelers in the Canadian northwest haul canoes up a river obstructed by rapids.

"Well, that gives me the go-by," growled Coke, whose alert ear caught no sound save the rippling of the water. "I say, mister, 'ow is it done?" he went on.

"It is a simple thing when you know the secret," said De Sylva. "Have you passed Fernando Noronha before, Captain?"

"Many a time."

"Have you seen the curious natural canal which you sailors call the Hole in the Wall?"

"Yes, it's near the s'uth'ard end."

"Well, the sea has worn away a layer of soft rock that existed there. In the course of centuries a channel has been cut right across the two hundred yards of land. Owing to the same cause the summer rains have excavated a ravine through the crater up above, and a similar passage exists here, only it happens to run parallel to the line of the cliff. It extends a good deal beyond its apparent outlet, and is defended by a dangerous reef. Marcel once landed on a rock during a very calm day, and saw the opening. He investigated it, luckily for me--luckily, in fact, for all of us."

Watts interrupted De Sylva's smooth periods by a startled ejaculation, and Coke turned on him fiercely.

"Wot's up now?" he demanded. "Ain't you sober yet?"

"Some dam thing jumped on me," explained Watts.

"Probably a crab," said De Sylva. "There are jumping crabs all around here. It will not hurt you. It is quite a small creature."

"Oh, if it's on'y a crab," muttered Watts, "sorry I gev' tongue, skipper. I thought it was a rat, an' I can't abide 'em."

"Then you must learn to endure them while you are in Fernando do Noronha itself," went on the Brazilian. "The island absolutely swarms with rats; some of the larger varieties are rather dangerous."

"Sufferin' Moses!" groaned Watts. "It'll be the death o' me."

"Wot color are they?" asked Coke. De Sylva's reply was given in a tone of surprise. Certainly these hardy mariners had selected an unusual topic for discussion at a critical moment.

"The common dark gray," he said.

"That's all right, then," sneered Coke. "Watts don't mind 'em gray. They're old messmates of his. It's w'en they're pink or green that he fights shy of 'em."

"I hate rats of any sort----" began Watts hotly, spurred to anger by an audible snigger among the men, but De Sylva stopped his protest peremptorily. It was idiotic, this bantering when the next half hour might be their last.

"You must learn to guard your tongue," he said with harsh distinctness. "We cannot have our plans marred by a fool's outcry."

Nevertheless, the chief officer of the *Andromeda* was far from being a fool. He had cut an inglorious figure during the wreck, but he was sober enough now, and it hurt his pride to be jeered at by his own skipper and treated with contumely by one whom he privately classed as a Dago. He had the good sense to realize that the present was no fit time for a display of temper; but he nursed his wrath. Dom Corria would have been well advised had he followed the counsel given so ungraciously, and guarded his own tongue.

It might well be that the ex-President, whose fortunes were on the tiptoe of desperate hazard, was beginning to despair. He may have scanned the meager forces at his disposal and felt that he was asking the gods for more than they could grant. A few minutes earlier he had put forth the suave suggestion that Hozier should be given the speediest chance of securing the girl's safety. That was politic; perhaps his stanch nerve was yielding to the strain, now that the two islanders were gone on their doubtful quest. Be that as it may, his attitude did not encourage light conversation. Even Coke withheld some jibe at the unfortunate mate's expense. A chill silence fell on the little group. The more imaginative among them were calculating the exact kind of lurch taken by the unstable raft that would mean "drowning without a cry."

Thus the minutes sped, until a dim shape emerged from the opposite blackness. It came unheard, growing from nothing into something with ghostly subtlety. Iris, a prey to many emotions, managed to stifle the exclamation of alarm that rose unbidden. But Hozier read her distress in a hardly audible sob.

"It is our friend, Marcel," he whispered. "So Domingo has made good his landing. Be brave! The sea is quite calm. This man has been to the island and back in less than a quarter of an hour."

His confidence gave her new courage. She even tried to turn danger itself into a jest.

"We seem to be living in spasms just now," she said. "We certainly crowd a good deal of excitement into a very few minutes."

The catamaran swung round and grated on the shingle. Marcel was in a hurry.

"Are you ready?" asked De Sylva, bending toward Iris.

"Yes," she said.

"Then you had better kneel behind Marcel, and steady yourself by placing your hands on his shoulders. Yes, that is it. Do not change your position until you are ashore. Now you, Mr. Hozier."

Marcel murmured something.

"Ah, good!" cried De Sylva softly. "Domingo, too, has secured a catamaran. He is bringing it at once in order to save time."

A second spectral figure emerged from the gloom. Without waiting for further instructions, Marcel swung his paddle, and the one craft passed the other in the center of the pool. Iris felt Hozier's hands on her waist. He obeyed orders, and uttered no sound, but the action told her that she might trust him implicitly. When the narrow cleft was traversed, and she saw the open sea on her right, there was ample need for some such assurance of guardianship. Viewed from the cliff, the swell that broke on the half-submerged reef was of slight volume, but it presented a very different and most disconcerting aspect when seen in profile. It seemed to be an almost impossible feat for any man to propel three narrow planks, top-heavy with a human freight, across a wide channel through which such a sea was running. Indeed, Hozier himself, sailor as he was, felt more than doubtful as to the fate of their argosy. But Marcel paddled ahead with unflagging energy once he was clear of the tortuous passage, and, before the catamaran had traveled many yards, even Iris was able to understand that the outlying ridge of rocks both protected their present track and created much of the apparent turmoil.

At last the raft, for it was little else, bore sharply out between two huge boulders that might well have fallen from the mighty pile of Grand-pere itself. Pointed and angular they were, and set like a gateway to an abode of giants. Beyond, there was a shimmer of swift-moving water, with a silver mist on the surface, though from a height of a few feet it would have been easy to distinguish the bold contours of Fernando Noronha itself.

Marcel plied his paddle vigorously, and Iris thought they were heading against the current, since there was a constant swirl of white-tipped waves on both sides of the curved plank, and her dress soon became soaked. But Hozier knew that one man could not drive a craft that had no artificial buoyancy in the teeth of a four-knot tidal stream. Marcel was edging across the channel, and making good use of the very force that threatened to sweep him away. Indeed, in less than five minutes, a definite clearing yet darkening of the atmospheric light showed that land was near. The hiss of the ripple subsided, the tide ceased its chant, and a dark mass sprang into uncanny distinctness right ahead.

The girl's first sensation on nearing the island was an unpleasant one. She was conscious of a slight but somewhat nauseating odor, quite unlike anything within her ken previously. It suffused the air, and grew more pronounced as the catamaran crept noiselessly into a tiny bay.

Hozier sympathized with her distress; knowing that acquaintance with an evil often helps to minimize its effect, he bent close to her ear and whispered the words:

"Mangrove swamp."

Iris had read of mangroves. In a dim way, she classed them with tamarinds, and cocoa-palms, and other sub-tropical products. At any rate, she was exceedingly anxious to tell Hozier that if mangroves tasted as they smelt she would need to be very hungry before she ate one!

Marcel was endowed with quick ears. Though Hozier's whisper could hardly have reached him, he held up a warning hand, even while he brought the catamaran ashore on the shingle, so gently that not a pebble was disturbed. He rose, a gaunt scarecrow, stepped off, and drew the shallow craft somewhat further up the sloping beach. Then he helped Iris to her feet. She became conscious at once that his thumb-nail was of extraordinary length, and--so strangely constituted is human nature--this peculiarity made a lasting impression on her mind.

Hozier, thinking that he ought to remain near the catamaran, stood upright, but did not offer to follow the others. Iris, filled with a sudden fear, hung back. The Brazilian, aware of her resistance, sought its cause. He saw Hozier, grinned, and beckoned to him. So the three went in company, and at each upward stride the disagreeable stench, ever afterwards associated with Fernando Noronha in the girl's memories, became less and less perceptible, until, after a short walk through a clump of banana trees, it vanished altogether.

At that instant, when Iris was beginning to revel in the sweet incense of a multitude of unseen flowers, Marcel halted, motioned to Hozier to stand fast, and indicated that Iris was to come with him. At once she shrank away in terror. Though in some sense prepared for this parting, she felt it now as the crudest blow that fortune had dealt her during a day crowded with misfortunes. In all likelihood, those two would never meet again. She needed no telling as to

the risk he would soon be called on to face, and her anguish was made the more bitter by the necessity that they should go from each other's presence without a spoken word.

Nevertheless, she forced herself to extend a hand in farewell. Her eyes were blinded with tears. She knew that Hozier drew her nearer. With the daring of one who may well cast the world's convention to the winds, he gathered her to his heart and kissed her. Then she uttered a little sob of happiness and sorrow, and fainted.

It was not until she was lying helpless in his embrace, with her head pillowed on his breast, and an arm thrown limply across his shoulder, that Philip understood what had happened. He loved her, and she, the promised wife of another man, had tacitly admitted that she returned his love. Born for each other, heirs of all the ages, they were destined to be separated under conditions that could not have been brought about by the worst tyrant that ever oppressed his fellow creatures. Small blame should be his portion if in that abysmal moment there came to Philip a dire temptation. There was every reason to believe that he and Iris, if they found some hiding-place on the island that night, might escape. He could send Marcel crashing into the undergrowth with a blow, carry the unconscious girl somewhere, anywhere, until the darkness shrouded them, and wait for the dawn with some degree of confidence. In a red fury of thought he pictured her face when she regained possession of her senses and was told that they had no more to fear. He saw, with a species of fantastic intuition, that the island authorities would actually acclaim them for the tidings they brought. And then, he would find those grave brown eyes of hers fixed on his in agonized inquiry. What of the others? Why had he betrayed his trust? Dom Corria de Sylva had sent him ashore in advance of any among the little band of fugitives. Marcel and Domingo were outside the pale. Their lives, at least, were surely forfeit when recaptured. It was not a prayer but a curse that Hozier muttered when Marcel whispered words he did not understand, but whose obvious meaning was that now the girl must be carried to the convict's hut, since they were losing time, and time was all-important.

So they strode on, across ground that continued to rise in gentle undulations. Even in his present frenzied mood, Hozier noticed that they were following the right bank of a rivulet, the catamaran being beached on the same side of its cove-like estuary. Progress was rather difficult. They were skirting a wood, and the trailers of a great scarlet-flowered bean and a climbing cucumber smothered the ground, canopied the trees, and swarmed over the rocks. He could not distinguish these hindrances in the darkness, but he soon found that he must walk warily. As for the effort entailed by his forlorn burden he did not give a thought to it until Marcel indicated that he must stand fast. The Brazilian went on, leaving Hozier breathless. Evidently he went to warn the inhabitants of a wretched hut, suddenly visible in the midst of a patch of maize and cassava, that there were those at hand who needed shelter.

A dog barked--Marcel whistled softly, and the animal began to whimper. The Brazilian vanished. Hozier still held Iris in his arms; his heart was beating tumultuously; his throat ached with the labor of his lungs. His straining ears caught rustlings among the grass and roots, but otherwise a solemn peace brooded over the scene. Just beyond the hut, which was shielded from the arid hill by a grove of curiously contorted trees, the inner heights of the island rose abruptly. Something that resembled a column of cloud showed behind the rugged sky-line of the land. Even while he waited there, he saw a glint of light on its eastern side. He fancied that under stress of emotion and physical weakness his eyes were deceiving him; but the line of golden fire grew brighter and more definite. It was broken but unwavering, and black shadows began to take form as part of this phenomenon. Then he remembered the giant peak of Fernando Noronha, that mis-shapen mass which thrusts its amazing beacon a thousand feet into the air. The rising moon was gilding El Pico long ere its rays would illumine the lower land--that was all--yet he hailed the sight as a token of deliverance. It was not by idle chance that that which he had taken for a cloud should be transmuted into a torch; there sprang into his heated brain a new trust. He recalled the unceasing vigilance of One All-Powerful, who, ages ago, when His people were afflicted, "went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light."

Then Marcel came, and aroused him from the stupor that had settled on him, and together they entered into the hovel, where a dark-skinned woman and a comely girl uttered words of sympathetic sound when Iris was laid on a low trestle, and Hozier took a farewell kiss from her unheeding lips.

The Englishman stumbled away with his guide; he fancied that Marcel warned him several times to be more circumspect. He did his best, but, for the time, he was utterly spent. At last the Brazilian signified that they were near a trysting place. He uttered a cry like a night-jar's, and the answer came from no great distance. Soon they encountered Coke and De Sylva, who were awaiting them anxiously, and wondering, no doubt, why Hozier was missing, since Domingo and Marcel had fixed on an aged fig-tree as a rendezvous, and Hozier was not to be found anywhere near it.

The two boatmen hurried away, and De Sylva placed his lips close to Philip's ear.

"What went wrong?" he asked.

"Iris--Miss Yorke--fainted," was the gasping reply.

"Ah. You had to carry her?"

"Yes."

De Sylva fumbled in a pocket. He produced a flask.

"Here is some brandy. I kept it for just such an extremity. We cannot have you breaking down. Drink!"

Two weary hours elapsed before the little army of the Grand-pere Rock was reunited on the shore of Cotton-Tree Bay. Then there was a further delay, while their indefatigable scouts brought milk and water, some coarse bread, and a good supply of fruit from the hut. It was part of their scheme that they should give their friend's habitation a wide berth. If their plans miscarried he was instructed to say that he had found the English lady wandering on the shore soon after daybreak. In any event, there would be no evidence that he had entertained the invaders in his hovel; otherwise, he would lose the first-class badge that permitted him, a convict, to dwell apart with his wife and daughter.

It was with the utmost difficulty that the men could be restrained from expressing their delight when they were given water and milk to drink. The water was poor, brackish stuff; the milk was sour and had lost every particle of cream; yet they deemed each a nectar of rank, and even the miserable Watts, who had long ago ascertained that the rustlings in the herbage were caused by countless numbers of rats and mice, was ready to acclaim beverages which he was too apt to despise.

About midnight there was a bright moon sailing overhead, and De Sylva gave a low order that they were to form in Indian file. Marcel led, the ex-President himself followed, with San Benavides, Coke, and Hozier in close proximity. Domingo brought up the rear, in order to prevent straggling, and assist men who might stray from the path.

Avoiding the cultivated land surrounding the creek, the party struck up the hillside. A few plodding minutes sufficed to clear the trees and dense undergrowth. A rough, narrow path led to the saddle of the central ridge. They advanced warily but without any real difficulty. Hozier took a listless interest in watching the furtive glances cast over his shoulder by San Benavides so long as the south coast of the island was visible. At each turn in the mountain track the Brazilian officer searched the moonlit sea for the agreed signal. At last, when the northern side also came in sight, and the whole island lay spread before them, San Benavides resigned himself to the inevitable. For a little while, at least, he was perforce content to survey events through the eyes of his companions, and throw in his lot irrevocably with theirs.

Roughly speaking, Fernando Noronha itself, irrespective of the group of islands at its northeasterly extremity, stretches five miles from east to west, and averages a mile and a half in width. From Cotton-Tree Bay, to which the catamarans had brought the small force, it was barely a mile to the village, convict settlement, and citadel. Some few lights twinkling near the shore showed the exact whereabouts of the inhabited section. Another mile away to the right lay Fort San Antonio, which housed the main body of troops. Watch-fires burning on South Point, whence came the shells that disabled the *Andromeda*, revealed the presence of soldiers in that neighborhood. De Sylva explained that a paved road ran straight from the town and landing-place to the hamlet of Sueste and an important plantation of cocoanuts and other fruit-bearing trees that adjoined South Point. It was inadvisable to strike into that road immediately. A little more to the right there was a track leading to the Curral, or stockyard. If they headed for the latter place the men could obtain some stout cudgels. The convict peons in charge of the cattle should be overpowered and bound, thus preventing them from giving an alarm, and it was also possible to avoid the inhabited hillside overlooking the main anchorage until they were close to the citadel. Then, crossing the fort road, they would advance boldly to the enemy's stronghold, first making sure that the launch was moored in her accustomed station in the roadstead beneath the walls. San Benavides would answer the sentry's questions, there would be a combined rush for the guard-room on the right of the gate, and, if they were able to master the guard, as many of the assailants as possible would don the soldiers' coats, shakos, and accouterments. Granted success thus far, there should not be much difficulty in persuading the men in charge of the launch that a cruise round the island was to be undertaken forthwith. Marcel would remain with them until the citadel was carried. He would then hurry back to bring Iris across the island to an unfrequented beach known as the Porto do Conceicao, where he would embark her on a catamaran and row out to the steamer, which, by that time, would be lying off the harbor out of range of the troops who would surely be summoned from the distant fort.

The project bristled with audacity, and that has ever been the soul of achievement. Even the two wounded men

from the *Andromeda* took heart when they listened to De Sylva's low-toned explanation, given under the shadow of a great rock ere the final advance was made. If all went well at the beginning, the small garrison of the citadel would be astounded when they found themselves struggling against unknown adversaries. Haste, silence, determination--these things were essential; each and all might be expected from men who literally carried their lives in their hands.

A keen breeze was blowing up there on the ridge. A bank of cloud was rising in the southwest horizon, and, at that season, when the months of rain were normally at an end, the mere presence of clouds heralded another spell of broken weather, though the preceding gale had probably marked the worst of it. Indeed, valuable auxiliary as the moon had proved during the march across rough country, it would be no ill hap if her bright face were veiled later. The mere prospect of such an occurrence was a cheering augury, and it was in the highest spirits that the little band set out resolutely for the Curral.

Here they encountered no difficulty whatever. Perhaps the prevalent excitement had drawn its custodians to the town, since they found no one in charge save a couple of barking dogs, while, if there were people in the cattle-keepers' huts, they gave no sign of their presence. A few stakes were pulled up; they even came upon a couple of axes and a heavy hammer. Equipped with these weapons, eked out by three revolvers owned by the Brazilians and the dapper captain's sword, they hurried on, quitting the road instantly, and following a cow-path that wound about the base of a steep hill.

They met their first surprise when they tried to cross the road to the fort. Quite unexpectedly, they blundered into a small picket stationed there. Its object was to challenge all passers-by during the dark hours, and it formed part of the scheme already elaborated by the authorities for a complete search of every foot of ground. But Brazilian soldiers are apt to be lax in such matters. These men were all lying down, and smoking. For a marvel, they happened to be silent when Marcel led his cohort into the open road. They were listening, in fact, to the crackling of the undergrowth, though utterly unsuspecting of its cause, and the first intimation of danger was given by the startling challenge:

"Who goes there?"

It was familiar enough to island ears, and the convict answered readily:

"A friend!"

"Several friends, it would seem," laughed a voice. "Let us see who these friends are."

Luckily, in response to De Sylva's sibilant order, most of the *Andromeda's* crew were hidden by the scrub from which they were about to emerge.

The soldiers rose, and strolled nearer leisurely.

"Now!" shouted De Sylva, leaping forward.

There was a wild scurry, two or three shots were fired, and Hozier found himself on the ground gripping the throat of a bronzed man whom he had shoved backward with a thrust, for he had no time to swing his stake for a blow. He was aware of a pair of black eyes that glared up at him horribly in the moonlight, of white teeth that shone under long moustachios of peculiarly warlike aspect, but he felt the man was as putty in his hands, and his fingers relaxed their pressure.

He looked around. The fight was ended almost as soon as it began. The soldiers, six in all, were on their backs in the roadway. Two of them were dead. The Italian sailor had been shot through the body, and was twisting in his last agony.

The bloodshed was bad enough, but those shots were worse. They would set the island in an uproar. The reports would be heard in town, citadel, and fort, and the troops would now be on the *qui vive*. But De Sylva was a man of resource.

"Strip the prisoners!" he cried. "Take their arms and ammunition, but bind them back to back with their belts."

"Butt in there, me lads," vociferated Coke, who had accounted for one of the Brazilians with an ax. "Step lively! Now we've got some uniforms an' guns, we can rush that dam citydel easy."

Hozier was busy relieving his man of his coat. When the prone warrior realized that he was not to be killed, he helped the operation, but Philip was thinking more of Iris than of deeds of derring-do.

"Why attempt to capture the citadel at all?" he asked. "Now that we can make sufficient display, is there any reason that we should not go straight for the launch?"

"Hi, mister, d'ye 'ear that?" said Coke to De Sylva. "There's horse sense in it. The whole bally place will be buzzin' like a nest of wasps till they find out wot the shots meant."

"I think it is a good suggestion," came the calm answer, "provided, that is, the launch is in the harbor."

"She's just as likely to be there now as later. If she isn't, we must hark back to the first plan. Now, you swabs, all aboard! See to them buckles afore you quit."

A bell began to toll in the convict settlement. Lights appeared in many houses scattered over the seaward slope. In truth, Fernando Noronha had not been so badly scared since its garrison mutinied three years earlier because arrears of pay were not forthcoming. It was impossible to determine as yet whether or not the island steamer was at her berth, so they could only push on boldly and trust to luck. Hozier, never for an instant forgetting Iris, saw that Marcel still remained with his leader. Under these new circumstances, it certainly would be a piece of folly to send back until they were sure of the launch. So he hurried after them, struggling the while into a coat far too small, though fortunate in the fact that his captive's head was big in proportion to the rest of his body.

Some few men were met, running from the town to the main road where they had located the shooting. Each breathlessly demanded news, and was forthwith given most disconcerting information by a savage blow. The *Andromeda* had received no quarter, and her crew retaliated now. They did not deliberately murder anyone, but they took good care that none of those whom they encountered would be in a condition to work mischief until the night was ended.

It was a peculiar and exasperating fact that although they were descending a steep incline to the harbor the presence of trees and houses rendered it impossible to see the actual landing-place. Hence, there was no course open but to race on at the utmost speed, though De Sylva was careful to keep his small force compact, and its pace was necessarily that of its slowest members. Among these was Coke, who had never walked so far since he was granted a captain's certificate. He swore copiously as he lumbered along, and, what between shortness of breath and his tight boots and clothing, the latter disability being added to by a ridiculously inadequate Brazilian tunic, he was barely able to reach the water's edge.

Happily, the launch was there, moored alongside a small quay. From the nearest building it was necessary to cross a low wharf some fifty yards in width, and De Sylva's whispered commands could not restrain the eager men when escape appeared no longer problematical but assured. They broke, and ran, an almost fatal thing, as it happened, since the soldiers whom Philip had seen from the rock were still on board. One of them noticed the inexplicable disorder among a body of men some of whom resembled his own comrades. He had heard the firing, and was discussing it with others when this strange thing happened.

He challenged. San Benavides answered, but his voice was shrill and unofficer-like.

The engines were started. A man leaped to the wharf. He was in the act of casting a mooring rope off a fixed capstan when De Sylva shot him between the shoulder-blades.

"On board, all of you!" shrieked the ex-President in a frenzy.

"At 'em, boys!" gasped Coke, though scarce able to stagger another foot.

The men needed no bidding. Sheets of flame leaped from the vessel's deck as the soldiers seized their rifles and fired point-blank at these mysterious assailants who spoke in a foreign language. But flame alone could not stop that desperate attack. Some fell, but the survivors sprang at the Brazilians like famished wolves on their prey. There was no more shooting. Men grappled and fell, some into the water, others on deck, or they sprawled over the hatch and wrought in frantic struggle in the narrow cabin. The fight did not last many seconds. An engineer, finding a lever and throttle valve, roared to a sailor to take the wheel, and already the launch was curving seaward when Hozier shouted:

"Where is Marcel?"

"Lyn' dead on the wharf," said Watts.

"Are you certain?"

"He was alongside me, an' 'e threw is 'ands up, an' dropped like a shot rabbit."

"Then who has gone for Miss Yorke?"

"No one. D'ye think that this d--d President cares for anybody but hisself?"

Philip felt the deck throbbing with the pulsations of the screw. The lights on shore were gliding by. The launch was leaving Fernando Noronha, and Iris was waiting in that wretched hut beyond the hill, waiting for the summons that would not reach her, for Marcel was dead, and Domingo, the one other man who could have gone to her, was lying in the cabin with three ribs broken and a collar-bone fractured.

CHAPTER IX

WHEREIN CERTAIN PEOPLE MEET UNEXPECTEDLY

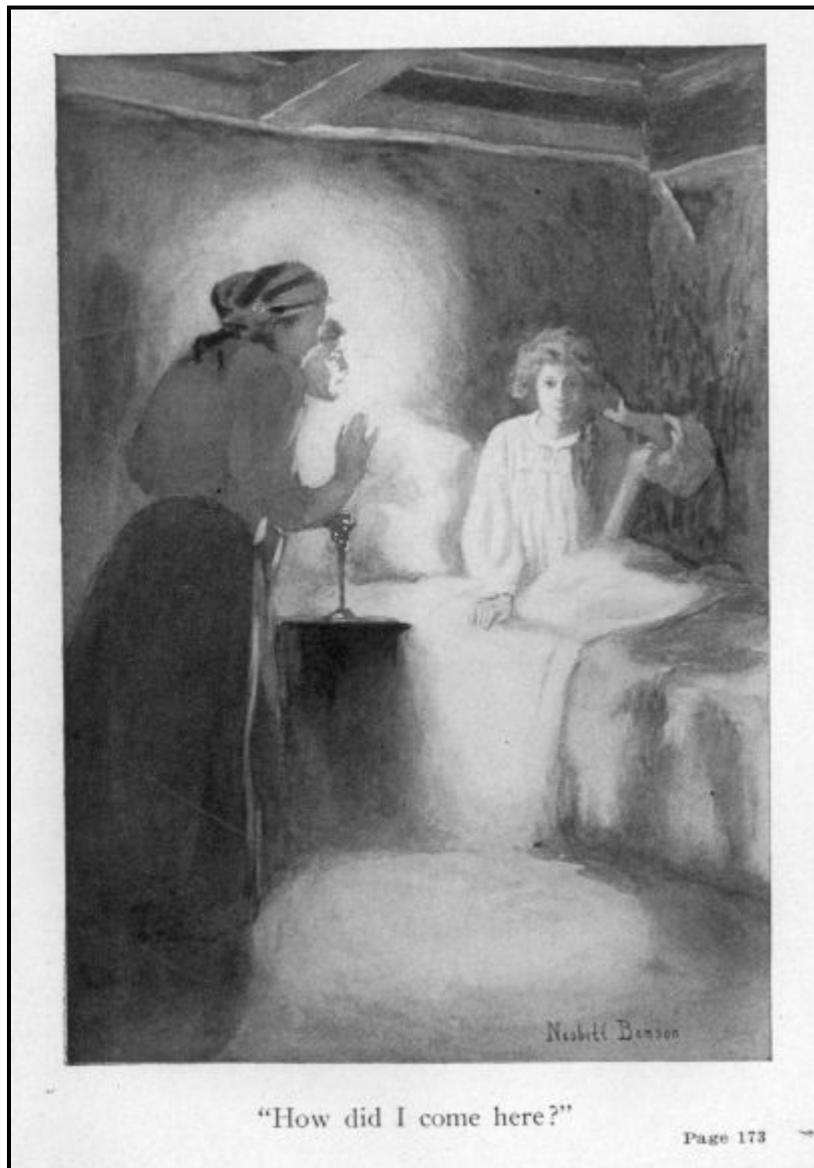
Iris came back from the void to find herself lying on a truckle bed in a dimly-lighted hovel. A cotton wick flickered in a small lamp of the old Roman type. It was consuming a crude variety of castor oil, and its gamboge-colored flame clothed the smoke-darkened rafters and mud walls in somber yet vivid tints that would have gladdened the heart of a Rubens. This scenic effect, admirable to an artist, was lost on a girl waking in affright and startled by unfamiliar surroundings. She gazed up with uncomprehending eyes at two brown-skinned women bending over her.

One, the elder, was chafing her hands; the other, a tall, graceful girl, was stirring something in an earthenware vessel. She heard the girl murmur joyfully:

"Gracas a Deus, elh' abria lhes olhas!"

Iris was still wandering in that strange borderland guarded by unknown forces that lies between conscious life and the sleep that is so close of kin to death. If in full possession of her senses, she might not have caught the drift of the sentence, since it was spoken in a guttural patois. But now she understood beyond cavil that because she had opened her eyes, the girl was giving thanks to the Deity. The first definite though bewildering notion that perplexed her faculties, at once clouded and unnaturally clear, was an astonished acceptance of the fact that she knew what the strange girl had said, though the phrase only remotely resembled its Spanish equivalent. She gathered its exact meaning, word for word, and it was all the more surprising that both women should smile and say something quite incomprehensible as soon as Iris lifted herself on an elbow and asked in English:

"Where am I? How did I come here?"



[Illustration: "How did I come here?"]

Then she remembered, and memory brought a feeling of helplessness not wholly devoid of self-reproach. It was bad enough that her presence should add so greatly to the dangers besetting her friends; it was far worse that she should have fainted at the very moment when such weakness might well prove fatal to them.

Why did she faint? Ah! A lively blush chased the pallor from her cheeks, and a few strenuous heartbeats restored animation to her limbs. Of course, in thinking that she had yielded solely to the stress of surcharged emotions, Iris was mistaken. What she really needed was food. A young woman of perfect physique, and dowered with the best of health, does not collapse into unconsciousness because a young man embraces her, and each at the same moment makes the blissful discovery that the wide world contains no other individual of supreme importance. Iris's great-grandmother might have "swooned" under such circumstances--not so Iris, who fainted simply because of the strain imposed by failure to eat the queer fare provided by De Sylva and his associates. She hardly realized how hungry she was until the girl handed her the bowl, which contained a couple of eggs beaten up in milk, while small quantities of rum and sugar-cane juice made the compound palatable.

"Bom!" said the girl, "bebida, senhora!"

It certainly was good, and the senhora drank it with avidity, the mixture being excellent diet for one who had eaten nothing except an over-ripe banana during thirty hours. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to extend that period considerably. Iris had left practically untouched the meals brought her by the steward during the gale, and the early morning cup of coffee, which would have proved most grateful after a storm-tossed night, was an impossible

achievement owing to the lack of water.

So Iris tackled the contents of the bowl with a vigorous appetite oddly at variance with the seeming weakness that ended in a prolonged fainting fit, and the hospitable Brazilians, to whom this fair English girl was a revelation in feature and clothing, bestirred themselves to provide further dainties. But, excepting some fruit, Iris had the wisdom to refuse other food just then. Her thoughts were rapidly becoming coherent, and she realized that a heavy meal might be absolutely disastrous. If the men made good their project she would be called on within an hour to cross the island. It seemed reasonable that, hungry though she was, she would be better fitted to climb the island hills at a fast pace if she ate sparingly. Still, she longed for a drink of water, and taxed her small stock of Spanish to make known her desire.

"Agua, senhora," she said with a smile, and the delight of mother and daughter was great, since they thought she could speak their language.

Therein, of course, they were disappointed, but not more so than Iris when she tasted the brackish fluid alone procurable on the south coast of Fernando Noronha. That was a fortunate thing in itself. Only those who have endured real thirst can tell how hard it is to refrain from drinking deeply when water is ultimately obtained; but the mixture of milk and eggs had already soothed her parched mouth and palate, and she quickly detected an unpleasantly salt flavor in the beverage they gave her.

Then she set herself to discover her whereabouts. The women were eager to impart information, but, alas, Iris's brain had regained its every-day limitations, and she could make no sense of their words. At last, seeing that the door was barred and the hut was innocent of any other opening, she stood upright, and signified by a gesture that she wished to go out. There could be no mistaking the distress, even the positive alarm, created by this demand. The girl clasped her hands in entreaty, and the older woman evidently tried most earnestly to dissuade her visitor from a proceeding fraught with utmost danger.

Being quite certain that they meant to be friendly, Iris sat down again. She knew, of course, that Marcel would come for her, if possible, and the relief displayed by her unknown entertainers was so marked that she resolved to await his appearance quietly. She would not abandon hope till daylight crept through the chinks of the hut. How soon that might be she could not tell. It seemed but a few seconds since she felt Hozier's arms around her, since her lips met his in a passionate kiss. But, meanwhile, someone had brought her here. Her dress, though damp, was not sopping wet. Even the slight token of the beaten eggs showed how time must have sped while she was lying there oblivious of everything. She tried again to question the women, and fancied that they understood her partly, as she caught the words "meia noite," but it was beyond her powers to ascertain whether they meant that she had come there at midnight, or were actually telling her the hour.

At any rate, they were most anxious for her well-being. The island housewife produced another dish, smiled reassuringly, and said, "Manioc--bom," repeating the phrase several times. The compound looked appetizing, and Iris ate a little. She discovered at once that it was tapioca, but her new acquaintance suggested "cassava" as an alternative. The girl, however, nodded cheerfully. She had heard the gentry at Fort San Antonio call it tapioca, and her convict father cultivated some of the finer variety of manioc for the officers' mess.

"Ah," sighed Iris, smiling wistfully, "I am making progress in your language, slow but sure. But please don't give me any mangroves."

The girl apparently was quite fascinated by the sound of English. She began to chatter to her mother at an amazing rate, trying repeatedly to imitate the hissing sound which the Latin races always perceive in Anglo-Saxon speech. Her mother reproved her instantly. To make amends, the girl offered Iris a fine pomegranate. Iris, of course, lost nothing of this bit of by-play. It was almost the first touch of nature that she had discovered among the amazing inhabitants of Fernando Noronha.

These small amenities helped to pass the time, but Iris soon noted an air of suspense in the older woman's attitude. Though mindful of her guest's comfort, Luisa Gomez had ever a keen ear for external sounds. In all probability, she was disturbed by the distant reports of fire-arms, and it was a rare instance of innate good-breeding that she did not alarm her guest by calling attention to them. Iris, amid such novel surroundings, could not distinguish one noise from another. Night-birds screamed hideously in the trees without; a host of crickets kept up an incessant chorus in the undergrowth; the intermittent roaring of breakers on the rocks invaded the narrow creek. The medley puzzled Iris, but the island woman well knew that stirring events were being enacted on the other side of the hill. Her husband was there--he had, indeed, prepared a careful alibi since Marcel visited him--and wives are apt to feel worried if husbands are abroad when bullets are flying.

So, while the girl, Manoela, was furtively appraising the clothing worn by Iris, and wondering how it came to pass that in some parts of the world there existed grand ladies who wore real cloth dresses, and lace embroidered underskirts, and silk stockings, and shining leather boots--wore them, too, with as much careless ease as one draped one's self in coarse hempen skirt and shawl in Fernando Noronha--her mother was listening ever for hasty footsteps among the trailing vines.

At last, with a muttered prayer, she went to the door, and unfastened the stout wooden staple that prevented intruders from entering unbidden.

It was dark without. Dense black clouds veiled the moon, and a gust of wind moaned up the creek in presage of a tropical storm. Someone approached.

"Is that you, Manoel?" asked Luisa Gomez in a hushed voice.

There was no answer. The woman drew back. She would have closed the door, but a slim, active figure sprang across the threshold. She shrieked in terror. The new-comer was a Brazilian officer, one of those glittering beings whom she had seen lounging outside the Prindio[1] during her rare visits to the town. She was hoping to greet her Manoel, she half expected to find Marcel, but to be faced by an officer was the last thing she had thought of. In abject fear, she broke into a wild appeal to the Virgin; the officer merely laughed, though not loudly.

"Be not afraid, senhora--I am a friend," he said with quiet confidence, and the fact that he addressed her so courteously was a wondrously soothing thing in itself. But he raised a fresh wave of dread in her soul when he peered into the cabin and spoke words she did not understand.

"I think you are here, mademoiselle," he said in French. "I am come to share your retreat for a little while. Perchance by daybreak I may arrive at some plan. At present, you and I are in difficulties, is it not?"

Iris recognized the voluble, jerky speech. A wild foreboding gripped her heart until she was like to shudder under its fierce anguish.

"You, Captain San Benavides?" she asked, and her utterance was unnaturally calm.

"I, mademoiselle," he said, "and, alas! I am alone. May I come in? It is not well to show a light at this hour, seeing that the island is overrun with infuriated soldiers."

The concluding sentence was addressed to Luisa Gomez in Portuguese. Realizing instinctively that the man came as a friend, she stood aside, trembling, on the verge of tears. He entered, and the door was closed behind him. The yellow gleam of the lamp fell on his smart uniform, and gilded the steel scabbard of his sword. In that dim interior the signs of his three days' sojourn on Grand-pere were not in evidence, and he had not been harmed during the struggle on the main road or in the rush for the launch.

He doffed his rakish-looking kepi and bowed low before Iris. Perhaps the white misery in her face touched him more deeply than he had counted on. Be that as it may, a note of genuine sympathy vibrated in his voice as he said:

"I am the only man who escaped, mademoiselle. The others? Well, it is war, and war is a lottery."

"Do you mean that they have been killed, all killed?" she murmured with a pitiful sob.

"I--I think so."

"You ... think? Do you not know?"

He sighed. His hand sought an empty cigarette case. Such was the correct military air, he fancied--to treat misfortunes rather as jests. He frowned because the case was empty, but smiled at Iris.

"It is so hard, mademoiselle, when one speaks these things in a strange tongue. Permit me to explain that which has arrived. We encountered a picket, and surprised it. Having secured some weapons and accouterments, we hastened to the quay, where was moored the little steamship. Unhappily, she was crowded with soldiers. They fired, and there was a short fight. I was knocked down, and, what do you call it?--*etourdi*--while one might count ten. I rose, half blinded, and what do I see? The vessel leaving the quay--full of men engaged in combat, while, just beyond the point, a warship is signaling her arrival. It was a Brazilian warship, mademoiselle. She showed two red rockets followed by a white one. It was only a matter of minutes before she met the little steamship. I tell you that it was bad luck, that--a

vile blow. I was angry, yes. I stamp my foot and say foolish things. Then I run!"

Iris made no reply. She hid her face in her hands. She could frame no more questions. San Benavides was trying to tell her that Hozier and the rest had been overwhelmed by fate at the very instant escape seemed to be within reach. The Brazilian, probably because of difficulties that beset him in using a foreign language, did not make it clear that he had flung himself flat in the dust when he heard the order to fire given by someone on board the launch. He said nothing of a tragic incident wherein Marcel, shot through the lungs, fell over him, and he, San Benavides, mistaking the convict for an assailant, wrestled furiously with a dying man. He even forgot to state that had he charged home with the others, he would either have met a bullet or gained the deck of the launch, and that his failure to reach the vessel was due to his own careful self-respect. For San Benavides was not a coward. He could be brave spectacularly, but he had no stomach for a fight in the dark, when stark hazard chooses some to triumph and some to die. That sort of devilish courage might be well enough for those crude sailors; a Portuguese gentleman of high lineage and proved mettle demanded a worthier field for his deeds of derring-do. Saperlotte! If one had a cigarette one could talk more fluently!

"Believe me, mademoiselle," he went on, speaking with a proud humility that was creditable to his powers as an actor, "the tears came to my eyes when I understood what had happened. For myself, what do I care? I would gladly have given my life to save my brave companions. But I thought of you, solitary, waiting here in distress, so I hurried into the village, and my uniform secured me from interruption until I was able to leave the road and cross the hills."

Then the lightning of a woman's intuition pierced the abyss of despair. Surely there were curious blanks in this thrilling narrative. As was her way when thoroughly aroused, Iris stood up and seized San Benavides almost roughly by the arm. Her distraught eyes searched his face with a pathetic earnestness.

"Why do you think that the launch did not get away?" she cried. "It was dark. The moon might have been in shadow. If the launch met the warship and was seen, there must have been firing----"

"Chere mademoiselle, there was much firing," he protested.

"At sea?"

The words came dully. She was stricken again, even more shrewdly. The gloom was closing in on her, yet she forced herself to drag the truth from his unwilling lips.

"Yes. Of course, I could not wait there in that open place. I was compelled to seek shelter. Troops were running from town and citadel. I avoided them by a miracle. And my sole concern then was your safety."

"Oh, my safety!" she wailed brokenly. "How does it avail me that my friends should be slain? Why was I not with them? I would rather have died as they died than live in the knowledge that I was the cause of their death."

San Benavides essayed a confidential hand on her shoulder. She shrank from him; he was not pleased but he purred amiably:

"Mademoiselle is profoundly unhappy. Under such circumstances one says things that are unmerited, is it not? If anyone is to blame, it is my wretched country, which cannot settle its political affairs without bloodshed. Ah, mademoiselle, I weep with you, and tender you my most respectful homage."

A deluge of tropical rain beat on the hut with a sudden fury. Conversation at once became difficult, nearly impossible. Iris threw herself back on the trestle in a passion of grief that rivaled the outer tempest. San Benavides, by sheer force of habit, dusted his clothes before sitting on the chair brought by Luisa Gomez. The woman's frightened gaze had dwelt on Iris and him alternately while they spoke. She understood no word that was said, but she gathered that the news brought by this handsome officer was tragic, woeful, something that would wring the heartstrings.

"Was there fighting, senhor?" she asked, close to his ear, her voice pitched in a key that conquered the storm.

He nodded. He was very tired, this dandy; now that Iris gave no further heed to him, he was troubled by the prospects of the coming day.

"Were they soldiers who fought?"

He nodded again.

"No islanders?"

Then he raised a hand in protest, though he laughed softly.

"Your good man is safe, senhora," he said. "Marcel told him to go to Sueste and tend his cattle. When he comes home it will be his duty to inform the Governor that we are here. He will be rewarded, not punished. *Sanguê de Deus!* I may be shot at dawn. I pray you, let me rest a while."

The girl, Manoela, weeping out of sympathy, crept to Iris's side and gently stroked her hair. Like her mother, she could only guess that the English lady's friends were captured, perhaps dead. Even her limited experience of life's vicissitudes had taught her what short shrift was given to those who defied authority. The Republic of Brazil does not permit its criminals to be executed, but it shows no mercy to rebels. Manoela, of course, believed that the Englishmen were helping the imprisoned Dom Corria to regain power. She remembered how a mutiny was once crushed on the island, and her eyes streamed.

Meanwhile, Luisa Gomez was touched by the good-looking soldier's plight. Never, since she came to Fernando Noronha to rejoin her convict husband, had she been addressed so politely by any member of the military caste. The manners of the officers of the detachment at Fort San Antonio were not to be compared with those of Captain San Benavides. Her heart went out to him.

"We must try to help you, Senhor Capitano," she said. "If the others are dead or taken, you may not be missed."

He threw out his hands in an eloquent gesture. Life or death was a matter of complete indifference to him, it implied.

"We shall know in the morning," he said. "Have you any cigarettes? A milrei[2] for a cigarette!"

"But listen, senhor. Why not take off your uniform and dress in my clothes? You can cut off your mustaches, and wear a mantilha over your face, and we will keep you here until there is a chance of reaching a ship. Certainly that is better than being shot."

He glanced at Iris. Vanity being his first consideration, it is probable that he would have refused to be made ridiculous in her eyes, had not a knock on the door galvanized him into a fever of fright. He sprang up and glared wildly around for some means of eluding the threatened scrutiny of a search party. Luisa Gomez flung him a rough skirt and a shawl. He huddled into a corner near the bed,--in such wise that the figures of Iris and Manoela would cloak the rays of the lamp,--placed his drawn sword across his knees, and draped the two garments over his head and limbs.

Then, greatly agitated, but not daring to refuse admittance to the dreaded soldiery, the woman unbarred the door. A man staggered in. He was alone, and a swirl of wind and rain caused the lamp to flicker so madly that no one could distinguish his features until the door was closed again.

But Iris knew him. Though her eyes were dim with tears, though the new-comer carried a broken gun in his hands, and his face was blood-stained, she knew.

With a shriek that dismayed the other women--who could not guess that joy is more boisterous than sorrow, she leaped up and threw her arms around him.

"Oh, Philip, Philip!" she sobbed. "He told me you were dead ... and I believed him!"

The manner of her greeting was delightful to one who had faced death for her sake many times during the past hour, yet Hozier was so surprised by its warmth that he could find never a word at the moment. But he had the good sense to throw aside the shattered rifle and return her embrace with interest. Long ago exhausted in body, his mind reeled now under the bewildering knowledge that this most gracious woman did truly love him. When they parted in that same squalid hut at midnight, he took with him the intoxication of her kiss. Yet he scarce brought himself to believe that the night's happenings were real, or that they two would ever meet again on earth. And now, here was Iris quivering against his breast. He could feel the beating of her heart. The perfume of her hair was as incense in his nostrils. She was clinging to him as if they had loved through all eternity. No wonder he could not speak. Had he uttered a syllable, he must have broken down like the girl herself.

San Benavides supplied a timely tonic.

Throwing aside the rags which covered him, he tried to rise. Philip caught a glimpse of the uniform, the sheen of

the naked sword. He was about to tear himself from Iris's clasp and spring at this new enemy when the Brazilian spoke.

"Mil diabos!" he cried in a rage, "this cursed Inglez still lives, and here am I posing before him like an old hag."

His voice alone saved him from being pinned to the floor by a man who had adopted no light measures with others of his countrymen during the past half-hour, as the dented gun-barrel, minus its stock, well showed. But the captain's mortified fury helped to restore Philip's sanity. Lifting Iris's glowing face to his own, he whispered:

"Tell me, sweetheart, how comes it that our Brazilian friend is here?"

"He ran away when some shots were fired," which was rather unfair of Iris. "He said the launch had been sunk by a man-of-war----"

"But he is wrong. I saw no man-of-war. We captured the launch. By this time she is well out to sea. Unfortunately, Marcel was killed, and Domingo badly wounded. There was no one to come for you, so I jumped overboard and swam ashore. I had to fight my way here, and it will soon be known that there are some of us left on the island. I thought that perhaps I might take you back to the Grand-pere cavern. These people may give us food. I have some few sovereigns in my pocket...."

"Oh, yes, yes!" She was excited now and radiantly happy. "Of course, Captain San Benavides must accompany us. He says the soldiers will shoot him if they capture him. I, too, have money. Let me ask him to explain matters to this dear woman and her daughter. They have been more than kind to me already."

She turned to the sulky San Benavides and told him what Hozier had suggested. He brightened at that, and began a voluble speech to Luisa Gomez. Interrupting himself, he inquired, in French, how Hozier proposed to reach the rock.

"On a catamaran. There are two on the beach, and I can handle one of them all right," said Philip. "But what is this yam of a warship? When last I sighted the launch she was standing out of the harbor, and the first clouds of the storm helped to screen her from the citadel."

Iris interpreted. San Benavides repeated his story of the rockets. In her present tumult, the girl forgot the touch of realism with regard to the firing that he had heard. Certainly there was a good deal of promiscuous rifle-shooting after the departure of the launch, but warships use cannon to enforce their demands, and the boom of a big gun had not woke the echoes of Fernando Noronha that night. Philip deemed the present no time for argument; he despised San Benavides, and gave no credence to him. Just now the Brazilian was an evil that must be endured.

Luisa Gomez promised to help in every possible way. Her eyes sparkled at the sight of gold, but the poor woman would have assisted them out of sheer pity. Nevertheless, the gift of a couple of sovereigns, backed by the promise of many more if her husband devoted himself to their service, spurred her to a frenzy of activity.

There was not a moment to be lost. The squall had spent itself, and a peep through the chinks of the door showed that the moon would quickly be in evidence again. It was essential that they should cross the channel while the scattering clouds still dimmed her brightness; so Manoela and her mother collected such store of food, and milk, and water, as they could lay hands on. Well laden, all five hastened to the creek, and Hozier, Iris, and San Benavides, boarded the larger of the two catamarans. The strong wind had partly dissipated the noisome odor, but it was still perceptible. Iris was sure she would never like mangroves.

Having a degree of confidence in the queer craft that was lacking during their earlier voyage, they did not hesitate to stack jars and baskets against the curved prow in such a manner that the eatables would not become soaked with salt water. Then, after a hasty farewell, during which Iris showed her gratitude to those kindly peasants by a hug and a kiss, Hozier pushed off and tried to guide the catamaran as Marcel had done.

Oddly enough, he and Iris now saw the majestic outlines of the Grand-pere for the first time. The great rock rose above the water like some immense Gothic cathedral. The illusion was heightened by a giant spire that towered grandly from the center of the islet. It looked a shrine built by nature in honor of its Creator, a true temple of the infinite, and the semblance was no illusion to these three castaways, since they regarded it as a sanctuary to which alone, under Heaven, they might owe their lives. Hozier, of course, realized that there was a certain element of risk in returning there. The island authorities would surely endeavor to find out where the party of desperadoes had lain *perdu* between the sinking of the ship and the attack on the picket. But the ill-starred Marcel had been confident that none could land on the rock who was not acquainted with the intricacies of the approach, and Philip was content to trust to the reef-guarded passage rather than seek shelter on the mainland.

Once embarked in the fairway, the management of the catamaran occupied his mind to the complete exclusion of all other problems. He was puzzled by the discovery that the awkward craft was traveling too far to the westward, until he remembered that the tide had turned, and that the current was either slack or running in the opposite direction. Changing the paddle to the starboard side, he soon corrected this deviation in the route. But he had been carried already a hundred yards or more out of the straight line. To reach the two pointed rocks that marked the entrance to the secret channel, he was obliged to creep back along the whole shoreward face of the Grand-pere; and to this accident was due a surprise that ranked high in a day replete with marvels.

When the catamaran rounded the last outlying crag, and they were all straining their eyes to find the sentinel pillars, they became aware that a small boat was being pulled cautiously toward them from the opposite side of the rock.

Iris gasped. She heard Hozier mutter under his breath, while San Benavides revealed his dismay by an oath and a convulsive tightening of the hands that rested on the girl's shoulders.

Hozier strove with a few desperate strokes of the paddle to reach the shadows of the passage before the catamaran was seen by the boat's occupants. He might have succeeded. Many things can happen at night and on the sea--strange escapades and hair's-breadth 'scapes--thrills denied to stay-at-homes dwelling in cities, who seldom venture beyond a lighted area. But there was even a greater probability that the unwieldy catamaran might be caught by the swell and dashed side-long against one of the half-submerged rocks that thrust their black fangs above the water.

Happily, they were spared either alternative. At the very instant that their lot must be put to the test of chance, Coke's hoarse accents came to their incredulous ears.

"Let her go, Olsen," he was growling. "We've a clear course now, an' that dam moon will spile everything if we're spotted."

In this instance hearing was believing, and Philip was the first to guess what had actually occurred.

"Boat ahoy, skipper!" he sang out in a joyous hail.

Coke stood up. He glared hard at the reef.

"Did ye 'ear it?" he cried to De Sylva, who was steering. "Sink me, I 'ope I ain't a copyin' pore ole Watts, but if that wasn't Hozier's voice I'm goin' dotty."

"It's all right, skipper," said Philip, sending the catamaran ahead with a mighty sweep. "Miss Yorke is here--Captain San Benavides, too. I was sure you would look for us if you cleared the harbor safely."

Then Coke proclaimed his sentiments in the approved ritual of the high seas, while the big Norseman at the oars swung the boat's head round until both craft were traveling in company to the waiting launch. But before anything in the nature of an explanation was forthcoming from the occupants of either the boat or the catamaran, a broad beam of white light swept over the crest of the island from north to south. It disappeared, to return more slowly, until it rested on Rat Island, at the extreme northwest of the group. It remained steady there, showing a wild panorama of rocky heights and tumbling sea.

"A search-light, by G--d!" growled Coke.

"Then there really *was* a warship," murmured Iris.

"Ha!" said San Benavides, and his tone was almost gratified, for he had gathered that Hozier was skeptical when told of the rockets. But in that respect, at least, he was not mistaken. A man-of-war had entered the roadstead, and her powerful lamp was now scouring sea and coast for the missing launch. And in that moment of fresh peril it was forgotten by all but one of the men who had survived so many dangers since the sun last gilded the peak of Fernando Noronha, that were it not for Iris having been left behind, and Philip's mad plunge overboard to go to her, and the point-blank refusal of the *Andromeda's* captain and crew to put to sea without an effort to save the pair of them, the launch would not now be hidden behind the black mass of the Grand-pere rock.

Nevertheless, the fact was patent. Had the little vessel sailed to the west, in the assumption that her only feasible course lay in that direction, she must have been discovered by the cruiser's far-seeing eye. And what that meant needed no words. The bones of the *Andromeda* supplied testimony at once silent and all-sufficing.

[1] The Governor's residence.

[2] The Brazilian milrei is worth 55 cents, or 2s. 3 1/2d. The Portuguese is worth only one-tenth of a cent.

CHAPTER X

ON THE HIGH SEAS

Again did that awe-inspiring wand of light describe a great arc in the sky. But it was plain to be seen that it sprang from an altered base. The warship was in motion. She was about to steam around the group of islands.

Boat and catamaran raced at once for the launch; a Babel of strange oaths jarred the brooding silence; alarm, almost panic, stirred men's hearts and bubbled forth in wild speech. Under pressure of this new peril the instinct of self-preservation burst the bonds of discipline. The first law of nature may be disregarded by heroes, but the *Andromeda's* crew were just common sailormen, who did not know when they were heroic and did not care if they were deemed bestial. It may be urged that they had suffered much. Out of a ship's company of twenty-two exactly one half had survived the day's rigors. Domingo was lying in the cabin, too seriously injured to be concerned whether he lived or died. With him were two wounded soldiers, happily saved from the ruthless ferocity of the fight alongside the wharf, when every Brazilian in uniform found on deck was flung off to sink or swim as he was best able. Indeed, it was during this phase of the struggle that Hozier managed to scramble on shore unnoticed. He landed at the same moment as enemies who were blind to every other consideration except their own dangerous plight.

Small wonder, then, if authority was cast to the winds now that capture seemed to be unavoidable. Coke tried to still the tumult by thundering a command to Norrie, second engineer, to throw open the throttle valve. He took the wheel in person, meaning to shape a course due east, and thus endeavor to avoid the cruiser's baleful glance. But some of the men realized instantly that this expedient would fail. They were in no mood for half measures. Norrie felt a bayonet under his left shoulder-blade. Coke was roared down, and a hoarse voice growled:

"Me for the tall timbers, maties. It's each one for hisself now."

"Aye, aye!" came the chorus ... "Shove her ashore!... Give us a chanst there... We've none at sea."

Dom Corria, being something of a fatalist, did not interfere. On this cockleshell of a craft, among these rude spirits of alien races, he was powerless. On land a diplomat and strategist of high order, here he was a cipher. Moreover, he was beaten to his knees, and he knew it. The arrival of the warship had upset his calculations. After many months' planning of flight, he had been forced, by the events of a few hours, into an aggressive campaign. His little cohort had done wonders, it is true, but of what avail were these ill-equipped stalwarts against a fast-moving fort, armed with heavy guns and propelled by thousands of steam horses? None, absolutely none. Dom Corria drew San Benavides aside.

"All is ended!" he said quietly. "We shall never see Brazil again, Salvador *meu*! Carmela must find another lover, it seems."

Salvador did not appear to be specially troubled by the new quest imposed on Carmela, but he was much perturbed by an uproar betokening disunion among the men who had already saved his life twice. He was beginning to believe in them. It was night, and they possessed a vessel under steam. Why did they not hurry into the obscurity of the smooth dark plain that looked so inviting?

It was left to Hozier to solve a problem that threatened to develop into a disastrous brawl. Danger sharpens a brave man's wits, but love makes him fey. To succor Iris was now his sole concern. He swung a couple of the excited sailors out of his way and managed to stem the torrent of Coke's futile curses.

"Give in to them!" he cried eagerly. "Tell them they are going ashore in the creek. That will stop the racket. If they listen to me, I can still find a means of escape."

"Avast yelpin', you swabs!" bellowed Coke. "D'y'e want to let every bally sojer on the island know where you are? We're makin' for the creek. Will *that* please you? Now, Mr. Norrie, let her rip!"

The head of the launch swung toward the protecting shadows. The men knew the bearings of Cotton-Tree Bay, so the angry voices yielded to selfish thought. If it was to be *sauve qui peut* when the vessel grounded, there was ample room for thought, seeing that each man's probable fate would be that of a mad dog.

Hozier seized the precious respite. He spoke loudly enough that all should hear, and he began with a rebuke.

"I am sorry that those of us who are left should have disgraced the fine record set up by the *Andromeda's* crew since the ship struck," he said. "Your messmates who fell fighting would hardly believe St. Peter himself if he told them that we were on the verge of open mutiny. I am ashamed of you. Let us have no more of that sort of thing. Sink or swim, we must pull together."

There was some discordant muttering, but he gained one outspoken adherent.

"Bully for you!" said the man who had suggested tree-climbing as an expedient.

"Shut up!" was the wrathful answer. "You've made plenty of row already. I only hope you have not attracted attention on the island. You may not have been heard, owing to the disturbance on the other side, but no thanks to any of you for that. Our skipper's first notion was to put to sea. Wasn't it natural? Do you want to be hunted over Fernando Noronha at daybreak? But he would have seen the uselessness of trying to slip the cruiser before the launch had gone a cable's length. Now, here is a scheme that strikes me as workable. At any rate, it offers a forlorn hope. There is a sharp bend in the creek just where the tidal water ends. I fancy the launch will float a little higher up, but we must risk it. We will take her in, unship the mast, tie a few boughs and vines on the funnel, and not twenty search-lights will find us."

A rumble of approving murmurs showed that he had scotched the dragon. It was even ready to become subservient again. He continued rapidly:

"No vessel of deep draught can come close in shore from the east. The cruiser will have the Grand-pere rock abeam within an hour, but, to make sure, two of you will climb the ridge and watch her movements. The rest will load up every available inch of space with wood and water and food. How can we win clear of Fernando Noronha without fuel? It is a hundred to one that the launch would not steam twenty miles on her present coal supply. Such as it is, we must keep it for an emergency, even if we are compelled to tear up the deck and dismantle the cabin."

"Talks like a book!" snorted Coke, and some of the men grinned sheepishly.

Hozier was coolly reminding them of those vital things which frenzy had failed wholly to take into account. Confidence was reborn in them. They wanted to cheer this fearless young officer who seemed to forget nothing, but the island promontories were so close at hand that perforce they were dumb.

The simplicity of the project was its best recommendation. Sailors themselves, the mind of the cruiser's commander was laid bare to them. He would soon be convinced that the launch had passed him in the dark ere the search-light looked out over the sea. Long before the circuit of Fernando Noronha was completed he would be itching to rush at top speed along the straight line to Pernambuco. It was a bold thing, too, to land on the island and stock their vessel for a voyage, the end of which no man could foresee. The dare-devil notion fascinated them. In that instant, the *Andromeda's* crew returned to their allegiance, which was as well, since it was fated to be stiffly tested many times ere they were reported inside 1 degree West again.

Unfortunately, Coke was in a raging temper. Never before had his supremacy been challenged. Having lost control over his men, he owed its restoration to Hozier. Such a fact was gall and wormwood to a man of his character, and he was mean-souled enough to be vindictive. Promising himself the future joy of pounding to a jelly the features of every mother's son among the fore-castle hands, he began to snarl his orders.

"Watts, you must leg it to the sky-line, an' pipe the cruiser. Olsen, you go, too, an' see that Mr. Watts doesn't find a brewery. Hozier, p'raps you'd like to rig the mistletoe. Miss Yorke 'll 'elp, I'm sure. It's up to you, mister, an' his nibs with the sword, to parly-voov to the other convicts about the grub. Is there a nigger's wood-pile handy? If not, we must collar the hut. I'll take care of the stowage."

He meant each jibe to hurt, and probably succeeded, but Watts was too despondent, and Hozier and De Sylva too self-controlled, to say aught that would add to their difficulties. Nevertheless, he was answered, from a quarter whence

retort was least expected.

"You must modify your instructions, Captain Coke," said Iris with quiet scorn. "It would be a shameful act to destroy the house of those who befriended us. They gave freely of their stores, as you will see by the supplies lashed to the catamaran, and will assist us further if Senhor De Sylva appeals to them----"

"You can safely leave that to me," broke in Dom Corria.

But Iris was not to be placated thus easily.

"I know that," she said. "I only wished Captain Coke to understand that if he cannot make clear his meaning he should obey rather than command."

"The lady 'as 'ad the last word. Now let's get busy," sneered Coke.

Hozier, who had not quitted his side since the incipient outbreak was quelled, gripped his shoulder.

"There is a pile of wood near the cottage," he said in Coke's ear. "I saw it there. It must be paid for. Have you any money?"

"A loose quid or two--no more."

"A sovereign will be ample. Miss Yorke has already given the owners two pounds."

"Wot for?"

"For their kindness. You are all there when it comes to a scrap, skipper, but at most other times you ought to be muzzled. No, don't talk now. We will discuss the point on some more suitable occasion, when we can deal with it fully, and Miss Yorke is not present."

Philip spoke in a whisper, but the low pitch of his voice did not conceal its menace. He was longing to twine his fingers round Coke's thick neck, and some hint of his desire was communicated by the clutch of his hand. Coke shook himself free. He feared no man born, but it would be folly to attack Hozier then, and he was not a fool.

"Let go, you blank ijjit," he growled. "I've no grudge ag'in you. If we pull out of this mess you'll 'ave to square matters wi' David Verity an' that other ole ninny, Dickey Bulmer. She's promised to 'im, you know. Told me so 'erself, so there's no mistake. I got me rag out, I admit, an' 'oo wouldn't after bein' 'owled down by those swine forrard. My godfather! Watch me put it over 'em w'en I get the chanst. Stop 'er, Norrie! There's plenty of way on 'er to round that bend."

Hozier reflected that he had chosen an odd moment to quarrel with his captain, whose mordant humor in the matter of the mistletoe was only accentuated by his reference to Iris's reported engagement. The pungent smell of the mangrove swamp was wafted now to his nostrils. It brought a species of warning that the disagreeable conditions of life in Fernando Noronha were yet active. It was not pleasant to be thus suddenly reminded of pitfalls that might exist in England; meanwhile, here was the launch thrusting her nose into the mud and shingle of this malevolent island.

To his further annoyance, San Benavides, who depended on his compatriot for a summary of the latest scheme, asked Iris to accompany De Sylva and himself to the hut.

"They are stupid creatures, these peasants," he said. "When they see you they will not be frightened."

There was so much reason in the statement that Iris was a ready volunteer. Soon all hands were at work, and it was due to the girl's forethought that strips of linen were procured from Luisa Gomez, and healing herbs applied to the cuts and bruises of the injured men. Sylva was all for leaving the two soldiers on the island, but Coke's sailor-like acumen prevented the commission of that blunder.

"No, that will never do," he said, with irritating offhandness. "These jokers will be found at daylight, an' they'll be able to say exactly wot time we quit. The wimmin can make out they was scared stiff an' darsent stir. It 'ud be different with the sojers. An' we ain't goin' to have such a 'eart-breakin' start, even if the cruiser clears away soon after two o'clock."

"Where do you propose to make for?"

"Where d'ye think, mister? Nor'-east by nor', to be sure, until we sight some homeward-bound ship."

There was a pause. The pair could talk unheard, since they were standing on the bank, and the men were either loading firewood and fruit and cassava, or stripping trees and vines to hide the superstructure of the launch.

"You mean to abandon everything, then?" said De Sylva. He seemed to be watching the onward sweep of the search-light as the warship went to the north. But Coke was shrewd. He felt that there was something behind the words, and he suspected the ex-President's motives.

"I don't see any 'elp for it," he answered. "Gord's trewth, wot is there to abandon? I've lost me ship, an' me money, an' me papers, an' 'arf me men. Unless one was lookin' for trouble, this ain't no treasure island, mister."

"Yet it might be made one."

"As how?"

"Do you not realize how greatly the members of the present Government fear my return to Brazil? Here, I am their prisoner, practically friendless, almost alone. They dare not kill me by process of law, yet they are moving heaven and earth to prevent my escape, or shoot me down in the act. Why? Because they know that the people are longing to hail me as President again. Suppose you and your men took me to Pernambuco----"

"S'pose hell!" snapped Coke.

"Please listen. You can but refuse when you look at the facts fairly. If, as I say, I were put ashore at Pernambuco, or at any other of half a dozen ports I can name, I should be among my own followers. You, Captain Coke, and every officer and man of your ship, and her owners, and the relatives of those who have lost their lives, would not only be paid all just claims by the new Government, but adequately rewarded. In your own case, the recompense would be princely. But, assuming that we board a vessel bound for Europe, what certainty have you that you will ever receive a penny?"

"Oh, reely, that's comin' it a bit thick, mister," growled Coke.

"You believe I am exaggerating the difficulties of your position? Pray consider. Your vessel is broken up. She was fired on while at anchor on the wrong side of the island, on the very day selected for my escape. You and your men manage to dodge the bullets, and, under my leadership, assisted by Captain San Benavides, you overrun the place by night, kill several soldiers, seize a launch, despoil peasants of their crops and stores, and make off with a good deal of property belonging to the Brazilian Government, not to mention the presence in your midst of such a significant personage as myself. Speaking candidly, Senhor Captain, what chance have you of convincing any international court of your innocence? Who will believe that you were not a true filibuster? That is what Brazil will say you are. How will you disprove it? In any event, who will enforce your claims against my country? English public opinion would never compel your Government to take action in such an exceedingly doubtful case, now would it?"

"If we was to try and land you in Brazil, we'd bust up our claim for good an' all," muttered Coke. Though this was a powerful argument against De Sylva's theory, it revealed certain qualms of perplexity. The other man's brilliant eyes gleamed for an instant, but he guarded his voice. He was in his element now. When words were weapons he could vanquish a thousand such adversaries.

"I think otherwise," he said slowly. "A judge might well hold that in a small vessel like the launch you were entitled to make for the nearest land. But I grant you that point; it is really immaterial. If I fail, you lose everything. Accept my offer, and you have a reasonable chance of winning a fortune."

"Wot exactly is your offer?"

"Ample compensation officially. Five thousand pounds to you in person."

"Five thousand!" Coke cleared a throat husky with doubt. He scratched his head under the absurd-looking kepi which he was still wearing; for a moment, his lips set in grim calculation. "That 'ud make things pretty easy for the missus an' the girls," he muttered. "An' there's no new ship for me w'en Dickey Bulmer cocks 'is eye at Hozier. It's a moral there'll be a holy row between 'im an' David.... D'ye mean it, mister?"

"Even if I fail, and my life is spared, I will pay you the money out of my own private funds," was the vehement reply.

"Well, well, leave the job to me. You sawr 'ow them tinkers jibbed just now. I must 'umor 'em a bit, d--n 'em. But wait till the next time some of 'em ships under me. Lord luv' a duck, won't I skin 'em? Not 'arf!"

De Sylva, with all his admirable command of English, could not follow the Coke variety in its careless freedom. But he knew his man. Though bewildered by strange names and stranger words, he was alive to the significance of things being made easy "for the missus and the girls." So, even this gnarled sea-dog had a soft spot in his heart! On the very brink of the precipice his mind turned to his women-kind, just as De Sylva himself had whispered a last memory of his daughter to San Benavides when their common doom was seemingly unavoidable.

He would urge no more, since Coke was willing to fall in with his designs, but he could not forbear from clinching matters.

"I promise on my honor----" he began.

But the nearer surface of the sea flashed into a dazzling distinctness, and Coke dragged him down to the launch. The cruiser had rounded Rat Island, and was devoting one sweeping glance eastward ere she sought her prey in creek or tortuous channel. The men were summoned hastily. Watts and Olsen had been warned to crouch behind the rocks on the crest, while those who remained near the launch were told to hide among the trees or crowd into the small cabin. Movement of any kind was forbidden. There was no knowing who might be astir on the hills, and a sharp eye might note the presence of foreigners in Cotton-Tree Bay. Hozier had not forgotten the risk of detection from the shore, and the vessel was plentifully decorated with greenery. The long, large-leafed vines and vigorous castor-oil plants were peculiarly useful at this crisis. Trailing over the low freeboard into the water, they screened the launch so completely that Watts and the Norwegian, perched high above the creek at a distance of three hundred yards, could only guess her whereabouts when the search-light made the Gomez plantation light as day.

The cruiser evidently discovered traces of the *Andromeda* on Grand-pere. She stopped an appreciable time, and created a flutter in many anxious hearts by a loud hoot of her siren. It did not occur to anyone at the moment that she was signaling to the troops bivouacked on South Point. De Sylva was the first to read this riddle aright. He whispered his belief, and it soon won credence, since the warship continued her scrutiny of the coast-line.

At last, after a wearying delay, she vanished. Five minutes later, Watts and Olsen brought the welcome news that she was returning to the roadstead.

It was then half-past two o'clock, and the sun would rise soon after five. Now or never the launch must make her effort. Ready hands tore away her disguise, she was tilted by crowding in the poop nearly every man on board, the engines throbbed, and she was afloat.

At daybreak the thousand-foot peak of Fernando Noronha was a dark blur on the western horizon. No sail or smudge of smoke broke the remainder of the far-flung circle. The fugitives could breathe freely once more. They were not pursued.

Iris fell asleep when assured that the dreaded warship was not in sight. Hozier, too, utterly exhausted by all that he had gone through, slept as if he were dead. Coke, whose iron constitution defied fatigue, though it was with the utmost difficulty that he had walked across the narrow breadth of Fernando Noronha, took the first watch in person. He chatted with the men, surprised them by his candor on the question of compensation, and announced his resolve to make for the three-hundred-mile channel between Fernando Noronha and the mainland.

"You see, it's this way, me lads," he explained affably. "We're short o' vittles an' bunker, an' if we kep' cruisin' east in this latitood we'd soon be drawrin' lots to see 'oo'd cut up juiciest. So we must run for the tramp's track, which is two hundred miles to the west. We'll bear north, an' that rotten cruiser will look south for sartin, seein' as 'ow they know we 'ave the next President aboard."

Coke paused to take breath.

"Wot a pity we can't give 'im a leg up," he added confidentially. "It 'ud be worth a pension to every man jack of us. 'Ere 'e is, special freight, so to speak. W'y 'e'd sign anythink."

Once the train was laid, it was a simple matter to fire the mine. When Hozier awoke, to find the launch heading west, he was vastly astonished by Coke's programme. It was all cut and dried, and there was really nothing to cavil at. If they met a steamship, and she stopped in response to their signals, her captain would be asked to take care, not only of Miss Yorke, but of any other person who shirked further adventure. As for Coke, and Watts, and the majority of the

men, they were pledged to De Sylva. Even Norrie, the engineer, a hard-headed Scot, meant to stick to the launch until the President that was and would be again was safely landed among his expectant people.

Watts let the cat out of the bag later.

"Those of us 'oo don't leave Dom Wot's-'is-name in the lurch are to get ten years' full pay, extry an' over an' above wot the court allows," he said. "Just think of it! Don't it make your mouth water? Reminds me of a chap I wunst read about in a trac'. It tole 'ow 'e took to booze. One 'ot Sunday, bein' out for a walk, 'e swiped 'arf a pint of ginger beer, the next 'e tried shandy-gaff, the third 'e went the whole hog, an' then 'e never stopped for ten years. My godfather! Ten years' pay an' a ten years' drunk! It's enough to make a sinner of any man."

Hozier laughed. Two days ago he would have asked no better luck than the helping of Dom Corria to regain his Presidentship. Now, there was Iris to protect. He would not be content to leave her in charge of the first grimy collier they encountered, nor was he by any means sure that she would agree to be thus disposed of. He was puzzled by the singular unanimity of purpose displayed by his shipmates. But that was their affair. His was to insure Iris's safety; the future he must leave to Providence.

And, indeed, Providence contrived things very differently.

By nightfall the launch was a hundred miles west of the island. Norrie got eight knots out of her, but it needed no special calculation to discover that she would barely make the coast of Brazil if she consumed every ounce of coal and wood on board. The engines were strong and in good condition, but she had no bunker space for a long voyage. Were it not for Hozier's foresight she would have been drifting with the Gulf Stream four hours after leaving the island. As it was, unless they received a fresh supply of fuel from another ship, they must unquestionably take the straightest line to the mainland.

During the day they had sighted three vessels, but at such distances that signaling was useless, each being hull down on their limited horizon. Moreover, they had to be cautious. The cruiser, trusting to her speed, might try a long cast north and south of the launch's supposed path. She alone, among passing ships, would be scouring the sea with incessant vigilance, and it behooved them, now as ever, not to attract her attention. They were burning wood, so there was no smoke, and the mast was unstepped. Yet the hours of daylight were tortured by constant fear. Even Iris was glad when the darkness came and they were hidden.

At midnight a curious misfortune befell them. The compass had been smashed during the fight, and not a sailor among them owned one of the tiny compasses that are often worn as a charm on the watchchain. This drawback, of little consequence when sun or stars could be seen, assumed the most serious importance when a heavy fog spread over the face of the waters. The set of the current was a guide of a sort, but, as events proved, it misled them. Man is ever prone to over-estimate, and such a slight thing as the lap of water across the bows of a small craft was sure to be miscalculated; they contrived to steer west, it is true, but with a southerly inclination.

At four o'clock, by general reckoning, they were mid-way between island and continent. They were all wide awake, too weary and miserable to sleep. Suddenly a fog-horn smote the oppressive gloom. It drew near. A huge blotch crossed their bows. They could feel it rather than see it. They heard some order given in a foreign language, and De Sylva whispered:

"The *Sao Geronimo*!"

"The wot-ah?" demanded Coke, who was standing beside him.

"The cruiser!"

Coke listened. He could distinguish the half-speed beating of twin screws. He knew at once that the ex-President must have recognized the warship as she passed the creek, but, by some accident, had failed to mention her name during the long hours that had sped in the meantime. The sinister specter passed and the launch crept on. Everyone on board was breathless with suspense. Faces were shrouded by night and the fog, but some gasped and others mumbled prayers. One of the wounded soldiers shouted in delirium, and a coat was thrust over his head with brutal force. The fog-horn blared again, two cables' lengths distant. They were saved, for the moment!

In a little while, perhaps twenty minutes, they heard another siren. It sounded a different note, a quaintly harsh blend of discords. Whatsoever ship this might be, it was not the *Sao Geronimo*. And in that thrilling instant there was a coldness on one side of their faces that was not on the other. Moist skin is a weather-vane in its way. A breeze was

springing up. Soon the fog would be rolled from off the sea and the sun would peer at them in mockery.

Coke's gruff voice reached every ear:

"This time we're nabbed for keeps unless you all do as I bid you," he said. "When the fog lifts, the cruiser will see us. There's only one thing for it. Somewhere, close in, is a steamer. She's a tramp, by the wheeze of 'er horn. We've got to board 'er an' sink the launch. If she's British, or American, O.K., as 'er people will stand by us. If she's a Dago, we've got to collar 'er, run every whelp into the forehold, an' answer the cruiser's signals ourselves. That's the sittiwation, accordin' to my reckonin'. Now, 'oo's for it?"

"Butt right in, skipper," said a gentleman who claimed Providence, Rhode Island, as the place of his nativity.

Hozier, who had contrived to draw near Iris while Coke was speaking, breathed softly, so that none other could hear:

"This is rank piracy. But what else can we do?"

"Is it wrong?" she asked.

"Well--no, provided we kill no one. We are justified in saving our own lives, and the average German or Italian shipmaster would hand us over to the Brazilians without scruple."

Iris was far from Bootle and its moralities.

"I don't care what happens so long as you are not hurt," she whispered.

"Mr. Hozier," said Coke thickly.

"Yes, sir."

"You've got good eyes an' quick ears. Lay out as far forrard as you can, an' pass the word for steerin'!"

Hozier obeyed. The discordant bleat of a foghorn came again, apparently right ahead. In a few seconds he caught the flapping of a propeller, and silenced the launch's engines.

"We are close in now," he said to Coke, after a brief and noiseless drift. "Why not try a hail!"

"Ship ahoy!" shouted Coke, with all the force of brazen lungs.

The screw of the unseen ship stopped. The sigh of escaping steam reached them.

"*Holla! Wer rufe?*" was the gruff answer.

"Sink me if it ain't a German!" growled Coke, *sotto-voce*, "Norrie, you must stick here till I sing out to you. Then open your exhaust an' unscrew a sea-cock.... Wot ship is that?" he vociferated aloud.

Some answer was forthcoming--what, it mattered not. The launch bumped into the rusty ribs of a twelve-hundred ton tramp. A rope ladder was lowered. A round-faced Teuton mate--fat and placid--was vastly surprised to find a horde of nondescripts pouring up the ship's side in the wake of a short, thick, bovine-looking person who neither understood nor tried to understand a word he was saying.

These extraordinary visitors from the deep brought with them a girl and three wounded men. By this time the captain was aroused; he spoke some English.

"Vas iss diss?" he asked, surveying the newcomers with amazement, and their bizarre costumes with growing nervousness. "Vere haf you coomed vrom?"

Coke pushed him playfully into the cook's galley.

"This is too easy," he chortled. "Set about 'em, you swabs. Don't hurt anybody unless they ax for it. Round every son of a gun into the fo'c'sle till I come. Mr. Watts, the bridge for you. Olsen, take the wheel. Mr. Hozier, see wot you can find in their flag locker. Now, Mr. Norrie! Sharp for it. You're wanted in the engine-room."

And that is how ex-President Dom Corria Antonio De Sylva acquired the nucleus of his fleet, though, unhappily, an accident to a sea-cock forthwith deprived him of a most useful and seaworthy steam launch.

CHAPTER XI

A LIVELY MORNING IN EXCHANGE BUILDINGS

Coke and his merry men became pirates during the early morning of Thursday, September 2d; the curious reader can ascertain the year by looking up "Brazil" in any modern Encyclopedia, and turning to the sub-division "Recent History." On Monday, September 6th, David Verity entered his office in Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, hung his hat and overcoat on their allotted pegs, swore at the office boy because some spots of rain had come in through an open window, and ran a feverish glance through his letters to learn if any envelopes bearing the planetary devices of the chief cable companies had managed to hide themselves among the mass of correspondence.

The act was perfunctory. Well he knew that telephone or special messenger would speedily have advised him if news of the *Andromeda* had arrived since he left the office on Saturday afternoon. But it is said that drowning men clutch at straws, and the metaphor might be applied to Verity with peculiar aptness. He was sinking in a sea of troubles, sinking because the old buoyancy was gone, sinking because many hands were stretched forth to push him under, and never one to draw him forth.

There was no cablegram, of course. Dickey Bulmer, who had become a waking nightmare to the unhappy shipowner, had said there wouldn't be--said it twelve hours ago, after wringing from Verity the astounding admission that Iris was on board the *Andromeda*. It was not because the vessel was overdue that David confessed. Bulmer, despite his sixty-eight years, was an acute man of business. Moreover, he was blessed with a retentive memory, and he treasured every word of the bogus messages from Iris concocted by her uncle. They were lucid at first, but under the stress of time they wore thin, grew disconnected, showed signs of the strain imposed on their author's imagination. Bulmer, a typical Lancashire man, blended in his disposition a genial openhandedness with a shrewd caution. He could display a princely generosity in dealing with Verity as the near relative and guardian of his promised wife; to the man whom he suspected of creating the obstacles that kept her away from him he applied a pitiless logic.

The storm had burst unexpectedly. Bulmer came to dinner, ate and drank and smoked in quiet amity until David's laboring muse conveyed his niece's latest "kind love an' good wishes," and then----

"Tell you wot," said Dickey, "there's another five thousand due to-morrow on the surveyor's report."

"There is," said Verity, knowing that his guest and prospective partner alluded to the new steamer in course of construction on the Clyde.

"Well, it won't be paid."

David lifted his glass of port to hide his face. Was this the first rumbling of the tempest? Though expected hourly, he was not prepared for it. His hand trembled. He dared not put the wine to his lips.

"Wot's up now?" he asked.

"You're playin' some underhand game on me, David, an' I won't stand it," was the unhesitating reply. "You're lyin' about Iris. You've bin lyin' ever since she disappeared from Bootle. Show me 'er letters an' their envelopes, an' I'll find the money. But, of course, you can't. They don't exist. Now, own up as man to man, an' I'll see if this affair can be settled without the lawyers. You know wot it means once *they* take hold."

Then David set down the untasted wine and told the truth. Not all--that was not to be dreamed of. In the depths of his heart he feared Bulmer. The old man's repute for honesty was widespread. He would fling his dearest friend into prison for such a swindle as that arranged between Coke and the shipowner. But it was a positive relief to divulge everything that concerned Iris. From his pocket-book David produced her frayed letter, and Bulmer read it slowly, aloud, through eyeglasses held at a long focus.

Now, given certain definite circumstances, an honest man and a rogue will always view them differently. David had

interpreted the girl's guarded phrases in the light of his villainous compact with Coke. Dickey, unaware of this disturbing element, was inwardly amazed to learn that Verity had lied so outrageously with the sole object of carrying through a commercial enterprise.

"Tell him I shall marry him when the *Andromeda* returns to England from South America," he read. And again ... "The vessel is due back at the end of September, I believe, so Mr. Bulmer will not have long to wait."

If, in the first instance, David had not been swept off his feet by the magnitude of the catastrophe, if he had not commenced the series of prevarications before the letter reached him, he might have adopted the only sane course and taken Bulmer fully into his confidence. It was too late now. Explanation was useless. The only plea that occurred to him was more deadly than silence, since it was her knowledge of the contemplated crime that made Iris a stowaway. He had never guessed how that knowledge was attained and the added mystery intensified his torture.

Dickey rose from the table. His movements showed his age that night.

"I'll think it over, David," he said. "There's more in this than meets the eye. I'll just go home an' think it over. Mebbe I'll call at your place in the mornin'."

So here was Verity, awaiting Bulmer's visit as a criminal awaits a hangman. There was no shred of hope in his mind that his one-time crony would raise a finger to save him from bankruptcy. Some offenses are unforgivable, and high in the list ranks the folly of separating a wealthy old man from his promised bride.

Now that a reprieve was seemingly impossible, he faced his misfortunes with a dour courage. It had been a difficult and thankless task during the past month to stave off pressing creditors. With Iris in Bootle and Bulmer her devoted slave, Verity would have weathered the gale with jaunty self-confidence. But that element of strength was lacking; nay, more, he felt in his heart that it could never be replaced. He was no longer the acute, blustering, effusive Verity, who in one summer's afternoon had secured a rich partner and forced an impecunious sailor to throw away a worn-out ship. The insurance held good, of course, and there simply *must* be some sort of tidings of the *Andromeda* to hand before the end of September. Yet things had gone wrong, desperately wrong, and he was quaking with the belief that there was worse in store.

He began to read his letters. They were mostly in the same vein, duns, more or less active. His managing clerk entered.

"There's an offer of 5s. 6d. Cardiff to Bilbao and Bilbao to the Tyne for the *Hellespont*. It is better than nothing. Shall we take it, sir?"

The *Hellespont* was the firm's other ship. She, too, was old and running at a loss.

"Yes. Wot is it, coal or patent fuel?"

"Coal, with a return freight of ore."

"Wish it was dynamite, with fuses laid on."

The clerk grinned knowingly. Men grow callous when money tilts the scale against human lives.

"There's no news of the *Andromeda*, and *her* rate is all right," he said.

David scowled at him.

"D--n the rate!" he cried. "I want to 'ear of the ship. Wot the----"

But his subordinate vanished. David read a few more letters. Some were from the families of such of the *Andromeda's* crew as lived in South Shields, the Hartlepoons, Whitby. They asked as a great favor that a telegram might be sent when----

"Oh, curse my luck!" groaned the man, quivering under the conviction that the *Andromeda* was lost "by the act of God" as the charter-party puts it. The belief unnerved him. Those words have an ominous ring in the ears of evil-doers. He could show a bold front to his fellowmen, but he squirmed under the dread conception of a supernatural vengeance. So, like every other malefactor, David railed against his "luck." Little did he guess the extraordinary turn that his "luck" was about to take.

The office boy announced a visitor, evidently not the terrible Bulmer, since he said:

"Gennelman to see yer, sir."

"Oo is it?" growled the shipowner.

"Gennelman from the noospaper, sir."

"Can't be bothered."

"'E sez hit's most himportant, sir."

"Wot is?"

"I dunno, sir."

"Well, show 'im in. I'll soon settle 'im."

A quiet-mannered young man appeared. He ignored David's sharp, "Now, wot can I do for you?" and drew up a chair, on which he seated himself, uninvited.

"May I ask if you have received any private news of the *Andromeda*?" he began.

"No."

"In that case, you must prepare yourself for a statement that may give you a shock," said the journalist.

David creaked round in his chair. His face, not so red as of yore, paled distinctly.

"Is she lost?" said he in a strangely subdued tone.

"I—I fear she is. But there is much more than an ordinary shipwreck at issue. Several telegrams of the gravest import have reached us this morning. Perhaps, before I ask you any questions, you ought to read them. They are in type already, and I have brought you proofs. Here is the first."

David took from the interviewer's outstretched hand a long strip of white paper. For an appreciable time his seething brain refused to comprehend the curiously black letters that grouped themselves into words on the limp sheet. And, indeed, he was not to be blamed if he was dull of understanding, for this is what he read:

"REVOLUTION IN BRAZIL.

"SERIOUS POSITION.

"STARTLING ESCAPE OF A BRITISH SHIP.

"RIO DE JANEIRO, September 5th. A situation of exceptional gravity has evidently arisen on the island of Fernando do Noronha, whence, it is said, ex-President De Sylva recently attempted to escape. A battleship and two cruisers have been despatched thither under forced draught. No public telegrams have been received from the island during the past week, and the authorities absolutely refuse any information as to earlier events, though the local press hints at some extraordinary developments not unconnected with the appearance off the island of a British steamship known as the *Andromeda*.

"*Later*--De Sylva landed last night at the small port of Maceio in the province of Alagoas, a hundred miles south of Pernambuco. It is currently reported that Fernando Noronha was captured by a gang of British freebooters. De Sylva's return is unquestionable. To-day he issued a proclamation, and his partisans have seized some portion of the railway. Excitement here is at fever heat."

Verity glared at the journalist. He laughed, almost hysterically.

"The *Andromeda*!" he gasped. "Wot rot! Wot silly rot!"

"Better withhold your opinion until you have mastered the whole story," was the unemotional comment. "Here is a more detailed message. It is printed exactly as cabled. We have not added a syllable except the interpolation of such words as 'that' and 'the.' You will find it somewhat convincing, I imagine."

The shipowner grasped another printed slip. This time he was able to read more lucidly:

"PERNAMBUCO, September 4th. Public interest in the abortive attempt to reinstate Dom Corria De Sylva as President was waning rapidly when it was fanned into fresh activity by news that reached this port to-day. It appears that on the 31st ulto. a daring effort was made to free De Sylva, who, with certain other ministers expelled by the successful revolution of two years ago, is a prisoner on the island of Fernando do Noronha. Lloyd's agent on that island reports that the British steamer *Andromeda*, owned by David Verity & Co. of Liverpool, put into South Bay, on the southeast side of Fernando do Noronha, early on the morning of August 31st, and it is alleged that her mission was to take De Sylva and his companions on board. The garrison, forewarned by the central government, and already on the *qui vive* owing to the disappearance of their important prisoners from their usual quarters, opened fire on the *Andromeda* as soon as she revealed her purpose by lowering a boat.

"The steamer, being unarmed, made no attempt to defend herself, and was speedily disabled. She sank, within five minutes, off the Grand-pere rock, with all on board. With reckless bravado, her commander ran up the vessel's code signals and house flag while she was actually going down, thus establishing her identity beyond a shadow of doubt. A note of pathos is added to the tragedy by the undoubted presence of a lady on board--probably De Sylva's daughter, though it was believed here that the ex-President's family were in Paris. Telegrams from the island are strictly censored, and the foregoing statement is unofficial, but your correspondent does not question its general accuracy. Indeed, he has reason to credit a widespread rumor that the island is still in a very disturbed condition. No one knows definitely whether or not De Sylva has been recaptured. It is quite certain that he has not landed in Brazil, but the reticence of the authorities as to the state of affairs on Fernando Noronha leads to the assumption that he and a few staunch adherents are still in hiding in one of the many natural fastnesses with which the island abounds.

"The British community on the littoral is deeply stirred by the drastic treatment received by the *Andromeda*. It is pointed out that another ship, the *Andros-y-Mela*, believed to have been chartered by the insurgents, is under arrest at Bahia, and the similarity between the two names is regarded as singular, to say the least. Were it not that Lloyd's agent, whose veracity cannot be questioned, has stated explicitly that the *Andromeda* put in to South Bay--a point significantly far removed from the regular track of trading vessels--it might be urged that a terrible mistake had been made. In any event, the whole matter must be strictly inquired into, and one of His Majesty's ships stationed in the South Atlantic should visit the island at the earliest date possible. *Delayed in transmission.*"

Something buzzed inside Verity's head and stilled all sense of actuality. He was unnaturally calm. Though the weather was chilly for early September, great beads of perspiration glistened on his forehead. His eyes were dull; they lacked their wonted shiftiness. He gazed at the reporter unblinkingly, as though thought itself refused to act.

"Is that the lot?" he inquired mechanically.

"Nearly all, at present. These cablegrams reached us through London, and the agency took the earliest measures to substantiate their accuracy. The Brazilian Embassy pooh-poohs the whole story, but Embassies invariably do that until the news is stale. By their own showing, Ambassadors are singularly ill-informed men, especially in matters affecting their own countries. Here, however, is a short telegram from Paris which is of minor interest."

And Verity read again:

"PARIS, September 6th. The members of Dom Corria De Sylva's family, seen early this morning at the Hotel Continental, deny that any lady connected with the cause of Brazilian freedom took part in the attempted rescue of the ex-President. They are much annoyed by the unfounded report, and hold strongly to the opinion that the revolution would now have been a *fait accompli* had not a traitor revealed the destination of the *Andros-y-Mela* and thus led to that vessel's detention at Bahia."

The lady! Iris Yorke! At last David's supercharged mind was beginning to assimilate ideas. He was conscious of a fierce pain in the region of his heart. The buzzing in his head continued, and the journalist's voice came to him as through a dense screen.

"You will observe that the former President's relatives tacitly admit that there was a plot on foot," the other was saying. "It is important to note, too, that the long message from Pernambuco, marked 'delayed in transmission' seems to imply a prior telegram which was suppressed. It alludes to a revolt of which nothing is known here. Now, Mr. Verity, I want to ask you----"

The door was flung open. In rushed Dickey Bulmer with a speed strangely disproportionate to his years. In his hands he held a crumpled newspaper.

"You infernal blackguard, have you seen this?" he roared, and his attitude threatened instant assault on the dazed man looking up at him. The reporter moved out of the way. Here, indeed, was "copy" of the right sort. Bulmer held a position of much local importance. That he should use such language to the owner of the *Andromeda* promised developments "of the utmost public interest."

David stood up. His chair fell over with a crash. He held on to the table to steady himself. Even Bulmer, white with rage, could not fail to see that he was stunned.

But Dickey was not minded to spare him on that account.

"Answer me, you scoundrel!" he shouted, thrusting the paper almost into David's face. "You are glib enough when it suits your purpose. Were *you* in this? Is this the reason you didn't tell me Iris was on board till I forced the truth out of you last night?"

The managing clerk came in. Behind him, a couple of juniors and the office boy supplied reinforcements. They all had the settled conviction that their employer was a rogue, but he paid them in no niggardly fashion, and they would not suffer anyone to attack him.

This incursion from the external world had a restorative effect on Verity. Being what is termed a self-made man, he had a fine sense of his own importance, and his subordinates' lack of respect forthwith overcame every other consideration.

"Get out!" he growled, waving a hand toward the door.

"But, sir--please, gentlemen----" stuttered the senior clerk.

"Get out, I tell you! D--n yer eyes, 'oo sent for any of you?"

Undoubtedly David was recovering. The discomfited clerks retired. Even Dickey Bulmer was quieted a little. But he still shook the newspaper under David's nose.

"Now!" he cried. "Let's have it. No more of your flamin' made-up tales. Wot took you to shove the *Andromeda* into a rat-trap of this sort?"

David staggered away from the table. He seemed to be laboring for breath.

"'Arf a mo'. No need to yowl at me like that," he protested.

He fumbled with the lock of a corner cupboard, opened it, and drew forth a decanter and some glasses. A tumbler crashed to the floor, and the slight accident was another factor in clearing his wits. He swore volubly.

"Same thing 'appened that Sunday afternoon," he said, apparently oblivious of the other men's presence. "My poor lass upset one, she did. Wish she'd ha' flung it at my 'ed.... Did it say 'went down with all 'ands,' mister?" he demanded suddenly of the reporter.

"Yes, Mr. Verity."

"Is it true?"

"I trust not, but Lloyd's agent--well, I needn't tell you that Lloyd's is reliable. Was your niece on board? Is she the lady mentioned in the cablegram?"

Then Bulmer woke up to the fact that there was a stranger present.

"Ello!" he cried angrily. "Wot are you doin' ere? 'Oo are you? Be off, instantly."

"I am not going until Mr. Verity hears what I have to ask him, and answers, or not, as he feels disposed," was the firm reply.

"Leave 'im alone, Dickey. It's all right. Wot does it matter now 'oo knows all there is to know? Just gimme a minnit."

Verity poured out some brandy. Man is but a creature of habit, and the hospitable Lancastrian does not drink alone when there is company.

"'Ave a tiddy?" he inquired blandly.

Both Bulmer and the journalist believed that David was losing his faculties. Never did shipowner behave more queerly when faced by a disaster of like magnitude, involving, as did the *Andromeda's* loss, not only political issues of prime importance, but also the death of a near relative. They refused the proffered refreshment, not without some show of indignation. Verity swallowed a large dose of neat spirit. He thought it would revive him, so, of course, the effect was instantaneous. The same quantity of prussic acid could not have killed him more rapidly than the brandy rallied his scattered forces, and, not being a physiologist, he gave the brandy all the credit.

"Ah!" he said, smacking his lips with some of the old-time relish, "that puts new life into one. An' now, let's get on with the knittin'. I was a bit rattled when this young party steers in an' whacks 'is cock-an'-bull yarn into me 'and. 'Oo ever 'eard of a respectable British ship mixin' 'erself up with a South American revolution? The story is all moonshine on the face of it."

"I think otherwise, Mr. Verity, and Mr. Bulmer, I take it, agrees with me," said the reporter.

"Wot," blazed David, into whose mind had darted a notion that dazzled him by its daring, "d'ye mean to insinuate that I lent my ship to this 'ere Dom Wot's-'is-name? D'ye sit there an' tell me that Jimmie Coke, a skipper who's bin in my employ for sixteen year, would carry on that sort of fool's business behind 'is owner's back? Go into my clerk's office, young man, an' ax Andrews to show up a copy of the ship's manifest. See w'en an 'ow she was insured. Jot down the names of the freighters for this run, and skip round to their offices to verify. An' if that don't fill the bill, well, just interview yourself, an' say if you'd allow your niece, a bonnie lass like my Iris, to take a trip that might end in 'er bein' blown to bits. It's crool, that's wot it is, reel crool."

David was not simulating this contemptuous wrath. He actually felt it. His harsh voice cracked when he spoke of Iris, and the excited words gushed out in a torrent.

The reporter glanced at Bulmer, who was watching Verity with a tense expectancy that was not to be easily accounted for, since his manner and speech on entering the room had been so distinctly hostile.

"The lady referred to was Miss Iris Yorke, then?"

"'Oo else? I've on'y one niece. My trouble is that she went without my permission, in a way of speakin'. 'Ere, you'd better 'ave the fax. She was engaged to my friend, Mr. Bulmer, but, bein' a slip of a girl, an' fond o' romancin', she just put herself aboard the *Andromeda* without sayin' 'with your leave' or 'by your leave.' She wrote me a letter, w'ich sort of explains the affair. D'you want to see it?"

"If I may."

"No," said Bulmer.

"Yes," blustered Verity, fully alive now to the immense possibilities underlying the appearance in print of Iris's references to her forthcoming marriage.

"An' I say 'no,' an' mean it," said the older man. "Go slow, David, go slow. I was not comin' 'ere as your enemy when I found this paper bein' cried in the streets. It med me mad for a while. But I believe wot you've said, an' I'm not the man to want my business, or my future wife's I 'ope, to be chewed over by every Dick, Tom, an' 'Arry in Liverpool."

The reincarnation of David was a wonderful spectacle, the most impressive incident the journalist had ever witnessed, did he but know its genesis. The metamorphosis was physical as well as mental. Verity burgeoned before his very eyes.

"Of course, that makes a h-- a tremendous difference," said the shipowner. "You 'ave my word for it, an' that is enough for most men. Mr. Andrews 'll give you all the information you want. I'll cable now to Rio an' Pernambewco, an' see if I can get any straight news from the shippin' 'ouses there. I'll let you know if I 'ear anything, an' you might do the same by me."

The reporter gave this promise readily. He scented a possible scandal, and meant to keep in touch with Verity. Meanwhile, he was in need of the facts which the managing clerk could supply, so he took himself off.

Bulmer went to the window and looked out. A drizzle of sleet was falling from a gray sky. The atmosphere was heavy. It was a day singularly appropriate to the evil tidings that had shocked him into a fury against the man who had so willfully deceived him. David picked up the proof slips and reread them. He compared them with the paragraphs in the newspaper brought by Bulmer, and thrown by him on the table after his first outburst of helpless wrath. They were identical in wording, of course, but, somehow, their meaning was clearer in the printed page: and David, despite his uncouth diction, was a clever man.

He wrinkled his forehead now in analysis of each line. Soon he hit on something that puzzled him.

"Dickey," he said.

There was no answer. The old man peering through the window seemed to have bent and whitened even since he came into the room.

"Look 'ere, Dickey," went on David, "this dashed fairy-tale won't hold water. *You* know Coke. Is 'e the kind o' man to go bumpin' round like a stage 'ero, an' hoisting Union Jacks as the ship sinks? I ax you, is 'e? It's nonsense, stuff an' nonsense. An', if the Andromeeda was scrapped at Fernando Noronha, 'oo were the freebooters that collared the island, an' 'ow did this 'ere De Sylva get to Maceio? Are you listenin'?"

"Yes," said Bulmer, turning at last, and devouring Verity with his deep-set eyes.

"Well, wot d'ye think of it?"

"Did you send the ship to Fernando Noronha?"

It is needless to place on record the formula of David's denial. It was forcible, and served its purpose--that should suffice.

"Under ordinary conditions she would 'ave passed the island about the 31st?" continued Bulmer.

"Yes. Confound it, 'aven't I bin cablin' there every two days for a fortnight or more? B'lieve me or not, Dickey, it cut me to the 'eart to keep you in the dark about Iris. But I begun it, like an 'ijjit, an' kep' on with it."

"To sweeten me on account of the new ships, I s'pose?"

"Yes, that's it. No more lyin' for me. I'm sick of it."

"For the same reason you wanted that letter published?"

"Well--yes. There! You see I'm talkin' straight."

"So am I. If--if Iris is alive, the partnership goes on. If--she's dead, it doesn't."

"D'ye mean it?"

"I always mean wot I say."

The click of an indicator on the desk showed that Verity's private telephone had been switched on from the general office. By sheer force of routine, David picked up a receiver and placed it to his ear. The sub-editor of the newspaper whose representative had not been gone five minutes asked if he was speaking to Mr. Verity.

"Yes," said David, "wot's up now?" and he motioned to Bulmer to use a second receiver.

"A cablegram from Pernambuco states specifically that the captain and crew of the *Andromeda* fought their way across the island of Fernando Noronha, rescued Dom De Sylva, seized a steam launch, attacked and captured the German steamship *Unser Fritz*, and landed the insurgent leader at Maceio. The message goes on to say that the captain's name is Coke, and that he is accompanied by his daughter.... Eh? What did you say?... Are you there?"

"Yes, I'm 'ere, or I think I am," said David with a desperate calmness. "Is that all?"

"All for the present."

"It doesn't say that Coke is a ravin', tearin', 'owlin' lunatic, does it?"

"No. Is that your view?"

Bulmer's hand gripped David's wrist. Their eyes met.

"I was thinkin' that the chap who writes these penny novelette wires might 'ave rounded up his yarn in good shape," said Verity aloud.

"But there is not the slightest doubt that something of the kind has occurred," said the voice.

"It's a put-up job!" roared David. "Them bloomin' Portygees 'ave sunk my ship, an' they're whackin' in their flam now so as to score first blow. A year-old baby 'ud see that if 'is father was a lawyer."

The sub-editor laughed.

"Well, I'll ring you up again when the next message comes through," he said.

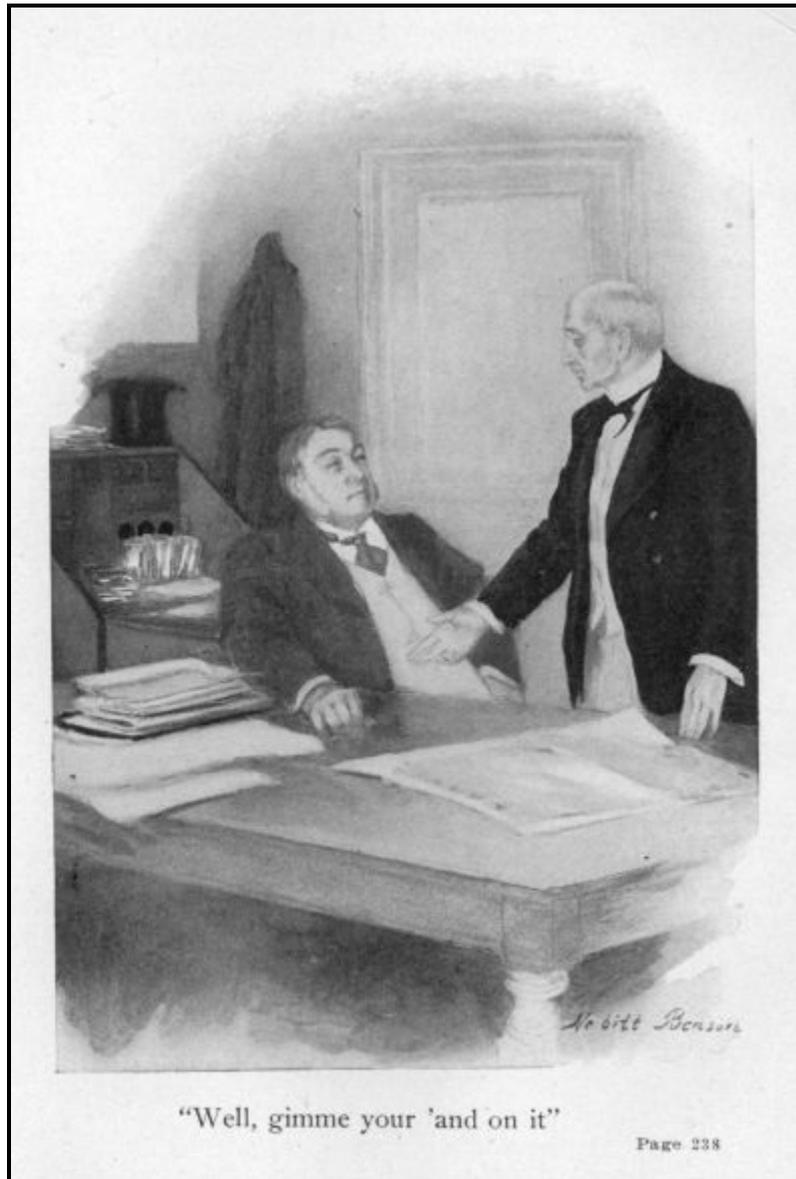
But to Bulmer, David said savagely:

"Wot's bitten Coke? 'E must 'ave gone stark, starin' mad."

"Iris is alive!" murmured Bulmer.

"Nice mess she med of things w'en she slung 'er 'ook from Linden 'Ouse," grunted her uncle.

"I don't blame 'er. She meant no 'arm. She's on'y a bit of a lass, w'en all is said an' done. Mebbe it's my fault, or yours, or the fault of both of us. An' now, David, I'll tell you wot I 'ad in me mind in comin' 'ere this morning. You're hard up. You don't know where to turn for a penny. If you're agreeable, I'll put a trustworthy man in this office an' give 'im full powers to pull your affairs straight. Mind you, I'm doin' this for Iris, not for you. An' now that we know wot's 'appening in South America, you an' I will go out there and look into things. A mail steamer will take us there in sixteen days, an' before we sail we can work the cables a bit so as to stop Iris from startin' for 'ome before we arrive. The trip will do us good, an' we'll be away from the gossip of Bootle. Are you game? Well, gimme your 'and on it."



[Illustration: "Well, gimme your 'and on it"]

CHAPTER XII

THE LURE OF GOLD

"Philip, I want to tell you something."

"Something pleasant?"

"No."

"Then why tell me?"

"Because, unhappily, it must be told. I hope you will forgive me, though I shall never forgive myself. Oh, my dear, my dear, why did we ever meet? And what am I to say? I—well, I have promised to marry another man."

"Disgraceful!" said Philip.

Though Iris's faltered confession might fairly be regarded as astounding, Philip was unmoved. The German captain had given him a cigar, and he was examining it with a suspicion that was pardonable after the first few whiffs.

"Philip dear, this is quite serious," said Iris, momentarily withdrawing her wistful gaze from the far-away line where sapphire sea and amber sky met in harmony. Northeastern Brazil is a favored clime. Bad weather is there a mere link, as it were, between unbroken weeks of brilliant sunshine, when nature lolls in the warmth and stirs herself only at night under the moon and the stars. That dingy trader, the *Unser Fritz*, ostensibly carrying wool and guano from the Argentine to Hamburg, was now swinging west at less than half speed over the long rollers which alone bore testimony to the recent gale. Already a deep tint of crimson haze over the western horizon was eloquent, in nature's speech, of land ahead. At her present pace, the *Unser Fritz* would enter the harbor at Pernambuco on the following morning.

Iris, her troubled face resting on her hands, her elbows propped on the rails of the poop on the port side, looked at Philip with an intense sadness that was seemingly lost on him. His doubts concerning the cigar had grown into a certainty. He cast it into the sea.

"I really mean what I say," she continued in a low voice that vibrated with emotion, for her obvious distress was enhanced by his evident belief that she was jesting. "I have given my word--written it--entered into a most solemn obligation. Somehow, the prospect of reaching a civilized place to-morrow induces a more ordered state of mind than has been possible since--since the *Andromeda* was lost."

"Who is he?" demanded Hozier darkly. "Coke is married. So is Watts. Dom Corria has other fish to fry than to dream of committing bigamy. Of course, I am well aware that you have been flirting outrageously with San Benavides--"

"Please don't make my duty harder for me," pleaded Iris. "Before I met you, before we spoke to each other that first day at Liverpool, I had promised to marry Mr. Bulmer, an old friend of my uncle's----"

"Oh,--he?... I am sorry for Mr. Bulmer, but it can't be done," interrupted Hozier.

"Philip, you do not understand. I--I cared for nobody then ... and my uncle said he was in danger of bankruptcy ... and Mr. Bulmer undertook to help him if I would consent...."

"Yes," agreed Philip, with an air of pleasant detachment, "I see. You are in a first-rate fix. I was always prepared for that. Coke told me about Bulmer--warned me off, so to speak. I forgot his claims at odd times, just for a minute or so, but he is a real bugbear--a sort of matrimonial bogey-man. If all goes well, and we enter Pernambuco without being fired at, you will be handed over to the British Consul, and he will send a rousing telegram about you to England. Bulmer, of course, will cause a rare stir at home. Who wouldn't? No wonder you are scared! It seems to me that there is only one safe line of action left open."

Iris did not respond to his raillery. She was despondent, nervous, uncertain of her own strength, afraid of the hurricane of publicity that would shortly swoop down on her.

"I wish you would realize how I feel in this matter," she said, with a persistence that was at least creditable to her honesty of purpose. "A woman's word should be held as sacred as a man's, Philip."

He turned and met her eyes. There was a tender smile on his lips.

"So you really believe you will be compelled to marry Mr. Bulmer?" he cried.

"Oh, don't be horrid!" she almost sobbed. "I cuc--cuc--can't help it."

"I have given some thought to the problem myself," he said, for, in truth, he was beginning to be alarmed by her tenacity, though determined not to let her perceive his changed mood. "Curiously enough, I was thinking more of your dilemma than of the signals when we were overhauled by the *Sao Geronimo* this morning. Odd, isn't it, how things pop into one's mind at the most unexpected moments? While I was coding our explanation that we were putting into Pernambuco for repairs, and that no steam yacht had been sighted between here and the River Plate, I was really trying to imagine what the cruiser's people would have said if I had told them the actual truth."

His apparent gravity drew the girl's thoughts for an instant from contemplating her own unhappiness.

"How could you have done that?" she asked. "We are going there to suit Senhor De Sylva's ends. We have

suffered so much already for his sake that we could hardly betray him now."

Hozier spread wide his hands with a fine affectation of amazement.

"I wasn't talking about De Sylva," he cried. "My remarks were strictly confined to the question of your marriage. I know you far too well, Iris, to permit you to go back to Bootle to be lectured and browbeaten by your uncle. I have never seen him, but, from all accounts, he is a rather remarkable person. He likes to have his own way, irrespective of other folks' feelings. I am a good guesser, Iris. I have a pretty fair notion why Coke meant to leave our poor ship's bones on a South American reef. I appreciate exactly how well it would serve Mr. David Verity's interests if his niece married a wealthy old party like Bulmer. By the way how old is Bulmer?"

"Nearly seventy."

Even Iris herself smiled then, though her tremulous mirth threatened to dissolve in tears.

"Ah, that's a pity," said Hozier.

"It is very unkind of you to treat me in this manner," she protested.

"But I am trying to help you. I say it is a pity that Bulmer should be a patriarch, because his only hope of marrying you is that I shall die first. Even then he must be prepared to espouse my widow. By the way, is it disrespectful to describe him as a patriarch? Isn't there some proverb about three score years and ten?"

"Philip, if only you would appreciate my dreadful position----"

"I do. It ought to be ended. The first parson we meet shall be commanded. Don't you see, dear, we really must get married at Pernambuco? That is what I wanted to signal to the cruiser: 'The *Unser Fritz* is taking a happy couple to church.' Wouldn't that have been a surprise?"

Iris clenched her little hands in despair. Why did he not understand her misery? Though she was unwavering in her resolution to keep faith with the man who had twitted her with taking all and giving nothing in return, she could not wholly restrain the tumult in her veins. Married in Pernambuco! Ah, if only that were possible! Yet she did not flinch from the lover-like scrutiny with which Philip now favored her.

"I am sure we would be happy together," she said, with a pathetic confidence that tempted him strongly to take her in his arms and kiss away her fears. "But we must be brave, Philip dear, brave in the peaceful hours as in those which call for another sort of courage. Last night we lived in a different world. We looked at death, you and I together, not once but many times, and you, at least, kept him at bay. But that is past. To-day we are going back to the commonplace. We must forget what happened in the land of dreams. I will never love any man but you, Philip; yet--I cannot marry you."

"You will marry me--in Pernambuco."

"I will not because I may not. Oh, spare me any more of this! I cannot bear it. Have pity, dear!"

"Iris, let us at least look at the position calmly. Do you really think that fate's own decree should be set aside merely to keep David Verity out of the Bankruptcy Court?"

"I have given my promise, and those two men are certain I will keep it."

"Ah, they shall release you. What then?"

"You do not know my uncle, or Mr. Bulmer. Money is their god. They would tell you that money can control fate. We, you and I, might despise their creed, but how am I to shirk the claims of gratitude? I owe everything to my uncle. He rescued my mother and me from dire poverty. He gave us freely of his abundance. Would you have me fail him now that he seeks my aid? Ah, me! If only I had never come on this mad voyage! But it is too late to think of that now. Perhaps--if I had not promised--I might steel my heart against him--but, Philip, you would never think highly of me again if I were so ready to rend the hand that fed me. We have had our hour, dear. Its memory will never leave me. I shall think of you, dream of you, when, it may be, some other girl--oh, no, I do not mean that! Philip, don't be angry with me to-day. You are wringing my heart!"

It was in Hozier's mind to scoff in no measured terms at the absurd theory that he should renounce his oft-won

bride because a pair of elderly gentlemen in Bootle had made a bargain in which she was staked against so many bags of gold. But pity for her suffering joined forces with a fine certainty that fortune would not play such a scurvy trick as to rob him of his divinity after leading him through an Inferno to the very gate of Paradise. For that is how he regarded the perils of Fernando Noronha. He was young, and the ethics of youth cling to romance. It seemed only right and just that he should have been proved worthy of Iris ere he gained the heaven of her love. There might be portals yet unseen, with guardian furies waiting to entrap him, and he would brave them all for her dear sake. But his very soul rebelled against the notion that he had become her chosen knight merely to gratify the unholy ardor of some decrepit millionaire. He laughed savagely at the fantasy, and his protest burst into words strange on his lips.

"I shall never give you up to any other man," he said. "I have won you by the sword, and, please God, I shall keep you against all claimants. Twenty-two men sailed out of Liverpool on board the *Andromeda*, and it was given to me among the twenty-two that I should pluck you from darkness into light. I had only seen you that day on the wharf, yet I was thinking of you constantly, little dreaming that you were within a few yards of me all the time. I was planning some means of meeting you again when our surly-tempered skipper bade me burst in the door that kept you from me. And that is what I have been doing ever since, Iris--breaking down barriers, smashing them, whether they were flesh and blood or nature's own obstacles, so that I might not lose you. Give you up! Not while I live! Why, you yourself dragged me away from certain death when I was lying unconscious on the *Andromeda's* deck. A second time, you saved not me alone but the ten others who are left out of the twenty-two, by bringing us back to Grand-pere in the hour that our escape seemed to be assured had we put out to sea. We are more than quits, dear heart, when we strike a balance of mutual service. We are bound by a tie of comradeship that is denied to most. And who shall sever it? The man who gains three times the worth of his ship by reason of the very dangers we have shared! To state such a mad proposition is to answer it. Who is he that he should sunder those whom God has joined together? And what other man and woman now breathing can lay better claim than we to have been joined by the Almighty?"

The strange exigencies of their lives during the past two days had ordained that this should be Philip's first avowal of his feelings. Under the stress of overpowering impulse he had clasped Iris to his heart when they were parting on the island. In obedience to a stronger law than any hitherto revealed to her innocent consciousness the girl had flown to his arms when he came to the hut. And that was all their love-making, two blissful moments of delirium wrenched from a time of a gaunt tragedy, and followed by a few hours of self-negation. Yet they sufficed--to the man--and the woman is never too ready to count the cost when her heart declares its passion.

But the morrow was not to be denied. Its bitter awakening had come. In the very agony of a sublime withdrawal Iris realized what manner of man this was whom she had determined to thrust aside so that she might keep her troth. She dared not look at him. She could not compel her quivering lips to frame a word of excuse or reiterated resolve. With a heart-breaking cry of sheer anguish she fled from him, running away along the deck with the uncertain steps of some sorely stricken creature of the wild.

He did not try to restrain her. Heedless of the perplexed scowl with which Coke was watching him from the bridge, he looked after her until she vanished in the cabin which had been vacated for her use by the chief engineer of the vessel. Even her manifest distress gave him a sense of riotous joy that was hardly distinguishable from the keenest spiritual suffering.

"Give you up!" he muttered again. "No, Iris, not if Satan brought every dead Verity to aid the living one in his demand."

Coke, to whom tact was anathema, chose that unhappy instant to summon him to take charge of the ship. The German master and crew had not caused trouble to their conquerors after the first short struggle. They washed their hands of responsibility, professed to be satisfied with the written indemnity and promise of reward given by De Sylva, and otherwise placed the resources of the vessel entirely at his disposal. A more peaceable set of men never existed. Though they numbered sixteen, three more than the usurpers, it was quite certain that the thought of further resistance never entered their minds. If anything, they hailed the adventure with decorous hilarity. It formed a welcome break in the monotony of their drab lives. Of course, they were utterly incredulous as to the ability of a scarecrow like Dom Corria to fulfil his financial pledges. Therein they erred. He was really a very rich man, having followed the illustrious example set by generations of South American Presidents in accumulating a fine collection of gilt-edged scrip during his tenure of office, which said scrip was safely lodged in London, Paris, and New York. But the world always refuses to associate rags with affluence, and these worthy Teutons regarded De Sylva and Coke as the leaders of a gang of dangerous lunatics who should be humored in every possible way until a port was reached.

It was precisely that question of a port which had engaged Coke in earnest consultation with De Sylva and San Benavides on the bridge while Iris and Hozier were lacerating each other's feelings on the poop.

Apparently, the point was settled when Hozier joined the triumvirate. Coke glanced at the compass, and placed the engine-room telegraph at "Full Speed Ahead," for the *Unser Fritz* had once been a British ship, and still retained her English appliances.

"Keep 'er edgin' south a bit," said he to Hozier. "There's no knowin' w'en that crimson cruiser will show up again, but we must try and steal a knot or two afore sundown."

The order roused Hozier from his stupor of wrathful bewilderment.

"Why south?" he asked. "If anything, Pernambuco lies north of our present course."

"We're givin' Pernambuco the go-by. It's Maceio for us, quick as we can get there."

Hozier was in no humor for conciliatory methods. He turned on his heel, and walked straight to where De Sylva was leaning against the rails.

"Captain Coke tells me that we are not making for Pernambuco," he said, meeting the older man's penetrating gaze with a glance as firm and self-contained.

"That is what we have arranged," said Dom Corria.

"It does not seem to have occurred to you that there is one person on board this ship whose interests are vastly more important than yours, senhor."

"Meaning Miss Yorke?" asked the other, who did not require to look twice at this stern-visaged man to grasp the futility of any words but the plainest.

"Yes."

"She will be safer at Maceio than at Pernambuco. Our only danger at either place will be encountered at the actual moment of landing. At Maceio there is practically no risk of finding a warship in the harbor. That is why we are going there."

"And not because you are more likely to find adherents there?"

"It is a much smaller town than Pernambuco, and my strength lies outside the large cities, I admit. But there can be no question as to our wisdom in preferring Maceio, even where the young lady's well-being is concerned."

"I think differently. At Maceio there are few, if any, Europeans. At Pernambuco the large English-speaking community will protect her, no matter what President is in power. I must ask you to reconsider your plan. Land Miss Yorke and me at Pernambuco, and then betake yourself and those who follow you where you will."

Coke jerked himself into the dispute.

"Ere, wot's wrong now?" he demanded angrily. "Since w'en 'as a second officer begun to fix the ship's course?"

"I am not your second officer, nor are you my commander," said Philip. "At present we are fellow-pirates, or, at best, running the gravest risk of being regarded as pirates by any court of law. I don't care a cent personally what port we make, but I do care most emphatically for Miss Yorke's safety."

"We've argied the pros an' cons, an' it's to be Maceio," growled Coke.

Dom Corria's precise tones broke in on what threatened to develop into a serious dispute.

"You would have been asked to join in the discussion, if, apparently, you were not better engaged at the moment, Mr. Hozier," he said. "I assure you, on my honor, that there are many reasons in favor of Maceio even from the exclusive point of view of Miss Yorke's immediate future. She will be well cared for. I promise to make that my first consideration. The army is mainly for me, and Senhor San Benavides's regiment is stationed at Maceio. The navy, on the other hand, supports Dom Miguel Barraca, who supplanted me, and we shall surely meet a cruiser or gunboat at Pernambuco. You see, therefore, that common prudence----"

"I see that, whether willing or not, we are to be made the tools of your ambition," interrupted Hozier curtly. "It is also fairly evident that I am the only man of the *Andromeda's* company whom you have not bribed to obey you. Well,

be warned now by me. If circumstances fail to justify your change of route, I shall make it my business to settle at least one revolution in Brazil by cracking your skull."

San Benavides, hearing the names of the two ports, understood exactly why the young Englishman was making such a strenuous protest. He moved nearer, laying an ostentatious hand on the sword that clanked everlastingly at his heels. He had never been taught, it seemed, that a man who can use his fists commands a readier weapon than a sword in its scabbard. Hozier eyed him. There was no love lost between them. For a fraction of a second San Benavides was in a position of real peril.

Then Dom Corria said coldly:

"No interference, I pray you, Senhor Adjudante. Kindly withdraw."

His tone was eminently official. San Benavides saluted and stepped back. The dark scar on De Sylva's forehead had grown a shade lighter, but there was no other visible sign of anger in his face, and his luminous eyes peered steadily into Hozier's.

"Let me understand!" he said. "You hold my life as forfeit if any mischance befalls Miss Yorke?"

"Yes."

"I accept that. Of course, you no longer challenge my direction of affairs?"

"I am no match for you in argument, senhor, but I do want you to believe that I shall keep my part of the compact."

Coke, familiar with De Sylva's resources as a debater, and by no means unwilling to see Hozier "taken down a peg," as he phrased it; eager, too, to witness the Brazilian officer's discomfiture if the second mate "handed it to him," thought it was time to assert himself.

"I'm goin' to 'ave a nap," he announced. "Either you or Watts must take 'old. W'ich is it to be?"

"No need to ask Mr. Hozier any such question," said the suave Dom Corria. "You can trust him implicitly. He is with us now--to the death. Captain San Benavides, a word with you."

"South a bit," repeated the skipper. "Call me at two bells in the second dog."

He was turning to leave the bridge with the Brazilians when a cheery voice came from a gangway beneath.

"Yah, yah, mine frent--that's the proper lubricant. I wouldn't give you tuppence a dozen for your bloomin' lager. Well, just a freshener. Thanks. Ik danky shun!"

"You spik Tcherman vare goot," was the reply.

"Talk a little of all sorts. Used to sing a Jarman song once. What was that you was a-hummin' in your cabin? Nice chune. I've a musical ear meself."

Someone sang a verse in a subdued baritone, tremulous with sentiment. The melody was haunting, the words almost pathetic under the conditions of life on board the disheveled *Unser Fritz*. They told of Vienna, the city beloved of its sons.

Es gibt nur eine Kaiser Stadt,
Es gibt nur eine Wien.

"Shake, me boy!" cried the enraptured Watts to the ship's captain. "I do'n' know wot it's all about, but it's reel fine. Something to do with a gal, I expect. Well, 'ere's one of the same kidney:

I know a maiden fair to see,
Take care!
She can both false and friendly be,
Beware, beware!
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee!"

Mr. Watts was both charmed and surprised when the friendly skipper joined in the concluding lines in his own language. But his pleasure was short-lived. Coke's inflamed visage glowered into the mess room.

"Sink me if you ain't a daisy!" he roared, pouncing on a three-quarters filled bottle of rum. "D'you fancy we're goin' to land you at Maceio cryin' drunk? No, sir, not this time. Over it goes, an' if you ain't dam careful, over you go after it!"

Watts could have wept without the artificial stimulus of the rum. To see good liquor slung into the sea in that fashion--well, it was a sin, that's wot it was! But Coke's furious eye quelled him; and revel and song ceased.

Above, on the bridge, Hozier smiled sourly at the squall which had so suddenly beset the fair argosy of the convivial-minded Watts. He tried to invest the incident with an excess of humor. Any excuse would serve to still certain disquieting doubts that were springing into alarming activity. Had he gone the best way to work in allaying Iris's conscience-stricken qualms? Was he justified in adopting such a bold line with De Sylva? Could it be possible--no, he refused to harbor any mean thought of Iris. She loved him, he was sure; his love for her was at once a torment and an excruciating bliss, and both of these wearing sensations sadly detracted from the efficiency of the officer of the watch. So our distracted Philip pulled himself up sharply, paced back and forth between port and starboard, and surveyed ship, binnacle, and horizon with alert vigilance.

On the fore-deck groups of sailors and firemen belonging to both vessels were fraternizing. There could be little room for speculation as to the subject of their broken talk. It was of De Sylva, of Brazil's new dictator, of the gold he would control when he became President again. The slow-moving Teutonic mind was beginning to assimilate the notion that there was money in this escapade. That the tatterdemalion then closeted with the *Unser Fritz's* captain could obtain a certified check for a million sterling, and twenty-five times as many millions of francs, and even then remain a man of means, was unbelievable; but if he regained power, that was different. *Ende gut, alles gut*. There might be pickings in it.

Soon after sunset Iris reappeared. She walked on the after deck with San Benavides, and seemed to be listening with great attention to something he was telling her. Hozier was often compelled to look that way in order to make certain that the *Sao Geronimo* was not overhauling the ship in one of her circling flights over the wide channel. He wondered what in the world San Benavides was saying that his chatter should be so interesting, and he acknowledged with a pang that Iris was deliberately avoiding his own occasional glances in her direction.

There is no saying what would have happened had he known that the Brazilian was relating the scene that took place on the bridge, suppressing its prime motive, and twisting it greatly to Hozier's detriment, though with an adroit touch that deprived Iris of any power to resent his words. Indeed, she read her own meaning into Philip's anxiety to reach Pernambuco, whereas San Benavides was striving to instill the belief that she would find excellent friends at Maceio. She was far too loyal-hearted to suspect Philip of a hidden purpose in urging that the voyage should end in one port rather than another. But she could not forget that he said repeatedly they would be married in Pernambuco. Indeed, the promise had a glamour of its own, even though it could never be fulfilled. More than once her cheeks glowed with a rush of color that San Benavides attributed to his own delightful personality, and, when she paled again, his voice sank to a deeply sympathetic note.

And here came Watts, rejuvenated, having imbibed many pints of the despised lager, and humming gaily:

Beware, Beware!
Trust her not!
She is fo-oo-ooling thee!

Confound the fellow. Why could he not chant the piratical doggerel that Coke abhorred? That, at least, would have been more appropriate to present surroundings? But would it? Ah, Philip felt a twinge then. "Touche!" chortled some unseen imp who plied a venomous rapier. Thank goodness, a sailor was standing by the ship's bell, with his hand on a bit of cord tied to the clapper. It would soon be seven o'clock. Even the companionship of the uncouth skipper was preferable to this brooding solitariness.

When Hozier was relieved, and summoned to a meal in the saloon with Norrie and some of the ship's own officers, Iris was nowhere visible. He went straight to her cabin, and knocked.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"I, Philip. Will you be on deck in a quarter of an hour?"

"No."

"But this time *I* want to tell *you* something."

"Philip, dear, I am weary. I must rest--and--I dare not meet you."

"Dare not?"

"I am afraid of myself. Please leave me."

He caught the sob in her voice, and it unmanned him; he stalked off, raging. He remembered how the fiend, in Gounod's incomparable opera, whispered in the lover's ear: "Thou fool, wait for night and the moon!" and he was wroth with himself for the memory. While off duty he kept strict watch and ward over the gangway in which Iris's cabin was situated. It was useless; she remained hidden.

The *Unser Fritz* was now heading southwest, and "reeling off her ten knots an hour like clockwork," as Norrie put it. The Recife, that enormous barrier reef which blockades hundreds of miles of the Brazilian coast, caused no anxiety to Coke. He was well acquainted with these waters, and he held on stoutly until the occulting light of Maceio showed low over the sea straight ahead. It was then after midnight, and the land was still ten miles distant, but the ship promptly resumed her role of lame duck, lest a prowling gunboat met and interrogated her.

As Coke had told Iris she might expect to be ashore about two o'clock, she waited until half-past one ere coming on deck. Despite her unalterable decision to abide by the hideous compact entered into with her uncle and Bulmer, her first thought now was to find Hozier. Though the sky was radiant with stars, a slight haze on the surface of the sea shrouded the ship's decks and passages in an uncanny darkness. Coke's orders forbade the display of any lights whatsoever, except those in the engine-room and the three essential lamps carried externally. So the *Unser Fritz* was gloomy, and the splash of the sea against her worn plates had an ominous sound, while the glittering white eye of the lighthouse winked evilly across the black plain in front.

In a word Iris was thoroughly wretched, and not a little disturbed by the near prospect of landing in a foreign country, which would probably be plunged into civil war by the mere advent of De Sylva. It need hardly be said that, under these circumstances, Hozier was the one man in whose company she would feel reasonably safe. But she could not see him anywhere. Coke and Watts, with the Brazilians and a couple of Germans, were on the bridge, but Hozier was not to be found.

At last she hailed one of the *Andromeda's* men whom she met in a gangway.

"Mr. Hozier, miss?" said he. "Oh, he's forrard, right up in the bows, keepin' a lookout. This is a ticklish place to enter without a pilot, an' we've passed two already."

This information added to her distress. She ought not to go to him. Full well she knew that her presence might distract him from an all-important task. So she sat forlornly on the fore-hatch, waiting there until he might leave his post, reviewing all the bizarre procession of events since she climbed an elm-tree in the garden of Linden House on a Sunday afternoon now so remote that it seemed to be the very beginning of life. The adventures to which that elm-tree conducted her were oddly reminiscent of the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. For once, the true had outrivalled the fabulous.

The steamer crept on lazily, and Iris fancied the hour must be nearer five o'clock than two when she heard Hozier's voice ring out clearly:

"Buoy on the port bow!"

There was a movement among the dim figures on the bridge. A minute later Hozier cried again:

"Buoy on the starboard bow!"

She understood then that they were in a marked channel. Already the road was narrowing. Soon they would be ashore. At last Hozier came. He saw her as he jumped down from the fore-castle deck.

"Why are you here, Iris?" was all he said. She looked so bowed, so humbled, that he could not find it in his heart

to reproach her for having avoided him earlier.

"I wanted to be near you," she whispered. "I--I am frightened, Philip. I am terrified by the unknown. Somehow, on the rock our dangers were measurable. Here, we shall soon be swallowed up among a whole lot of people."

They heard Coke's gruff order to the watch to clear the falls of the jolly-boat. The *Unser Fritz* was going dead slow. On the starboard side were the lights of a large town, but the opposite shore was somber and vague.

"Are we going to land at once, in a small boat?" said Iris timidly.

"I fancy there is a new move on foot. A gunboat is moored half a mile down stream. You missed her because your back was turned. She has steam up, and could slip her cables in a minute. They saw her from the bridge, of course, but I did not report her, as there was a chance that my hail might be heard, and we came in so confidently that we are looked on as a local trader. Come, let us buy a programme."

He took her by the arm with that masterful gentleness that is so comforting to a woman when danger is rife. Even his jesting allusion to their theatrical arrival in port was cheering. They reached the bridge. Some sailors were lowering a boat as quietly as possible.

Dom Corria approached with outstretched hand.

"Good-by, Miss Yorke," he said. "I am leaving you for a few hours, not longer. When next we meet I ought to have a sure grip of the Presidential ladder, and I shall climb quickly. Won't you wish me luck?"

"I wish you all good fortune, Dom Corria," said Iris. "May your plans succeed without bloodshed!"

"Ah, this is South America, remember. Our conflicts are usually short and fierce. *Au revoir*, Mr. Hozier. By daybreak we shall be better friends."

San Benavides also bade them farewell, with an easy grace not wholly devoid of melodramatic pathos. The dandy and the man of rags climbed down a rope ladder, the boat fell away from the ship's side, and the night took them.

"What did he mean by saying you would be 'better friends'?" whispered the girl. "Have you quarreled?"

"We had a small dispute as to the wisdom of landing you here," said Philip. "Perhaps I was wrong. He is a clever man, and he surely knows his own country."

"Mr. Hozier!" cried Coke.

"Yes, sir."

"Is all clear forrard to let go anchor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give her thirty. You go and see to it, will you?"

Hozier made off at a run.

Iris recalled the last time she heard similar words. She shuddered. Would that placid foreshore blaze out into a roar of artillery, and the worn-out *Unser Fritz*, like the worn-out *Andromeda*, stagger and lurch into a watery grave.

But the only noise that jarred the peaceful night was the rattle of the cable and winch. The ship fell away a few feet, and was held. There was no moving light on the river. Not even a police boat or Customs launch had put off. Maceio was asleep; it was quite unprepared for the honor of a Presidential visit.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NEW ERA

A swaggering officer and a man habited like a beggar landed unobserved at a coal wharf, moored a ship's boat to a bolt, and passed swiftly through a silent town till they reached the closed gates of an infantry barrack perched on a hill that rose steeply above the clustering roofs of Maceio.

Though the seeming mendicant limped slightly, his superior stature enabled him to keep pace with the officer. The pair neither lagged nor hesitated. The officer knocked loudly on a small door inset in the big gates. After some delay it was opened. A sentry challenged.

"Capitao San Benavides," announced the officer, and the man stood to attention.

"Enter, my friend," said San Benavides to his ragged companion. The latter stepped within; the wicket was locked, and the click of the bolt was suggestive of the rattle of the dice with which Dom Corria De Sylva was throwing a main with fortune. Perhaps some thought of the kind occurred to him, but he was calm as if he were so poor that he had naught more to lose.

"Who is the officer of the guard?" San Benavides asked the soldier.

"Senhor Tenente [Lieutenant] Regis de Pereira, senhor capitao."

"Tell him, with my compliments, that I shall be glad to meet him at the colonel's quarters in fifteen minutes."

The queerly-assorted pair moved off across the barrack square. The sentry looked after them.

"My excellent captain seems to have been brawling," he grinned. "But what of the *mendigo*?"

What, indeed? A most pertinent question for Brazil, and one that would be loudly answered.

The colonel's house was in darkness, yet San Benavides rapped imperatively. An upper window was raised. A voice was heard, using profane language. A head appeared. Its owner cried, "Who is it?"--with additions.

"San Benavides."

"Christo! And the other?"

"One whom you expect."

The head popped in. Soon there was a light on the ground floor. The door opened. A very stout man, barefooted, who had struggled into a pair of abnormally tight riding-breeches, faced them.

"Can it be possible?" he exclaimed, striking an attitude.

Dom Corria spoke not a word. He knew the value of effect, and could bide his time. The three passed into a lighted apartment. De Sylva placed himself under a chandelier, and took off a frayed straw hat which he had borrowed from someone on board the *Unser Fritz*. The colonel, a grotesque figure in his present *deshabille*, bowed low before him.

"My President!--I salute you," he murmured.

"Thank you, General," said Dom Corria, smiling graciously. "I knew I could depend on you. How soon can you muster the regiment?"

"In half an hour, Excellency."

"See that there is plenty of ammunition for the machine guns. What of the artillery?"

"The three batteries stationed here are with us heart and soul."

"Colonel San Benavides, as chief of the staff, is acquainted with every detail. You, General, will assume command of the Army of Liberation. Some trunks were sent to you from Paris, I believe?"

"They are in the room prepared for your Excellency."

"Let me go there at once and change my clothing. I must appear before the troops as their President, not as a jail-bird. For the moment I leave everything to you and San Benavides. Let Senhor Pondillo be summoned. He will attend to

the civil side of affairs. You have my unqualified approval of the military scheme drawn up by you and my other friends. There is one thing--a gunboat lies in the harbor. Is she the *Andorinha*?"

The newly-promoted general smote his huge stomach with both hands--"beating the drum," he called it--and the rat-tat signified instant readiness for action.

"The guns will soon scare that bird," he exclaimed. As *Andorinha* means "swallow" in English there was some point to the remark. Nor was he making a vain boast. The most astounding feature of every revolution in a South American republic is the alacrity with which the army will fire on the navy, *et vice versa*. The two services seem to be everlastingly at feud. If politicians fail to engineer a quarrel, the soldiers and sailors will indulge in one on their own account.

It was so now at Maceio. Dawn was about to peep up over the sea when twelve guns lumbered through the narrow streets, waking many startled citizens. A few daring souls, who guessed what had happened, rushed off on horseback or bicycle to remote telegraph offices. These adventurers were too late. Every railway station and post-office within twenty miles was already held by troops. Revolts are conducted scientifically in that region. Their stage management is perfect, and the cumbrous methods of effete civilizations might well take note of the speed, thoroughness, and efficiency with which a change of government is effected.

For instance, what could be more admirable than the scaring of the bird by General Russo? He drew up his three batteries on the wharf opposite the unsuspecting *Andorinha*, and endeavored to plant twelve shells in the locality of her engine-room without the least hesitation. There was no thought of demanding her surrender, or any quixotic nonsense of that sort. In the first place, no man would act as herald, since he would be shot or stabbed the instant his errand became known; in the second, as Hozier had explained to Iris, the gunboat could slip her cable very quickly, and Russo's artillerists might miss a moving object.

As it was, every gun scored, though the elevation was rather high. The shells made a sad mess of the superstructure, but left the engines intact. The sailors, on their part, knew exactly what had happened. Every man who escaped death or serious injury from the bursting missiles ran to his post. A wire hawser and mooring rope were severed with axes, the screw revolved, and the *Andorinha* was in motion. Though winged, she still could fly. The second salvo of projectiles was less damaging; again the gunners failed to reach the warship's vitals. Her commander got his own armament into action, and managed to demolish a warehouse and a grain elevator. Then he made off down the coast toward Rio de Janeiro.

The sudden uproar stirred Maceio from roof to basement. Its inhabitants poured into the Plaza. Every man vied with his neighbor in yelling: "The revolution is here! *Viva Dom Corria! Abajo Sao Paulo!*"

That last cry explained a good deal. The State of Sao Paulo had long maintained a "corner" in Brazilian Presidents. De Sylva, a native of Alagoas, was the first to break down the monopoly. Hence the cabal against him; hence, too, the readiness of Maceio, together with many of the smaller ports and the whole of the vast interior, to espouse his cause.

For the purposes of this story, which is mainly concerned with the lives and fortunes of a few insignificant people unknown to history, it is not necessary to follow in detail the trumpeting, proclamations, carousals, and arrests that followed Dom Corria's first success. It is a truism that in events of international importance the very names of the chief actors oftentimes go unrecorded. Future generations will ask, perhaps:--Who blew up the *Maine*? Who persuaded the Tsar to break his word anent Port Arthur? Who told Paul Kruger that the Continent of Europe would support the Boers against Great Britain? Such instances could be multiplied indefinitely, and the rule held good now in Brazil.

If any polite Pernambucano, Maceio-ite, or merchant of Bahia were informed that President De Sylva's raid was alone rendered possible by the help of a truculent British master-mariner and a dozen or so of his hard-bitten crew, he (the said Brasileiro) might be skeptical, or, at best, indifferent. But let the name of some puppet politician hailing from Sao Paulo be mentioned, and his eyes would flash with angry recognition; yet the *Andromeda's* small contingent achieved more than a whole army of conspirators.

The one incident, then, of a political nature, in which the victors of the tussle on Fernando Noronha were publicly concerned, was the outcome of a message cabled by Dom Corria while the smoke of Russo's cannon still clung about the quay.

It was written in German, addressed to a Hamburg shipping firm, and ran as follows: "Have sold *Unser Fritz* to Senhor Pondillo of this port as from September 1st, for 175,000 marks. If approved, cable confirmation, and draw on Paris branch Deutsche Bank at sight. Franz Schmidt, care German Consul, Maceio."

This harmless commercial item was read by many officials hostile to De Sylva, yet it evoked no comment. Its first real effect was observable in the counting-house of the Hamburg owners. There it was believed that Captain Schmidt had either become a lunatic himself or was in touch with a rich one. Schmidt was so well known to them that they acted on the latter hypothesis. They cabled him their hearty commendation, "drew" on the Paris bank by the next post, and awaited developments. To their profound amazement, the money was paid. As they had obtained 8,750 pounds for a vessel worth about one-quarter of the sum, they had good reason to be satisfied. It mattered not a jot to them that the sale was made "as from September 1st," or any other date. They signed the desired quittance, cabled Schmidt again to ask if Senhor Pondillo was in need of other ships of the *Unser Fritz* class, and the members of the firm indulged that evening in the best dinner that the tip-top restaurant of Hamburg could supply.

They were puzzled next day by certain statements in the newspapers, and were called on to explain to a number of journalists that the ship had left their ownership. She was at Maceio. Where was Maceio? Somewhere in South America.

"*Es ist nicht von Bedeutung*," said the senior partner to his associates. "Schmidt will write full particulars; when all is said and done, we have the money."

Yet it did matter very greatly, as shall be seen. Here, again, was an instance of an humble individual becoming a cog in the wheel of world politics. Within less than a month Schmidt was vituperated by half the chancelleries of Europe. A newspaper war raged over him. He became the object of an Emperor's Jovian wrath. "What's the matter with Schmidt? He's--all--right!" thundered the whole press of the United States. And all because he had made a good bargain at a critical moment!

But no one on board the *Unser Fritz* was vexed by aught save present tribulations when De Sylva and his *aide* quitted the ship. Be sure that not a soul thought of sleep. Every man, and the one woman whom chance had thrown in their midst, remained on deck and watched the slumbering town. It was only a small place. The *Andorinha* lay at one end of the harbor, the *Unser Fritz* at the other. They were barely half a mile apart, and Maceio climbed the sloping shore between the two points.

Hozier, of course, had forgiven Iris for her aloofness, and Iris, with that delightful inconsistency which ranks high among the many charms of her sex, found that "Philip dear," though she might not marry him, was her only possible companion. He, having acquired an experience previously lacking, took care to fall in with her mood. She, weary of a painful self-repression, cheated the frowning gods of "just this one night." So they looked at the twinkling lights, spoke in whispers lest they should miss any tokens of disturbance on shore, elbowed each other comfortably on the rails of the bridge, and uttered no word of love or future purpose.

They were discussing nothing more important than the sufferings of Watts--whom Coke would not allow to go out of his sight--when a lightning blaze leaped from the somber shadows of some buildings on the quay lower down the river. Again, and many times again, the sudden jets of flame started out across the black water. Iris, or Hozier, for that matter, had never seen a field-piece fired by night, but before the girl could do other than grip Philip's arm in a spasm of fear, the thunder of the artillery rolled across the harbor, and the worn plates of the *Unser Fritz* quivered under the mere concussion.

"By jove, they're at it!" cried Philip.

Iris felt the thrill that shook him. She could not see his face, but she knew that his blue eyes were shining like bright steel. She was horrified at the thought of red war being so near, yet she was proud of her lover. At these mortal crises, the woman demands courage in the man.

"Oh!" she gasped, and clung to him more tightly.

Under such circumstances it was only to be expected that his arm would clasp her round the waist; Disraeli's famous epigram was coined for diplomacy, not for love-making.

Hozier strained his eyes through the gloom to try and discover the effect of the cannonade on the gunboat. He was quickly alive to the significance of the answering broadside. Then the black hull grew dim and vanished. His sailor's sympathies went with the escaping ship.

"She has got away! I am jolly glad of it," he cried. "It was a dirty trick to open fire on her in that fashion. Just how they served the *Andromeda*, the hounds, only we had never a gun to tickle them up in return."

"Do you think that many of the poor creatures have been killed?" asked Iris tremulously. The din of ordnance and bursting shells had ceased as suddenly as it began. Lights appeared in nearly every house. Shouting men were running along the neighboring wharf. Maceio, never a heavy sleeper in bulk, dreamed for a second of earthquakes, leaped out of bed, and ran into the streets in the negligent costume which the Italians describe by the delightful word, *confidenza*.

"I don't suppose so," Hozier reassured her. "If the artillery had made good practice at that short range the gunboat must have sunk at her moorings. Her men naturally couldn't miss the town. There was a rare old rattle among the crockery behind the soldiers. Did you hear it? I wonder what went over?"

He was as excited as a schoolboy, almost jubilant. Poor Iris! Though she was now a veteran in scenes of death and disaster, she realized that fate had erred in choosing her as a heroine.

Coke and Watts drew near.

"Dom Wot's-'is-name wasn't long in gettin' busy," chuckled Coke. "Gev' her a dose of the *Andromeda's* physic, eh? I'm sorry the blighters managed to 'ook it."

Though he had just uttered an opinion directly contrary to his captain's, Hozier deemed it wise to be non-committal.

"The guns must have been laid badly," he said.

"Mebbe, an' wot's more, d--n 'em, they knew there was something in front that could shoot back."

So Coke was at least impartial. He cared not a jot how the Brazilians slaughtered each other so long as De Sylva established the new regime speedily.

"I never was a fightin' man meself," murmured Watts weakly. "That sort of thing gives me a sinkin' sensation in me innards."

"Wot you want is a drink, me boy," said Coke.

Watts brightened. He drew a deep breath.

"I reelly believe that's wot's wrong with me," he said.

"Then I'll just ax the cook to 'urry up with the corfee," guffawed the unfeeling skipper. "We'll all be the better for a snack an' somethink 'ot."

Iris managed to choke down an hysterical laugh. Coke was incorrigible, yet she was conscious of a growing appreciation of his crude chivalry. He boasted truly that he feared neither man nor devil. His chief defect lay in being born several centuries too late. Had he flourished during the Middle Ages, Coke would have carved out a kingdom.

Even while the men were thus callously discussing the tragedy that had been enacted before their eyes, the miracle of the dawn was transforming night into day. In the tropics there is no hesitancy about sunrise. The splendid imagery of Genesis is literally exact. "Let there be light; and there was light ... and God divided the light from the darkness." Long before the *Andorinha* had crept round the southern headland of the Macayo estuary she became visible again.

About six o'clock a grand review was held in the Plaza, or chief square. Dom Corria, a resplendent personage on horseback, made a fine speech. He was vociferously applauded, by both troops and populace. General Russo, also mounted, assured him that Brazil was pining for him. In effect, when he was firmly established in the Presidency, the people would be allowed to vote for him.

"We have borne two years of misrule," vociferated the commander-in-chief, "but it has vanished before the fiery breath of our guns. We hail your Excellency as our liberator. Long live Dom Corria! Down with----"

The fierce "Vivas" of the mob, combined with the general's weight, proved too much for his charger, which plunged violently. Russo was held on accidentally by his spurs. There was a lively interlude until an orderly seized the bridle, and the general was able to disengage the rowels from the animal's ribs. When tranquillity was restored, the soldiers marched off to their quarters, and Colonel San Benavides boarded the *Unser Fritz*. He invited Iris, Schmidt, Coke, and Hozier to breakfast with the President at the principal hotel.

Watts was not included in the list of guests. Being indignant, he expressed himself freely.

"Nice thing!" he said to Norrie. "We're not good enough to be axed. It was a bit of all right w'en we 'elped 'im out of quod, but now 'e's a bloomin' toff we're low-down sailormen--that's wot we are."

"Man, ye're fair daft," growled the Scot. "It's as plain as the neb on yer face that he canna dae wi' a', so he just picked the twa skippers and the lassie; he kent weel she wadna stir an inch without Hozier."

Norrie was right, as it happened, but Watts added another grudge to his score against De Sylva.

Now, though dynasties totter and empires crash, the first thing a woman thinks of when bidden to a public gathering is her attire. Iris declared most emphatically that to expect her to go ashore and meet certain military and civic dignitaries while she was wearing a costume originally purchased for mountaineering, which had endured the rough usage of the past two days, was "for to laugh." She was speaking French, and that was the literal phrase she used. The courteous San Benavides smiled away her protest. His Excellency had foreseen the difficulty. Those who knew Dom Corria best would not credit that he should forget anything. The Senhora Pondillo awaited Iris at the hotel with a supply of new clothing. Captain Schmidt, of course, could depend on his own wardrobe, but Captain Coke and the Senhor Hozier would find a tradesman in their rooms who had guaranteed to equip them suitably. Moreover, the same outfitter would visit the ship during the morning and make good the lost raiment and boots of the other officers and men of the *Andromeda*. San Benavides spoke like the ambassador of a prince, and, in the sequel, there was no stint of deeds to give effect to his promises.

On the way to the hotel Iris saw a large building labeled "Casa do Correio e Telegraphia." It was not surprising that she had not thought earlier of the necessity of cabling to Liverpool. She blushed, and looked involuntarily at Hozier.

"I must send a message to my uncle," she said.

Were Philip a professed spiritualist, the spectral shapes of David Verity and Dickey Bulmer could not have been more effectually "projected" into his astral plane at Maceio than they were at that instant. He had not set eyes on either of the men, but the girl's words conjured them into being, and the vision was vastly disagreeable.

San Benavides, of course, was anxious to oblige Iris in this as in every other respect. He procured the requisite form, told her the cost, which led to a condensed version of the original draft, smoothed away the slight hindrance of foreign money tendered in payment, and arranged the due delivery of a reply. Perhaps he smiled when he read what she had written. The words were comprehensible even to one who did not understand English:

"*Andromeda* lost. Arrived here safely. Address, Yorke, Maceio."

There was a space at the foot of the form on which it was necessary to subscribe her name and local address. So she wrote, "Iris Yorke, steamship *Unser Fritz*, Maceio harbor." Hozier was standing by her side as she printed the words legibly. She looked up at him with a curiously tense expression that he did not fathom immediately. They were in the busy main street again ere its meaning occurred to him. The cable committed her irrevocably. She felt that she was signing her own condemnation!

Among the four people, therefore, who entered the Hotel Grande in the Rua do Sul there were two whose feelings were the reverse of cheerful. But convention is stronger than the primal impulses--sometimes it triumphs over death itself--and convention was all-powerful now. It led Iris away captive in the train of the smiling and voluble Senhora Pondillo, and it immersed Hozier in a tangle of fearsome words which turned out to be the stock in trade of a clothier. The mere male of Maceio decks himself with gay plumage. Philip was hard put to it before he secured some garments which did not irresistibly recall the heroes of certain musical comedies popular in England.

Coke experienced worse vicissitudes. Even the variety and richness of a master mariner's vocabulary was taxed to its utmost resources when he was coaxed into "trying on" a short jacket apparently intended for a toreador. Such minor troubles, however, were overcome in time. A razor and a hot bath were by no means the least important items of the rejuvenating process, and when the two men entered the salon where Dom Corria was holding an impromptu reception they looked like a couple of coffee-planters from the Argentine. Schmidt was there already. For some reason, the new President seemed to be so fond of the *Unser Fritz's* commander that he refused to be parted from him. It was not until long afterward that Hozier discovered the reason of this mushroom friendship. The German consul was in the room.

The appearance of Iris caused something akin to a sensation. The Dona Pondillo could not create English clothes,

nor bad copies of French, but her own daughters dressed in the height of local fashion, and Dom Corria's earnest request had made them generous. The dark-eyed, olive-complexioned women of Alagoas are often exceedingly beautiful, but few of those present had ever seen a brown-haired, brown-eyed, fair-faced Englishwoman. Iris was remarkably good-looking, even among the pretty girls of her own county of Lancashire. Her large, limpid eyes, well-molded nose, and perfectly formed mouth were the dominant features of a face that had all the charm of youth and health. Her smooth skin, brown with exposure to sun and air, glowed into a rich crimson when she found herself in the midst of so many strangers. The slightly delicate semblance induced by the hardships and loss of rest which fell to her lot since the *Andromeda* went to pieces on the Grand-pere rock in no wise detracted from her appearance. She wore the elegant costume of a Maceio belle with ease and distinction. If she was flurried by the undisguised murmur of admiration that greeted her, she did not show it beyond the first rush of color.

Dom Corria, dragging Schmidt with him, hurried to meet her. Surprise at his gala attire helped to conquer her natural timidity, for the President was gorgeous in blue and gold.

"My good wishes are soon changed into congratulations, Senhor," she said.

"Ah, my dear young lady, I am overjoyed that you should be here to witness my success," he cried. Then, as if he had waited for this moment, he turned to the assembled company and delivered an eloquent panegyric of the *Andromeda's* crew and their *deusa deliciosa*--for that is what he called Iris--a delightful goddess. He had made many speeches already that day, but none was more heartfelt than this. His eulogy was unstinted. Luckily for Iris, she was so conscious of the attention she attracted that she kept her eyes steadfastly fixed on the carpet. Otherwise, having a well-developed sense of humor, she must have laughed outright had she seen Coke's face.

He, of course, understood no word that was said. But De Sylva's animated gestures and flashing eyes were enough. Ever and anon, the excitable citizens of Maceio would turn and gaze at one or other of the three, while loud cries of "Bravo!" punctuated the President's oratory. When Coke's turn came for these demonstrations, he tried to grin, but was only able to scowl. For once in his stormy life he was nonplused. His brick-red countenance glowed with heat and embarrassment. At the close of the speech he muttered to Hozier:

"Wish I'd ha' known wot sort of beano I was comin' to. Dam if I ain't meltin'!"

This ordeal ended, dejeuner was served. The President took in Iris and the Dona Pondillo. They were the only ladies present. The three sailors, some staff officers, and a few local celebrities, made up the rest of the company.

Hozier, though by no means indifferent to the good fare provided, was wondering how many hours would elapse before Iris's cablegram reached Verity's office, when some words caught his ear that drove all other considerations from his mind.

"I am sorry to say that, in my opinion, there is not the slightest chance of your message reaching England to-day, Miss Yorke," the President was saying.

"But why not?" she asked, with an astonishment that was not wholly the outcome of regret.

"The cable does not land here, and the transmitting stations will be closely watched, now that my arrival in Brazil is known. Even the simplest form of words will be twisted into a political significance. No, I think it best to be quite candid. Until I control Pernambuco, which should be within a week or ten days, you may rest assured that no private cablegrams will be forwarded."

"Oh, dear, I fully expected a reply to-day," she said, and now that she realized the effect of a further period of anxiety on the Bootle partnership she was genuinely dismayed.

"You may be sure it will not come," said Dom Corria. "Indeed I may as well take this opportunity of explaining to you--and to my other English friends"--with the interpolated sentence his glance dwelt quietly on Hozier and Coke--"the exact position locally. You see, Maceio is a small place, and easily approached from the sea. A hostile fleet could knock it to pieces in half an hour, and it would be a poor reward for my supporters' loyalty if my presence subjected them to a bombardment. I have no strong defenses or heavy guns to defy attack, and my troops are not more than a thousand men, all told. It is obvious that I must make for the interior. There, I gather strength as I advance, the warships cannot pursue, and I can choose my own positions to meet the half-hearted forces that Dom Miguel will collect to oppose me. In fact, I and every armed man in Maceio march up-country this afternoon."

Iris, by this time, was thoroughly frightened, and Hozier, who read more in De Sylva's words than was possible in

her case, was watching the speaker's calm face with a fixity that might have disconcerted many men. Dom Corria seemed to be unaware of either the girl's distress or Philip's white anger.

"You naturally ask how I propose to safeguard the companions of my flight from Fernando Noronha," he went on. "I answer at once--by taking them with me. The Senhora Pondillo and her family will accompany her husband to my *quinta* at Las Flores. A special train will take all of us to the nearest railway station this afternoon. Thence my estate is but a day's march. You and my other friends from both ships will be quite safe and happy there until order is restored. You must come. The men's lives, at any rate, would not be worth an hour's purchase if my opponent's forces found them here, and I feel certain that one or more cruisers will arrive off Maceio to-night. For you, this excursion will be quite a pleasant experience, and you can absolutely rely on my promise to send news of your safety to England at the very first opportunity."

Iris could say nothing under the shock of this intelligence. She looked at Philip, and their eyes met. They both remembered the glance they had exchanged at the post-office. Preoccupied by their own thoughts, neither of them had noticed the smile San Benavides indulged in on that occasion, nor did they pay heed to the fact that he was smiling again now, apparently at some story told him by General Russo. But San Benavides was sharp-witted. He needed no interpreter to make clear the cause of the chill that had fallen on the President's end of the table.

"He has told them," he thought, perhaps. And, if further surmise were hazarded as to his views, they might well prove to be concerned with the wonderful things that can happen within a week or ten days--especially when things are happening at the rate taken by events just then in Brazil.

Of course, as a philosopher, San Benavides was right; it was in the role of prophet that he came to grief, this being the pre-ordained fate of all false prophets.

CHAPTER XIV

CARMELA

Among the many words borrowed by the Brazilians from their Spanish-speaking neighbors, that for "to-morrow" is perhaps the most popular. The Spaniard's *Manana* is so elastic that it covers any period of time between the next twenty-four hours and the indefinite future. When, therefore, Dom Sylva spoke of controlling Pernambuco before the month of September was barely half sped, he was either too sanguine, or too literal in his translation of easy-going Portuguese into vigorous English.

His *quinta*, or country house, was situated on the upper watershed of the river Moxoto. There he raised his standard, thither flocked rebels galore, and in that direction, with due caution, President Barraca pushed columns of troops by road and rail from Bahia, from Pernambuco, and from Maceio itself. For Barraca held the sea, and the wealthy and enterprising south was strongly opposed to war, while Dom Corria trusted to the mountains and drew his partisans from the less energetic north. This bald statement has an unconvincing sound in the ears of races which dwell north of the equator, but it must be remembered that Brazil, in more respects than one, is the land of topsy-turveydom. Were it not that the mass of the people was heartily sick of a corrupt regime, De Sylva would have been dead or in irons on his way back to Fernando Noronha well within the time allotted for the consolidation of his rule. As it was, minor insurrections were breaking out in the southern provinces, the reigning President could trust only in the navy, and the conservatism of commerce and society, as represented by the great landowners of Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and Minas Geraes, alone stifled the upgrowth of an overwhelming national movement in Dom Corria's favor.

In a word, De Sylva commanded public sympathy but small resources; Barraca was unpopular but controlled the navy and part of the army. Given such conditions--with the added absurdity that the troops on both sides were most unwilling to face long-range rifle fire but would cheerfully hack each other to mince-meat with knives--and a tedious, indeterminate campaign is the certain outcome. De Sylva had said that local conflicts were usually "short and fierce." Applied to such upheavals as had taken place in the capital during recent years, the phrase was strictly accurate. He himself had been bundled out of office between Mass and Vespers on a memorable Sunday. But a convict on a remote island cannot organize such a perfect example of a successful revolt. He had done much in gaining a good foothold; the rest must be left to time and chance.

A few indecisive but sanguinary engagements were fought in the neighborhood of Pesqueira, a town in the hills about one hundred miles from the seaboard. These proved that General Russo was a valiant fighter but a poor tactician--and that was all. He was opposed by a commander of little courage but singular skill in strategy. To restore the balance, Dom Corria took the field in person, and Dom Miguel Barraca hastened from Rio de Janeiro to witness the crushing of his arch-enemy.

The position was complicated by the arrival at Pernambuco of a German squadron bearing a telegraphic cartel from the Emperor. A German ship had been seized on the high seas. Why? And by whom? And how could anybody dare? Then Brazil quivered, for every South American knows in his heart that the great navy of Germany is being created not so much to destroy England as to dispute the proud doctrine of the United States that no European power shall ever again be allowed to seize territory on the American continent.

So there were strenuous days and anxious nights at Las Flores, where President De Sylva sought to equip and discipline his levies, and at Carugru, where President Barraca called on all the gods to witness that De Sylva was a double-dyed traitor.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that a grand display of money and audacity, backed by sundry distant roars of the British lion, should enable two elderly Britons and a young Brazilian lady to pass through the lines of the Exercito Nacional, as Barraca had christened his following, in opposition to De Sylva's army of Liberation. Lest too many people should become interested, the adventure was essayed on the night of October 2d. Early next day the travelers and their guides reached the rebel outposts. The young lady, who seemed to be at home in this wild country, at once urged her horse into a pace wholly beyond the equestrian powers of her staid companions. They protested vainly. She waved a farewell hand, cantered over several miles of a rough road, and dashed up to the Liberationist headquarters about eight o'clock.

There was no hesitancy about her movements. She drew rein in approved Gaucho style, bringing her mount to a dead stop from a gallop.

"Where is the President?" she asked breathlessly.

"There, senhora," said an orderly, pointing to a marquee, open on every side, wherein De Sylva sat in conference with his staff.

So many officers and mounted soldiers were coming and going, so great was the bustle of preparation for some important movement then in train, that no one specially noted her arrival. She dismounted, and drew the reins across the horse's head ere she tied him to a tree. She saw a tall young man emerge from the tent, jump on a charger held by a soldier, and ride off at a fast pace toward the house of Las Flores, which stood in a large garden on the slope of a neighboring hill. His appearance seemed to puzzle her momentarily. His attire was that of Brazil, but neither his manner nor horsemanship was typical of the Brasileiro. In walking, he moved with an air of purposeful concentration that differed singularly from the languorous stroll of the average Brazilian officer, while his seat in the saddle, though confident enough, could not be mistaken for that of a man who never walks a yard if there is an animal to bestride.

The new arrival was, however, at once too weary and too excited to give further heed to one who was an utter stranger. She pushed her way through knots of smoking loungers, entered the tent, and uttered a little scream of delight when the President, who was writing at a big table, happened to glance at her. De Sylva rose hastily, with an amazed look on his usually unemotional face; forthwith the girl flung herself into his arms.

"Father!"

"Carmela!"

San Benavides, whose back was turned, heard the joyous cries of the reunited father and daughter. They were locked in each other's embrace, and the eyes of every man present were drawn to a pathetic and unexpected meeting. For that reason, and because none gave a thought to him, the pallor that changed the bronze of his forehead and cheeks into a particularly unhealthy-looking tint of olive green passed unnoticed. He swallowed something. It must have been a curse, for it seemed to taste bitter. But he managed to recover some shred of self-control ere the Senhora De Sylva was able to answer her father's first eager questions; then, with a charming timidity, she found breath to say:

"And what of Salvador--is he not here?"

Yes, Salvador was there--by her side--striving most desperately to look lover-like. They clasped hands. Brazilian

etiquette forbade a more demonstrative greeting, and Carmela attributed Salvador's manifest sallowness to the hardships of campaigning no less than the shock of her sudden appearance.

But the business of red war gave little scope for the many confidences that a girl who had journeyed more than four thousand miles for this reunion might naturally exchange with a father and a lover. Some important move was toward, and the President and his chief-of-staff had no time to spare.

"You have come to bring me luck, Carmela meu," said De Sylva, stroking his daughter's hair affectionately. "To-day we make our first real advance. Salvador and I are going to the front now, almost this instant. But there will be no fighting--an affair of outposts at the best--and when everything is in order we shall return here to sleep. Expect us, then, soon after sunset. Meanwhile, at the *quinta* you will find the young English lady of whose presence you are aware. Give her your friendship. She is worthy of it."

"Adeos, senhora!" echoed San Benavides, bringing his heels together with a click, and saluting. He gathered a number of papers from the table with nervous haste, and at once began to issue instructions to several officers. De Sylva renewed the signing of documents. Russo and he conversed in low tones. A buzz of talk broke out in the tent. Carmela felt that she had no part in this activity, that her mere presence was a positive hindrance to the work in hand. A trifle disappointed, yet not without a thrill of high resolve to create for herself an indispensable share in the movement of which her father was the central figure, she went out, unhitched her tired horse, and walked to the house.

In Brazil, a *quinta*, or farm, may range from a palace to a hovel. Dom Corria was rich; consequently Las Flores attained the higher level. It was a straggling, roomy structure, planned for comfort and hospitality rather than display, and the gardens, to whose beauty and extent was due the Spanish name, used to be famous throughout the province. Carmela had not seen the place during five years; she expected to find changes, but was hardly prepared for the ravages made by neglect, aided by unchecked tropical growth, as the outcome of her father's two years in prison. The flowers were gone, the rarer shrubs choked by rank weeds, the trees disfigured by rampant climbers. But, in front of the long, deep veranda, even the attention of a month had restored much of its beauty to a widespread lawn. Here, at that early hour, the air was cool and the shade abundant; indeed, so embossed in towering trees was the wide greensward, that it seemed to flow abruptly into the veranda without ever a path or garden gate to break the solid walls of foliage.

Filled with tumultuous memories, her heart all throbbing at the prospect of her father's fortunes being restored, the Senhora De Sylva was entering a gate that led to the left front of the house, when the young man came out whom she had seen leaving the headquarters tent. Again he rode like one in a hurry, and she noted that he emerged from a side path which gave access to the lawn. He gave her a sharp glance as he passed. She received an impression of a strong face, with stern-looking, bright, steel-blue eyes, a mouth tensely set, an aspect at once confident yet self-contained. She was sure now he was not a Brazilian, and he differed most materially from the mental picture of Captain James Coke created by the many conversations in which he had figured during her long voyage from Southampton in company with David Verity and Dickey Bulmer.

So Carmela wondered now who he could be, nor was her wonder lessened when she peered through the screen of trees, and saw a girl, whom she recognized instantly as Iris, furtively dabbing her tear-stained face with a handkerchief.

Unhappily, the President's daughter was not attractive in appearance. She had fine eyes, and she moved with the natural elegance of her race, but her features were somewhat angular for one of pure-blooded Portuguese descent, and a too well-defined chin was more effectual as an index of character than as an element of personal charm. Close acquaintance with the cosmopolitan society of Paris and London had familiarized her with many types of European and American beauty, and her surprise that such an uncommonly good-looking girl should be the niece of David Verity was not unmingled with pique at finding her already installed in remote Las Flores.

The veranda seemed to be a hive of feminine industry. The Dona Pondillo and her daughters, together with the female relatives of several noted men among the insurgents, were cutting and stitching most industriously. Iris Yorke's advice, perhaps her assistance, was evidently in demand. Assuming that the young man who rode thither so rapidly had gone to see her, she could not have been absent from the sewing party more than five minutes, yet half a dozen ladies were clamoring for her already. The truth was that many of them had never plied a needle before in their lives. They had to be taught everything. One peasant woman would have accomplished more real work than any five of the Librationist *grandes dames*.

Despite her firm chin, Carmela De Sylva did not condemn the meretricious aid of dress. Iris looked fresh and cool in soft muslin, whereas the newcomer was travel-stained and disheveled. The pack-mules were lagging on the road, but a wash and general tidying of dust-covered garments would help the President's daughter to regain the assurance, now

sadly lacking, which would be necessary ere she won her rightful place in a community largely composed of strangers. As she led her horse back into the main avenue, she was sorry that her father or Salvador could not spare even the few minutes that would have sufficed for an introduction. At any rate, she would probably find an old servant at the back of the house--some family retainer whose welcome would charm away this displeasing sense of intrusion.

On the way to the stables she heard a man singing. The words were in English. They were also quaint, for they dealt with life from a point of view which differed widely from that presented by Dom Corria's *fnca*.

"Oh, it's fine to be a sailor" [sang Watts],
"an' to cross the ragin' main,
From Hooghly bar to New Orleans to roam,
But I 'ope that my old woman will put me on the chain
Next time I want to quit my 'umble 'ome."

Possibly the verse was an original effort, because there followed a marked change in tune and meter.

"Mid pleasures an' palaces----" he began, when Senhora De Sylva came upon him as he sat on a fence, pipe in hand, with his back braced comfortably against a magnificent rosewood tree. He stopped, grinned sheepishly, and, not recognizing the lady, tried to cover his confusion by lighting the pipe.

"Are you one of the *Andromeda's* men?" asked Carmela, speaking in the clear and accurate English used by her father.

It was well for Watts that the tree prevented him from falling backwards. He was quite sober, but cheerful withal, as he had nothing to do but sleep, smoke, eat, and drink the light wine of the district, of which his only complaint was that "one might mop up a barrel of it an' get no forrarder." Nevertheless, he received a positive shock when addressed in his own language by a young woman who was obviously of Brazil. He stared at her so hard that he forgot the steady progress of the slow-burning tand-stikkor match recently ignited. Its sulphurous flame reached his fingers and reminded him.

"My godfather!" he howled, springing from the rail, and recovering his wits instantly. "Beg pardon, mum, but you took me aback all standin' as the saying is. Christopher, didn't that match wake me up!"

"I am afraid it is my fault," said Carmela, who could look sympathetic where Iris would want to laugh. "I have just arrived here, and everybody seems to be so full of troubles that I am glad to hear you singing."

"Oh, that's just hummin', mum. If you're fond of music you ought to 'ear Schmidt, Captain Schmidt of the *Unser Fritz*----"

Carmela struck an attitude.

"Wot, d'ye know 'im?" asked Watts.

"No, it is something--rather important. I must go back to my father. Ah, I ought to explain. I am the Senhora De Sylva, Dom Corria's daughter."

"Are you really, mum,--miss?" exclaimed Watts, highly interested. "Ow in the world did ye manage to come up from the coast? Accordin' to all accounts----"

"Yes, what were you going to say?" for the man hesitated.

"Well, some of our chaps will 'ave it that we're runnin' close-hauled on a lee shore."

Carmela knit her brows. The Watts idioms were not those of her governess.

"We had no great difficulty in passing through Dom Barraca's lines, if that is what you mean," she said. "Mr. Verity and Mr. Bulmer had obtained special permits, but in my case----"

"Mr. 'oo, did you say, miss?" demanded Watts, whose lower jaw actually dropped from sheer amazement.

"Mr. Verity, the owner of the *Andromeda*. You are one of the crew, I suppose?"

"I'm the chief officer. Watts is my name, miss. But d'you mean to tell me that ole David Verity 'as come 'ere--to Brazil--to this rotten... Sorry, miss, but you gev' me a turn, you did. An' Dickey Bulmer--is 'e 'ere too?"

"Yes, or he soon will be here. I rode on in advance of the others."

"Well--there--if that don't beat cock-fightin'!" cried Watts. "Wot'll Coke say? W'y, 'e'll 'ave a fit. An' Miss Iris! She's to marry ole Dickey. Fancy 'im turmin' up! There'll be the deuce an' all to pay, now, wot between 'im an' Hozier an' the dashin' colonel."

The horse, trying to nibble some grass at Carmela's feet, suddenly threw his head up, for the cruel South American bit had tightened under a jerk of the reins.

"Who is Mr. Hozier?" asked the girl calmly.

"He is, or was, our second mate, but since the colonel an' 'e got to loggerheads 'e took an' raised a corps of scouts. Some of our fellows joined, but not me. Killin' other folks don't agree with me a little bit. I don't mind a shine in a snug or a friendly scrap over an extry drink, but w'en it comes to them long knives----"

"And the colonel--what is *his* name?" broke in Carmela, turning to loosen the surcingle. She could control her voice but not her eyes, and she did not wish to startle this open-mouthed gossip.

"San Benavides, miss. Captain 'e was on Fernando Noronha; 'e took a mighty quick jump after we kem ashore. But I ax your pardon for ramblin' on in this silly way. Won't you go inside? There's a useful ole party there, name of Maria--"

"Ah, Maria--dear, good Maria--she at least will not have forgotten me," sobbed Carmela in her own tongue, and Watts afterwards informed Coke that although the inhabitants of China were noted for their peculiar ways, when it came to a show-down in that qualification, the average woman could beat any Chinky ever born. Had he but known more, Watts was also in a position to state that he had squared accounts with the scornful President.

For the Senhora De Sylva might have been seized with mortal illness if judged solely by the manner in which she staggered into her father's house, threw her arms around the neck of an elderly woman whom she petrified by her appearance, and almost fainted--not quite, but on the verge, much nearer than such a strong-minded young lady would have thought possible an hour earlier.

Maria screamed loudly. Tongue-tied at first, she was badly scared when Carmela collapsed on her ample bosom. Restoratives and endearments followed. Carmela asked to be taken to a room where she might wash and shake the dust from her hair and clothes. Maria considered ways and means. Every room in the big house was crowded.

"Who is in my own apartment?" demanded Carmela.

Even before the answer was forthcoming she guessed the truth. The Senhora Ingleza, of course. Those fine eyes of hers flashed dangerously.

"What, then? Does this woman come here and take all?" she cried.

"Ah, *pequinina*, do not be angry," said Maria. "Who save the good God could tell that you would come from Paris to-day? And the Senhora Ingleza will be glad to give place to you. She is so kind, so unselfish. All the men adore her."

"So I hear," murmured Carmela, trying to still the passion that throbbed in her heart, since she was aware that neither Maria nor any other among the old domestics at Las Flores knew of her engagement, and pride was now coming to her aid.

"She will have no word to say to any of them," gabbled Maria. "There is a young Englishman--well, it is no affair of mine, but I am told she loves him, yet is promised to another, an old man, too. *Santa Mae!* That would not suit me if I were her age!"

This home-coming of Carmela was quite an important event in its way. At first sight it bore the semblance of a mere disillusionment such as any girl might experience under like circumstances. She had been taken from Las Flores to occupy a palace at Rio de Janeiro, and was driven from the palace to the hotel life of the Continent. During two years she had not seen either father or lover; and lovers of the San Benavides ilk are apt to console themselves during these

prolonged intervals. Yet Carmela's shattered romance was the pivot on which rested the future of Brazil.

Had she gone straight to Iris on leaving her father, and made known the astounding tidings that Verity and Bulmer were riding up the Moxoto Valley barely three miles away, Iris would surely have devised some means of acquainting Philip Hozier with the fact. In that event, assuming that he awaited their arrival, the first march of an extended reconnaissance which he thought desirable would necessarily be postponed. And then--well, the recent history of Brazil would have to be re-written, since there cannot be the slightest doubt that Dom Corria De Sylva would never have occupied the Presidential chair a second time.

It would be idle now to inquire too closely into the springs of Philip's resolve to take service under a foreign flag. Perhaps the irksome state of affairs at Las Flores, where there was no mean between loafing and soldiering, was intolerable to a spirited youngster. Perhaps San Benavides, constantly riding in from the front, irritated him beyond endurance by his superior airs. Or it may be that a growing belief in Iris's determination to sacrifice herself by redeeming her bond made him careless as to what happened in the near future. The outcome of one or all of these influences was that he sought, and was readily given, a commission in the Army of Liberation. Like all sailors, he preferred the mounted arm, and De Sylva, having the highest opinion of his thoroughness, actually appointed him to command a branch of the Intelligence Department.

Philip, trained to pin his faith in maps and charts, came to the conclusion that Las Flores could be attacked from the rear, which lay to the northwest. The Brazilians laughed at the notion. Where were the troops to come from? Barraca must bring all his men by sea. There were none stationed in those wild mountains.

"Better go and make sure," quoth Philip.

He ascertained the President's intentions as to the next twenty-four hours, assembled his little body of scouts, saw to their forage and equipment, took leave of Iris, and hurried off.

When two stout and elderly fellow-countrymen of his climbed the last mile of the rough valley beneath the Las Flores slope, Philip and his troop were a league or more beyond the Moxoto's watershed.

Meanwhile, Carmela De Sylva proved that her resolute chin was not deceptive as a guide to temperament. The Dona Pondillo deemed her a spirit when she appeared on the veranda, but Carmela's impetuous kiss soon disabused the worthy dame of her error.

Iris, wondering why the lively chatter of her Brazilian friends was so suddenly stilled, to be succeeded by a hubbub of excited words as the older ladies present gathered around the new-comer, asked one of the Pondillo girls what had happened.

"It is Carmela, the President's daughter," giggled the other. "Mother says she is engaged to San Benavides. What fun! But where has she come from? When last I heard of her she was in Paris."

A month of close companionship with people who spoke Portuguese all day long, and often far into the night, had familiarized Iris with many of the common phrases. Thus, she gathered one fact as to Carmela, and more than suspected another. For a reason that every woman will understand, she felt a subtle thrill of fear. If San Benavides were really Carmela's accepted lover, then, indeed, Iris had good cause for foreboding. Though the Brazilian had never directly avowed his passion, since he knew quite well that she would refuse to listen, she could not be blind to his infatuation. Only the threat of her dire displeasure had restrained Hozier from an open quarrel with him. Her position, difficult enough already, would become intolerable if De Sylva's daughter became jealous, and she had no doubt whatsoever that San Benavides would seek to propitiate the woman he loved by callously telling the woman he had promised to marry that his affections were bestowed elsewhere.

Her heart sank when she discovered this new maelstrom in her sea of troubles; but here was Carmela herself speaking to her, and in English:

"So you are Iris Yorke!" the girl was saying. "I have heard so much of you, yet you are so utterly different from what I imagined."

"You have heard of *me*?" repeated Iris, and surprise helped her to smile with something of her wonted self-possession.

"Yes, on board the steamer. We sailed from Southampton, and had little else to talk of during the voyage. But, of

course, you cannot understand. Among my fellow-passengers were your uncle and Mr. Bulmer."

Iris had long relinquished any hope of communicating with Bootle until the present deadlock in the operations of the two armies was a thing of the past. Completely mystified now by Carmela's glib reference to the two men whose names were so often in her thoughts though seldom on her lips, she could only gaze at the Senhora De Sylva in silent bewilderment.

Carmela, feeling that she was gaining ground rapidly, affected a note of polite regret.

"Please forgive me for being so abrupt. Perhaps I ought to have prepared you. But it is quite true. Mr. Verity and Mr. Bulmer came with me from Europe. We all reached Pernambuco the day before yesterday. Indeed, if it were not for them, and the assistance they gave me, I would not be here now. No one recognized me, fortunately, and--I hope you will not be vexed--I passed as Mr. Verity's niece. In fact, I took your place for the time."

A notable feature of the De Sylva utterance was its clearness. Carmela's concluding words could not possibly be mistaken for anything else. Their meaning, on the other hand, was capable of varying shades of significance; but Iris was far too amazed to seek depths beneath their literalness.

"If Mr. Verity and Mr. Bulmer are in Brazil----" she began tremulously, but Carmela broke in with a shrill laugh.

"There is no 'if.' Look below there, near my father's tent! They have arrived. They are asking for you. Come, let us meet them! I must see my father before he departs."

Iris's swimming eyes could not discern the figures to which Carmela was pointing. But this strange girl's triumphant tone rang like a knell in her heart. She was not thinking now of the complications that might arise between San Benavides and his discarded flame. She only knew that, by some miracle, her uncle had come to bring her home, and with him was the man to whom she was plighted, while Philip, only half an hour ago, had told her he would not see her again until the following evening.

So this was the end of her dream. Bitter-sweet it had been, and long drawn out, but forthwith she must awake to the gray actualities of life.

She felt Carmela dragging her onward, irresistibly, vindictively. She saw, as through a mist, David Verity's fiery-hued face, and heard his harsh accents. Yes, there was no mistake. Here was Bootle transported to Brazil, Linden House to Las Flores!

"By gum, lass," he was bellowing, with a touch of real sentiment in his voice, "you've given us a rare dance afore we caught up wi' you. But 'ere you are, bright as a cherry, an' 'ere is Dickey an' meself come to fetch you. Dash my wig, there's life in the old dogs yet, or we'd never ha' bin able to ride forty mile through this God-forgotten country. An' damme if that isn't Coke, red as a lobster. Jimmie, me boy, put it there! Man, but you're a dashed long way from port!"

Happily, Iris was too stunned to betray herself. She extended a hand to the sun-browned, white-haired old man standing by her uncle's side.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Bulmer," she said simply. And, in that hour of searing agony, she meant it, for it is easier to look back on suffering than to await it, and she had been living in dread of this meeting for many a weary day.

CHAPTER XV

SHOWING HOW BRAZIL CHOSE HER PRESIDENT

Two thousand five hundred years ago the prophet Jeremiah expressed incredulity as to the power of an Ethiopian to change his skin or a leopard his spots. The march of the centuries has fully justified the seer's historic doubt, so it makes but slight demand on the critical faculties to assume that two years' residence in Europe had not cooled the hot southern blood flowing in Carmela's veins.

She had hated Iris before she set eyes on her; she hated her now that she had seen her rare beauty; she gloated

on the suffering inflicted by the presence of the faded old man who claimed her as his bride. Though it was of the utmost importance that she should hasten to her father, she returned to Las Flores in her rival's company, their arms linked in seeming friendship, and the Brazilian girl's ears alert to treasure every word that told of Bulmer's wooing.

Therein she greatly miscalculated the true gentility of one whom his cronies described as "a rough diamond." Bulmer realized that Iris was overwrought. Vague but sensational items in newspapers had prepared him in some measure for the story of her wanderings since last they met in quiet, old-fashioned Bootle. He felt that she was altered, that their ways in life had deviated with a sharpness that was not to be brought back into parallel grooves simply because he had traveled many thousands of miles to find her.

So Dickey contented himself by listening to Coke's Homeric account of the *Andromeda's* wrecking, and if he interposed an occasional question, and thus drew the girl's sweet voice into the talk, it was invariably germane to the strange history of the ship and her human freight.

Coke's narrative was picturesque and lurid. At times, he called himself to order; at times, both Iris and Carmela affected not to have heard him. But Carmela's interest never flagged. Nor did Bulmer's. As the yarn progressed--for Watts and Schmidt and Norrie had joined them, and the whole party was seated in an inner room where an impromptu meal was provided--both the woman of Brazil and the man of Lancashire seized on the same unspoken *motif*. Every incident centered in the striking personality of Philip Hozier. From the instant the second shell struck the winch, and laid him apparently dead on the forecastle, to the very hour of this coming together at Las Flores, Hozier held the stage. It was he who took Iris on his shoulders and brought her to safety through the spume of the wrathful sea, he who carried her to the hut, he who crossed Fernando Noronha alone to protect her.

Coke was impartial. He would have minimized his own singular bravery in running up the ship's signals had not Iris given him a breathing-space while she enthralled the others with her description. Otherwise, Coke skipped no line of his epic.

"You'll rec'lect," he wheezed, in a voice that rasped like a file, "you'll rec'lect, Mr. Verity, as I said to you that Hozier was good enough to take charge of the bridge of a battleship. By--well, any 'ow, if I'd said the Channel Fleet I shouldn't 'ave bin talkin' through me 'at. Look at 'im now. 'E's the on'y reel live man Dom Wot's-'is-name 'as got. Sink me! if it wasn't for the folks at 'ome, an' the fac' that the *Andromeeda's* skipper ought to keep clear of politics in this crimson country, I'd 'ave a cut in at the game meself."

It might be hoped that Carmela's mood would soften when she discovered her rival's hapless love, but that would be expecting something which her bursting southern heart could not give. A volcano pours forth lava, not water. It scorches, not heals. Iris, willing or not, had sapped her Salvador's allegiance. Carmela wanted to see those curved lips writhing in pain, those brown eyes dimmed, that smooth brow wrung with the grief that knows no remedy.

A fierce joy leaped up in her when Verity spoke of an early departure.

"You see, Iris," he explained, "these Brazilian bucks may be months in settlin' their differences. Dickey an' me, 'elped a lot by our Consul, squeezed a pass out of the President--beg pardon, miss, but 'e is President, in Pernambuco, at all events," he said in an apologetic "aside" to Carmela--"an' the sooner we make tracks for ole England the better it'll be for all of us. Wot do you say to an early start to-morrow? We'd be off to-night, on'y I'm feared my rheumatically bones wouldn't stand the racket."

The color ebbed from Iris's face, but she said at once:

"I shall be ready, uncle dear. I promised Dom Corria to look after the hospital appliances that are so much needed by the poor soldiers, but the Senhora De Sylva will attend to that much more effectually than I."

"Good! Then that's settled."

David pursed out his thick lips with a sigh of relief. Though he had watched the spoken record of the *Andromeda* and her company for craftier hints than was suspected by his fellow travelers, he was not deaf to Coke's appreciation of Hozier. The silence of his niece on that same topic was alarming, but the position could not be so bad if she was willing to leave for the coast without seeing him again. No secret was made of Philip's errand into the interior. The homeward-bound cavalcade would be at Pesqueira ere he returned to the *finca*.

Carmela, of course, did not believe in a woman's complacency in such a vital matter. She was ever prepared to spring, to strike, to wrench their plans to suit her own ends; but, contrive as she might, she could not succeed in

leaving Iris alone with Bulmer. Full of device, she was foiled at each turn. The day wore, the sun went down, the starlit sky made beautiful a parched earth, but never a word in privacy did Iris exchange with her husband-to-be. Carmela's malice was not hidden from her, but she despised it. There was some ease for her tortured brain in defeating it. If the Senhora De Sylva had only understood how thoroughly the Englishwoman loathed her petty jealousy, it was possible that the few remaining hours of their enforced intimacy might have been rendered less irksome.

But, by this time, fate had gathered the slackened strings of their destinies. Thenceforth they became her puppets. Permitted for a little while to play the tragi-comedy of life according to their own inclinations, now the stern edict had gone forth that they were to act their allotted parts in one of those fascinating if blood-stained dramas that the history of nations so often puts on the stage. The future is the most cunning of playwrights. No man may tell what the next scene shall be. And no man, nor any woman, could guess the mad revel of hate and war that would rage that night around the placid homestead of Las Flores.

Behind the veranda was a huge ballroom, converted, by the exigencies of the campaign, into a dining hall for the many inmates of the *finca*. The Brazilian ladies, the sailors, some sick or wounded officers who were not confined to bed, even the household servants, took their meals there in common. Supper was served soon after nine o'clock. When cigars and cigarettes were lighted, and the company broke up into laughing, gossiping, noisy groups, the place looked more like a popular Continental cafe than a room in a private mansion.

Though De Sylva, General Russo, San Benavides, and some score of members of the President's staff who usually dined at the *finca*, were now absent, there was no lack of lively chatter. A very Babel of tongues mixed in amity. The prevalent note was one of cheery animation. Carmela exerted herself to win popularity, and a President's daughter need not put forth very strenuous efforts in that direction to be acclaimed by most.

Iris was listening, with real interest, to Verity's description of the finding of Macfarlane in the *Andromeda's* boat by a Cardiff-bound collier three days after he had drifted away from Fernando Noronha.

"The yarn kem to us through the Consul at Pernambuco," he said. "Evidently, from wot you tell me, it's all right. Poor ole Mac 'ad a bad time afore 'e was picked up, but 'e was alive, an' I'm jolly glad of it, for 'e'll be a first-rate witness w'en this business comes up in court."

"Wot court?" demanded Coke sharply.

"The court that settles our claim, of course," retorted Verity, with a quick ferret look at his fellow-conspirator.

"There'll be no claim. The President means to stump up in style. You take my tip, an' shut up about courts," said Coke.

"It'll cost Brazil a tidy penny," remarked Bulmer thoughtfully. "Nobody would ever imagine wot bags of gold an' parcels of di'monds sailors an' firemen carry around in their kit-bags till a ship is lost an' a Government 'as to pay."

Watts deemed this an exquisite joke. He laughed loudly.

"That reminds me," he cried. "W'en the *Gem of the Sea* turned turtle on the James an' Mary----"

A *criado*, a nondescript man-servant attached to the household, stooped over Iris and whispered something. She gathered that she was wanted in the *pateo*, or court-yard, which, owing to the construction of the house, stood on one side instead of in front, where the lawn usurped its usual position.

"Who is it?" she asked.

The voice sank even lower.

"Colonel San Benavides, Senhora."

She had gathered sufficient of Brazilian ways to understand that the man had been bribed to convey this request to her without attracting attention.

"Tell him to wait," she said, hoping to gain a moment wherein to decide how best to act.

"It is urgent, Senhora--*ao mesmo tempo*, the colonel said."

"Go! That is my answer."

The man's unwillingness to obey showed how imperative were his instructions. She rose, and the *criado* hurried out, satisfied that she would follow. But Iris had no wish to meet San Benavides. If she were seen with him in the dark *pateo* at this late hour, fuel would be added to the fire of Carmela's foolish spite. She was aware of Carmela's covert glance watching her from the other end of the long room. What was to be done? Why not send Carmela in her stead? They were almost of the same height, and dressed somewhat alike in flowered muslin. It would be an amusing mistake, though annoying, perhaps, to San Benavides; at any rate, Carmela would not object, and Iris was fully resolved not to keep the tryst in person.

She walked straight to her enemy.

"Colonel San Benavides awaits you in the *pateo*," she said in English.

"Awaits *me*!"

There was no mistaking the gleam in those jet-black eyes. The smoldering fire flamed into furnace heat at the implied indignity of such a mandate being delivered by Iris.

"I suppose so," said Iris carelessly. "A servant brought the message. He came to me in the first instance, but I am just going to my room to pack my few belongings. We leave here at daybreak, you know."

Carmela tried to smile.

"I shall be sorry to lose you," she said, "though I admit it will be pleasant to occupy my own room again."

Then Iris was genuinely distressed.

"I had not the least notion----" she began, but Carmela nodded and made off, saying as she went:

"What matter--for one night?"

So, at last, she would learn the truth. Salvador was out there, alone. She would soon judge him. If he were innocent, she would know. If he had merely been made the sport of a designing woman, she was ready to forgive. In a more amiable mood than she had displayed at any moment since her arrival at Las Flores, Carmela hastened along a dark corridor, crossed a bare hall, passed through a porch, and searched the shadows of the *pateo* for the form of her one-time lover.

A voice whispered, in French:

"Come quickly, Senhora, I pray you!"

It startled her to find San Benavides talking French, until it occurred to her that Iris and he must converse in that language or hardly at all. The thought was disquieting. The volcano stirred again.

"Senhora, je vous prie!" again pleaded the man, who was on horseback under the trees.

She did not hesitate, but ran to him. Without a word of explanation, he bent sideways, caught her in his arms, drew her up until she was seated on the holsters strapped to a gaucho saddle, and wheeled his horse into a gallop. Filled with a grim determination, she uttered no protest. Not a syllable crossed her lips lest he should strive to amend his woeful blunder. She noticed that they were not going toward the camp, but circling round the enclosed land in the direction of the hills. Though the night was dark, the stars gave light enough for the horse to move freely. Carmela's head was bent. A gauze-like mantilla covered her black hair, and, strange though it may seem, one woman's small waist and slim figure can be amazingly like the same physical attributes in another woman.

But San Benavides wondered why the cold Ingleza had surrendered so silently. He expected at least a scream, a struggle, an impassioned demand to be released. He was prepared for anything save a dumb acceptance of this extraordinary raid.

So he began to explain.

"One word, Senhora!" he muttered. "You must think me mad. I am not. All is lost! Our army is defeated! In an hour Las Flores will be in flames!"

The girl quivered in his arms. A moaning cry came from her.

"It is true, I swear it!" he vowed. "I mean you no ill. I fought till the end, and my good horse alone carried me in advance of the routed troops. Dom Corria may reach the *finca* alive, but, even so, he and the rest will be killed. I refused to escape without you. Believe me or not, you are dearer than life itself. In the confusion we two may not be missed. Trust yourself wholly to me, I beseech you!"

He spoke jerkily, in the labored phrase of a man who has to pick and choose the readiest words in an unfamiliar language.

Carmela, with a sudden movement, raised her face to his, and threw aside her veil.

"Salvador!" she said.

His eyes glared into hers. His frenzied clutch at the reins pulled the horse on to its haunches.

"My God!... Carmela!" he almost shrieked.

"Yes. So you are running away, Salvador--running away with the English miss--deserting my father in the hour of his need! But she will die with the others, you say. Well, then--join her!"

During that quick twist on the horse's withers, she had plucked a revolver from a holster. She meant to shatter that false face of his utterly, to blast him as with lightning ... but the lock snapped harmlessly, for San Benavides had, indeed, borne himself gallantly in the fray. He struck at her now in a whirl of fury. She winced, but with catamount activity drew back her arm and hit him on the temple with the heavy weapon. He collapsed limply, reeled from off the saddle, and they fell together. The frightened horse, finding himself at liberty, galloped to the camp, where already there was an unusual commotion.

Carmela flung herself on the man's body. She was capable of extremes either of grief or passion.

"Salvador, my love! my love!" she screamed. "What have I done? Speak to me, Salvador! It is I, Carmela! Oh, Mary Mother, come to my aid! I have killed him, killed my Salvador!"

He looked very white and peaceful as he lay there in the gloom. She could not see whether his lips moved. She was too distraught to note if his heart was beating. It seemed incredible that she, a weak woman, should have crushed the life out of that lithe and active frame with one blow. Then a dark stain appeared on the white skin. Her hands, her lips, were covered with blood. She tasted it. The whole earth reeked of it. It scorched her as with vitriol. She rose and ran blindly. The darkness appalled her. No matter now what fate befell, she must have light, the sound of human voices.... And she sobbed piteously as she ran:

"Salvador! Oh, God in heaven, my Salvador!"

It is not the crime, but the conscience, that scourges erring humanity. Carmela needed some such flogging. It was just as well that her fright at the horrible touch of blood was not balanced by the saner knowledge that a ruptured vein was nature's own remedy for a man jarred into insensibility. Long before Carmela reached the *finca*, San Benavides stirred, groaned, squirmed convulsively, and raised himself on hands and knees. He turned, and sat down, feeling his head.

"The spit-fire!" he muttered. "The she-devil! And that other! Would that I could wring *her* neck!"

A sputtering of rifles crackled in the valley. There was a blurred clamor of voices. He looked at the sky, at the black summits of the hills. He stood up, and his inseparable sword clanked on the stony ground.

"Ah, well," he growled, "I have done with women. They have had the best of my life. What is left I give to Brazil."

So he, too, made for Las Flores, but slowly, for he was quite exhausted, and his limbs were stiff with the rigors of a wild day in the saddle.

Carmela went back to a household that paid scant heed to her screaming. Dom Corria was there, bare-headed, his gorgeous uniform sword-slashed and blood-bespattered. General Russo, too, was beating his capacious chest and shouting:

"God's bones, let us make a fight of it!"

A sprinkling of soldiers, all dismounted cavalry or gunners, a few disheveled officers, had accompanied De Sylva in his flight. With reckless bravery, he and Russo had tried to rally the troops camped at headquarters. It was a hopeless effort. Half-breeds can never produce a military caste. They may fight valiantly in the line of battle--they will not face the unknown, the terrible, the harpies that come at night, borne on the hurricane wings of panic. Unhappily, De Sylva and his bodyguard were the messengers of their own disaster. The cowardly genius at Pesqueira had planned a surprise. He would not lead it, of course, but in Dom Miguel Barraca he found an eager substitute. It was a coup of the Napoleonic order; an infantry attack along the entire front of the Liberationist position cloaked the launching against the center of a formidable body of cavalry. The project was to thrust this lance into the rebel position, probe it thoroughly, as a surgeon explores a gunshot wound, and extract the offender in the guise of Dom Corria.

The scheme had proved eminently successful. The Liberationists were crumpled up, and here was Dom Corria making his last stand.

He deserved better luck, for he was magnificent in failure. Calm as ever, he tried to be shot or captured when the reserves in camp failed him. Russo and the rest dragged him onward by main force.

"They want me only," he urged. "My death will end a useless struggle. I shall die a little later, when many more of my friends are killed. Why not die now?"

They would not listen.

"It is night!" they cried. "The enemy's horses are spent. A determined stand may give us another chance."

But it was a forlorn hope. As San Benavides lurched into the *pateo*, the horses of the first pursuing detachment strained up the slope between house and encampment.

Carmela, all her fire gone, the pallid ghost of the vengeful woman who would have shattered her lover's skull were the revolver loaded, was the first to see him. She actually crouched in terror. Her tongue was parched. If she uttered some low cry, none heard her.

Dom Corria, striving to dispose his meager garrison as best he could, met his trusted lieutenant. His face lit with joy.

"Ah, my poor Salvador!" he cried. "I thought we had lost you at the ford!"

"No," said San Benavides. "I ran away!"

Even in his dire extremity, De Sylva smiled.

"Would that others had run like you, my Salvador!" he said. "Then we should have been in Pernambuco tomorrow."

The Brazilian looked around. His eye dwelt heedlessly on the cowering Carmela. He was searching for Iris, who had been compelled by Coke and Bulmer and her uncle to take shelter behind the score of sailors who still remained at Las Flores.

"It is true, nevertheless," he said laconically. "I knew the game was lost, so I came here to try and save a lady."

"Ah--our Carmela? You thought of her?"

"No!"

Then the spell passed from Carmela. She literally threw herself on her lover.

"Yes, it is true!" she shrieked. "He came to save me, but I preferred to die here--with you, father--and with him."

Dom Corria did not understand these fire-works, but he had no time for thought. Bullets were crashing through the closed Venetians. Light they must have, or the defense would become an orgy of self-destruction, yet light was their most dangerous foe when men were shooting from the somber depths of the trees.

The assailants were steadily closing around the house. Their rifles covered every door and window. Each minute

brought up fresh bands in tens and twenties. At last, Barraca himself arrived. Some members of his staff made a hasty survey of the situation. There were some three hundred men available, and, in all probability, Dom Corria could not muster one-sixth of that number. It was a crisis that called for vigor. The cavalry lance was twenty miles from its base, and there was no knowing what accident might reunite the scattered Liberationists. One column, at least, of the Nationalists had failed to keep its rendezvous, or this last desperate stand at Las Flores would have proved a sheer impossibility.

So the house must be rushed, no matter what the cost. This was a war of leaders. Let Dom Corria fall, and his most enthusiastic supporters would pay Dom Miguel's taxes without further parley. A scheme of concerted action was hastily arranged. Simultaneously, five detachments swarmed against the chosen points of assault. One crossed the *pateo* to the porch, another made for the stable entrance, a third attacked the garden door, a fourth assailed the servants' quarters, and the fifth, strongest of all, and inspired by Dom Miguel's presence, battered in the shutters and tore away the piled up furniture of the ballroom.

The Nationalist leader's final order was terse.

"Spare the women; shoot every rebel; do not touch the foreigners unless they resist!"

With yells of "Abajo De Sylva!" "Morto por revoltados!" the assailants closed in. Neither side owned magazine rifles, so the fight was with machetes, swords, and bayonets when the first furious hail of lead had spent itself. No man thought of quarter, nor ceased to stab and thrust until he fell. Not even then did some of the half-savage combatants desist, and a many a thigh was gashed and boot-protected leg cut to the bone by those murderous hatchet knives wielded by hands which would soon stiffen in death.

When three hundred desperadoes meet fifty of like caliber in a hand-to-hand conflict--when the three hundred mean to end the business, and the fifty know that they must die--fighting for choice, but die in any event--the resultant encounter will surely be both fierce and brief. And never was fratricidal strife more sanguinary than during the earliest onset within the walls. Each inch of corridor, each plank of the ballroom floor, was contested with insane ferocity. This was not warfare. It savored of the carnage of the jungle. Its sounds were those of wild beasts. It smelled of the shambles.

By one of those queer chances which sometimes decide the hazard between life and death, the window nearest that end of the room where the sailors strove to protect a few shrieking women had not been broken in. Here, then, was a tiny bay of refuge; from it the men of the *Andromeda* and the *Unser Fritz*, Bulmer, Verity, Iris, and such of the Brazilian ladies as had not fled to the upper rooms at the initial volley, looked out on an amazing butchery. De Sylva, no longer young, and never a robust man, had been dragged from mortal peril many times by his devoted adherents. Carmela had snatched a machete from the fingers of a dying soldier, and was fighting like one possessed of a fiend.

Once, when a combined rush drove the defenders nearly on top of the non-combatants, Iris would have striven to draw the half-demented girl into the little haven with the other women.

But Coke thrust her back, shouting:

"Leave 'er alone. She'll set about you if you touch her!"

Dickey Bulmer, too, who was displaying a fortitude hardly to be expected in a man of his years and habits, thought that interference was useless.

"Let 'er do what she can," he said. "She doesn't know wot is 'appenin' now. If she was on'y watchin' she'd be a ravin' lunatic. God 'elp us all, we've got ourselves into a nice mess!"

Somehow, the old man's Lancashire drawl, with its broad vowels and misplaced aspirates, exercised a singularly soothing effect on Iris's tensely-strung nerves. It seemed to remove her from that murder-filled arena. It was redolent of home, of quiet streets, of orderly crowds thronging to the New Brighton sands, of the sober, industrious, God-fearing folk who filled the churches and chapels at each service on a Sunday. These men and women of Brazil were her brothers and sisters in the great comity of nations, yet Heaven knows they did not figure in such guise during that hour of intense emotions.

But if Dickey Bulmer's simple words exalted him into the kingdom of the heroic, David Verity occupied a lower plane. Prayers and curses alternated on his lips. He was stupefied with fear. He had never seen the lust of slaying in men's eyes, and it mesmerized him. Many of the sailors wanted to join in on behalf of their friends. It needed all Coke's

vehemence to restrain them. "Keep out of it, you swabs," he would growl. "It's your on'y chanst. This isn't our shindy. Let 'em rip an' be hanged to 'em!" Yet he was manifestly uneasy, and he kept a wary eye on De Sylva, whom he appraised at a personal value of five thousand pounds "an pickin's."

A tall, distinguished-looking man, wearing a brilliant uniform, his breast decorated with many orders, now appeared on the scene. He shouted something, and the attacking force redoubled their efforts. He raised a revolver, and took deliberate aim at Dom Corria. Coke saw him, and his bulldog pluck combined with avarice to overcome his common sense. Without thought of the consequences, he sprang into the swaying mob and pulled De Sylva aside. A bullet smashed into the wall behind them.

"Look out, mister!" he bellowed. "'Ere's a blighter 'oo wants to finish you quick!"

De Sylva's glance sought his adversary. He produced a revolver which hitherto had remained hidden in a pocket. Perhaps its bullets were not meant for an enemy. He fired at the tall man. A violent swerve of the two irregular ranks of soldiers screened each from the other. An opening offered, and the man who had singled out Dom Corria for his special vengeance fired again. The bullet struck Coke in the breast. The valiant little skipper staggered, and sank to the floor. His fiery eyes gazed up into Verity's.

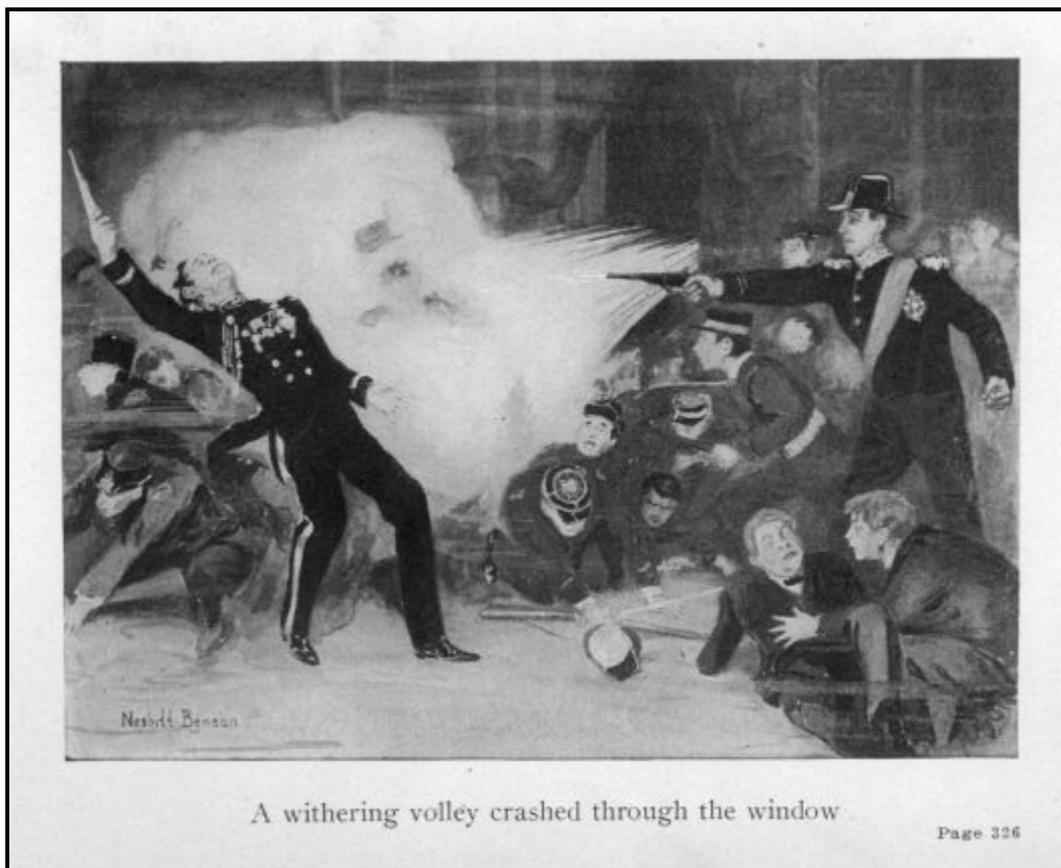
"Damme if I ain't hulled!" he roared, his voice loud and harsh as if he were giving some command from the bridge in a gale of wind.

David dropped to his knees.

"For Gawd's sake, Jimmie!" he moaned.

"Yes, I've got it. Sarve me dam well right, too! No business to go ag'in me own pore old ship. Look 'ere, Verity, I'm done for! If you get away from this rotten muss, see to my missus an' the girls. If you don't--d--n you----"

"Fire!" shouted a strong English voice from without. A withering volley crashed through the open windows. Full twenty of the assailants fell, Dom Miguel de Barraca among them. There was an instant of terrible silence, as between the shocks of an earthquake.



[Illustration: A withering volley crashed through the window]

"Now, come on!" shouted the same voice, and Philip Hozier rushed into the ballroom, followed by his scouts and a horde of Brazilian regulars. No one not actually an eye-witness of that thrilling spectacle would believe that a fight waged with such determined malevolence could stop so suddenly as did that fray in Las Flores. It was true, now as ever, that men of a mixed race cannot withstand the unforeseen. Dom Miguel fallen, and his cohort decimated by the leaden storm that tore in at them from an unexpected quarter, the rest fled without another blow. They raced madly for their horses, to find that every tethered group was in the hands of this new contingent. Then the darkness swallowed them. Dom Miguel's cavalry was disbanded.

At once the medley within died down. Men had no words as yet to meet this astounding development. Dom Corria went to where his rival lay. Dom Miguel was dying. His eyes met De Sylva's in a strange look of recognition. He tried to speak, but choked and died.

Then the living President stooped over the dead one. He murmured something. Those near thought afterward that he said:

"Is it worth it? Who knows!"

But he was surely President now; seldom have power and place been more hardily won.

His quiet glance sought Philip.

"Thank you, Mr. Hozier," he said. "All Brazil is your debtor. As for me, I can never repay you. I owe you my life, the lives of my daughter and of many of my friends, and the success of my cause."

Philip heard him as in a dream. He was looking at Iris. Her eyes were shining, her lips parted, yet she did not come to him. By her side was standing a white-haired old man, an Englishman, a stranger. Bending over Coke, and wringing his hands in incoherent sorrow, was another elderly Briton. A fear that Philip had never before known gripped his heartstrings now. He was pale and stern, and his forehead was seamed with foreboding.

"Who is that with Miss Yorke?" he said to Dom Corria.

The President had a rare knack of answering a straight question in a straight way.

"A Mr. Bulmer, I am told," he said.

There was a pause. General Russo, carved from head to foot, but so stout withal that his enemies' weapons had reached no vital part, approached. He thumped his huge stomach.

"We must rally our men," he said. "If we collect even five thousand to-night----"

"Yes," said De Sylva, "I will come. Before I go, Mr. Hozier, let me repeat that I and Brazil are grateful."

"May the devil take both you and Brazil!" was Philip's most ungracious reply, and he turned and strode out into the night.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEREIN THE PRESIDENT PRESIDES

Before the exciting story so rudely interrupted is resumed, it may be well to set down in their sequence the queer workings of fortune which led to Philip's timely reappearance at Las Flores.

His troop of scouts consisted of twenty-eight men. Five were sailors and firemen from the *Andromeda*; three were Germans from the *Unser Fritz*. But the whole eight were ex-soldiers, and one man-at-arms trained on the European model is worth ten of the Brazilian product. The remaining twenty were hillmen, good riders, excellent shots, and acquainted with every yard of the wild country within a radius of a hundred miles. They would fight anybody if well

led, and here it may be observed that when Philip called on them to storm the ballroom, he said, "Come on!"; between which curt command and its congener, "Go on!" these half-breed warriors drew a fine distinction. The language difficulty was surmounted partly by an interpreter in the person of one of the Germans, who spoke English and had lived in Bahia, partly by signs, and largely by Philip's methods as a leader.

He never asked his men to do anything that he did not do himself, and they were never dubious as to his tactics, since he invariably closed with any Nationalist detachment met during the day's operations.

About mid-day, then, they came upon the advance guard of a column sent off a week earlier by the expert at Pesqueira with instructions to arrive at Las Flores before sunset that very day. Instantly the twenty-nine charged; with equal celerity the advance guard bolted. From the crest of a rocky pass Philip looked down on a column of fully a thousand men. The situation was critical. It called for prompt handling. Five men held the horses; twenty-three spread themselves among the rocks; Philip unslung his carbine; and twenty-four rifles indulged in long-range practice on a narrow mountain path crowded with men and animals.

Nothing more was needed. It has been noted already that the Brazilians disliked long-range shooting. There was a stampede. The scouts occupied the ridge until sundown, and were returning leisurely to report the presence of the column, when they fell in with the first batch of fugitives from the valley. Forthwith, Philip became a general and each scout an officer. They reasoned and whacked the runaways into obedience, picked up quite a number of men who were willing enough to fight if told what was expected of them--and the rest was a matter of simple strategy such as Macaulay's schoolboy would exhibit in the escalade of a snow fort. But it was a near thing. Five minutes later, and Hozier might have seized the presidency himself.

And now, as to the night, and the next day.

Russo and his diminished staff took Philip's little army as a nucleus. Brazil had duly elected Dom Corria, as provided by the statute, and the news spread like wild fire. Before morning, the Liberationists were ten thousand strong. Before night closed the roads again, the Pesqueira genius wrote to Dom Corria under a flag of truce, and pointed out that he served the *President*, not any crank who said he was President, but the honored individual in whom the people of Brazil placed their trust. Dom Corria replied in felicitous terms, and, as the newspapers say, the incident ended. The navy sulked for a while, because they held that Russo's treatment of the *Andorinha* was not cricket, or baseball, or whatsoever game appeals most to the Brazilian sportsman. It was not even professional football, they said; but an acrimonious discussion was closed by a strong hint from the Treasury that pay-day might be postponed indefinitely if too much were made of a regrettable accident to the guns of the Maceio artillery.

Meanwhile, Dom Corria, the man who did not forget, was puzzled by two circumstances not of national importance. San Benavides, never a demonstrative lover where Carmela was concerned, was a changed man. He was severely wounded during the fight, and Carmela nursed him assiduously, but there could be no doubt that he was under her thumb, and would remain there. The indications were subtle but unmistakable. Carmela even announced the date of their marriage.

Dom Corria remembered, of course, what San Benavides and his daughter had said when they all met in the ballroom. It seemed to him that Salvador was telling the truth and that Carmela was fibbing on that occasion. But he let well enough alone. It was good for Salvador that he should obey Carmela. He blessed them, and remarked that a really "smart" wedding would be just the thing to inaugurate the new reign at Rio de Janeiro.

He was far more perplexed by the untimely wrath of Philip Hozier. He thought of it for at least five minutes next morning. Then he sought Dickey Bulmer, who had just quitted Coke's bedroom, and was examining the rare shrubs that bordered the lawn.

"What news of that brave man?" asked Dom Corria, and his deep voice vibrated with real feeling.

"First-rate, sir," said Dickey. "The bullet is extracted, and the doctor says 'e'll soon be all right. Leastways, that's wot Iris tells me. I can't talk Portuguese meself, an' pore old Jimmie's langwidge ain't fit to be repeated."

The President laughed.

"He is what you call a bundle of contradictions, eh?--a rough fellow with the heart of a bull. But he saved my life, and that naturally counts for a good deal with me. And how is your niece after last night's terrible experience?"

"My niece? D'ye mean Iris?" demanded Bulmer, obviously somewhat annoyed.

"Yes."

"She's not my niece; she's----"

"Your grand-daughter, then?"

"No, sir. That young lady 'as done me the honor of promisin' to be my wife."

"Oh!" said Dom Corria, fixing his brilliant eyes on Bulmer's vexed face.

"There's no 'Oh' about it," growled Dickey. "It was all cut an' dried weeks ago, an' she 'asn't rued of'er bargain yet, as far as I can make out."

"You mean that the marriage was arranged before the *Andromeda* sailed?" said Dom Corria gently.

"W'y, of course. It couldn't very well be fixed after, could it?"

"No--not as between you and her. I can vouch for that. Forgive me, Mr. Bulmer--I have a daughter of marriageable age, you know, and I speak as a parent--do you think that it is a wise thing for a man of your years to marry a girl of twenty?"

"If I didn't, I wouldn't do it."

"But may it not be selfish?"

Then downright Lancashire took hold of the argument.

"Look 'ere, wot are you drivin' at?" demanded Dickey, now in a white heat of anger. He had yet to learn that the President preferred a straight-forward way of talking.

"I want you to forego this marriage," he said.

"Why?"

"Because that charming girl loves another man, but feels that she is bound to you. I understand the position at last. Mr. Bulmer, you cannot wish to break her heart and drive that fine young fellow, Philip Hozier, to despair. Come, now! Let you and me reason this thing together. Possibly, when she agreed to marry you she did not know what love is. She is high-minded, an idealist, the soul of honor. What other woman would have consented to be separated from her friends on Fernando Noronha merely because it increased their meager chances of safety? How few women, loving a man like Philip Hozier, who is assured of a splendid reward for his services to this State, would resolutely deny the claims of her own heart in order to keep her word?"

Bulmer had never heard anyone speak with the crystal directness of Dom Corria. Each word chipped away some part of the fence which he had deliberately erected around his own intelligence. Certain facts had found crevices in the barrier already; Dom Corria broke down whole sections. But he was a hard man, and stubborn. Throughout his long life he had not been of yielding habit, and his heart was set on Iris.

"You are mighty sure that she is wrapped up in this young spark," he growled.

"Were I not, I would not have interfered. Take my advice. First, ask yourself an honest question. Then ask the girl. She will answer. I promise you that."

"I'm a rich man," persisted Dickey.

"Yes."

"Nobody forced 'er, one way or the other."

"Possibly. One wonders, though, why she hid herself on the *Andromeda*."

"It's true, I tell you. David said----"

"Who is David?"

"Her uncle."

"In England, I take it, if a man wishes to marry a girl he does not woo her uncle. Of course, these customs vary. Here, in Brazil----"

Then Bulmer said something about Brazil that was not to be expected from one of his staid demeanor. In fact, he regarded Brazil as the cause of the whole trouble, and his opinion concerning that marvelous land coincided with Hozier's. He turned and walked away, looking a trifle older, a trifle more bent, perhaps, than when he came out of the house.

An hour later, Dom Corria and Carmela met in a corridor. They were discussing arrangements for a speedy move to the capital when Iris ran into them. Her face was flushed, and she had been crying. Much to Carmela's amazement, the English girl clasped her round the neck and kissed her.

"Tell your father, my dear, that he has been very good to me," she whispered; then her face grew scarlet again, and she hurried away.

"Excellent!" said the President. "That old man is a gentleman. His friend is not. Yet they are very much alike in other respects. Odd thing! Carmela *cara*, can you spare a few minutes from your invalid?"

"Yes, father."

"Go, then, and find that young Englishman, Philip Hozier. Tell him that the engagement between Miss Yorke and Mr. Bulmer is broken off."

Carmela's black eyes sparkled. That wayward blood of hers surged in her veins, but Dom Corria's calm glance dwelt on her, and the spasm passed.

"Yes, father," she said dutifully.

He stroked his chin as he went out to pronounce a funeral oration on those who had fallen during the fight.

"I think," said he reflectively, "I think that Carmela dislikes that girl. I wonder why?"

Philip had never, to his knowledge, seen the Senhora De Sylva. Watts spoke of her, remarking that she was "a reel pleasant young lady, a bit flighty, p'raps, but, then, 'oo could tell wot any gal would do one minnit from the next?" And that was all.

It was, therefore, something more than a surprise when the sallow-faced, willowy girl, black-haired, black-eyed, and most demure of manner, whom he remembered to have met in the gateway of Las Flores early on the previous day, came to his tent and asked for him.

She introduced herself, and Philip was most polite.

"My father sent me----" she began.

"I ought to have waited on the President," he said, seeing that she hesitated, "but several of my men are wounded, and we have so few doctors."

She smiled, and Carmela could redeem much of her plainness of feature by the singular charm of her smile.

"Dom Corria is a good doctor himself," she said.

"His skill will be much appreciated in Brazil at the present moment," said he, rather bewildered.

"He mends broken hearts," she persisted.

"Ah, a healer, indeed!" but he frowned a little.

"He is in demand to-day. He asked me to tell you of one most successful operation. The--er--the engagement between Miss Iris Yorke--is that the name?--and Mr.--Mr.--dear me----"

"Bulmer," scowled Philip, a block of ice in the warm air of Brazil.

"Yes, that is it--well--it is ended. She is free--for a little while."

There was a curious bleaching of Philip's weather-tanned face. It touched a chord in Carmela's impulsive nature.

"It is all right," she nodded. "You can go to her."

She left him there, more shaken than he had ever been by thunderous sea or screaming bullet.

"They are cold, these English," she communed, as she passed up the slope to the house. "It takes something to rouse them. What would he have said were he in Salvador's place last night!"

It did not occur to her that Philip could not possibly have been in Salvador's place, since God has made as many varieties of men as of berries, whereof some are wholesome and some poisonous, yet they all have their uses. And she might have modified her opinion of his coldness had she seen the manner of his meeting with Iris.

Visiting the sick is one of the Christian virtues, so Philip visited Coke. Iris had just finished writing a letter, partly dictated, and much altered in style, to Mrs. James Coke, Sea View, Ocean Road, Birkenhead, when a gentle tap brought her to the door. She opened it. Her wrist was seized, and she was drawn into the corridor. She had no option in the matter. The tall young man who held her wrist proceeded to squeeze the breath out of her, but she was growing so accustomed to deeds of violence that she did not even scream.

"There is a British chaplain at Pernambuco," was Philip's incoherent remark.

"I must ask my uncle," she gasped.

"No. Leave that to me. No man living shall say 'Yes' or 'No' to me where you are concerned, Iris."

"Do not be hard with him, Philip dear. He was always good to me, and--and--I have grown a wee bit afraid of you."

"Afraid!"

"Yes. You are so much older, so much sterner, than when you and I looked at the Southern Cross together from the bridge of the *Andromeda*."

"I was a boy then, Iris. I am a man now. I have fought, and loved, and suffered. And what of you, dear heart? We went through the furnace hand in hand. What of the girl who has come forth a woman?"

There was an open window at the end of the passage. Watts had bought, or borrowed, or looted a bottle of wine. Schmidt and he were in a shaded arbor beneath, and his voice came to them:

"It is always fair weather
When good fellows meet together..."

But another voice, hoarse as a foghorn, boomed through the door which Iris had left ajar.

"Bring 'er in 'ere, you swab. D--n your eyes, if you come courtin' my nurse, you'll 'ave to do it in my room or not at all. Wot the----"

"Come in, dear," said Iris. "The doctor says he is not to excite himself. And he will be so glad to see you. He has been asking for you all day."

At Pernambuco, his excellency the President of the Republic of Brazil was waited on by Admiral Prince Heinrich von Schnitzenhausen, who was attended by an imposing armed guard. After compliments, the admiral stated that his Imperial master wished to be informed as to the truth or otherwise of a circumstantial statement made by the German Consul at Maceio, and confirmed by functionaries at Pernambuco, that on a certain date, to wit, September the 2d, he, Dom Corria De Sylva, aided and abetted by a number of filibusters, did unlawfully seize and sequester the steamship *Unser Fritz*, the said steamship being the property of German subjects and flying the German flag.

Though the admiral's sentence was much longer than its English translation, it only contained a dozen words. Its sound was fearsome in consequence, and its effect ought to have been portentous. But Dom Corria was unmoved.

"There is some mistake," said he.

"Exactly," said the admiral, "an-error-the-most-serious-and-not-easily-rectifiable."

"On your part," continued Dom Corria. "The vessel you name is the property of my friend and colleague Dom Alfonso Pondillo, of Maceio. He purchased and paid for her on September 1st. Here is the receipt of the former owners, given to the Deutsche Bank in Paris, and handed to Senhor Pondillo's agents. You will observe the date of the transaction."

The admiral read. He read again.

"Ach Gott!" he cried angrily. "There are some never-to-be-depended-upon fools in the world, and especially in Hamburg."

"Everywhere," agreed Dom Corria blandly. Carmela's memory was not quite of the hereditary order. She had forgotten, for three whole days, that the letter containing the receipt was in her pocket.

When Coke was pronounced fit for comfortable travel, David Verity and Dickey Bulmer conveyed him home. They took with them drafts on a London bank for amounts that satisfied every sort of claim for the sinking of the *Andromeda*. Judged by the compensation given to the vessel's survivors, there could be no doubt that the dependants of the men who lost their lives would be well provided for. Even Watts vowed that the President had behaved reel 'andsome, and, as a token of regeneration, swore that never another drop o' sperrits would cross his lips. Wines and beers, of course, were light refreshments of a different order. Schmidt, too, sublimely heedless of the diplomatic storm he had caused, seemed to be contented. He taught Watts "*Es gibt nur eine Kaiser Stadt*," and Watts taught him the famous chanty of the *Alice* brig and her marooned crew. But the latter effusion was rehearsed far from Coke's deck-chair, because the captain of the mail steamer said that although he liked Coke personally, some of the lady passengers might complain.

At odd moments David and Dickey Bulmer discussed the partnership. The young people would be home in two months, and then Philip was to come into the business.

"We're growing old, David," said Dickey. "I've got plenty of money, an' you'll 'ave a tidy bit now, but there's one thing neether of us can buy, and that's youth."

"I don't want to be young again," said David, "but I'd like to go back just a year or so--no more.

"Why?"

"Well, there's bin times w'en--w'en I'd 'ave acted different. Wot do you say, Jimmie?"

Coke, thus appealed to, glowered at his employer.

"Say!" he growled. "I say nothink. I know you, David."

Philip and Iris attended Carmela's wedding during their honeymoon. The cathedral at Rio de Janeiro was packed, and Iris was quite inconspicuous among the many richly-attired ladies who graced the ceremony by their presence. Nevertheless, Colonel Salvador San Benavides favored her with a peculiar smile as he led his bride down the central aisle.

She laughed, blushed, and looked at her husband.

"Yes, I saw him," he whispered. "But I never feared him. It was you that made me sit up. By the way, old girl, let us cut out the reception. I want to call at the bank, and at a shop in the Rua Grande. You will be interested."

Well, being a good and loving wife, she was interested deeply. Ten thousand pounds was Dom Corria's financial

estimate of the services rendered by Philip, and Iris was absolutely dumfounded by the total in milreis. But her voice came back when Philip took her to a jeweler's, and the man produced a gold cross on which blazed four glorious diamonds. Dom Corria had given her a necklace many times more valuable; but this----

"For remembrance!" said Philip.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she murmured, and her eyes grew moist.

THE END