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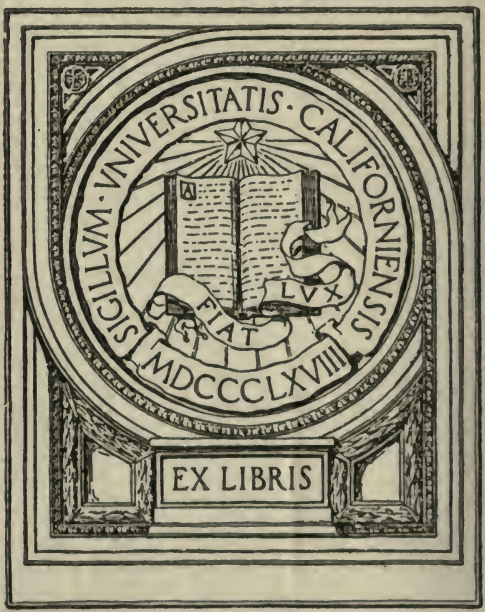

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THE FAR CRY

THE FAR CRY

BY

HENRY MILNER RIDEOUT

AUTHOR OF "WHITE TIGER," ETC.

NEW YORK

DUFFIELD AND COMPANY

1919

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To

H. Elliston Warrall

Dear Warrall:

It is a long time since the *Ping Suey* lay waiting for the *Chatham* to blow up, since we dined with the merry Bey, and—worst of all—since we met and talked. You, following the sea in peace and war, have many friends scattered about the globe: let this book serve to recall one of them.

As formerly, my dear captain, "chin-chin."

Sincerely yours,

H. M. R.

August, 1916.

451209

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PART I

THE ISLE OF BIRDS

"There is an old white-haired man who calls out continually day and night. — *Answer:* The surf on the reef, whose voice is never still."

Polynesian Riddle."

THE FAR CRY

CHAPTER I

THE "NANTWICH": TOWING

"Ragotin, ce matin,
A tant bu de pots de vin,
Qu'il branle, qu'il branle! . . . "

So sang Tisdale in the bow, and staggered for fun, while the schooner staggered in earnest. He enjoyed himself, watching the rainbow spray dash up at every plunge, and flinging his words aft in a melodious yell. Wallace, at the wheel, frowned. A pretty place to be singing, this was, aboard a battered old sea wagon like the *Nantwich.* She labored along, following the dirty white bulk and dirty black smoke of the steamer *Albay,* which tugged at her carelessly with ropes as short as when they left harbor.

"O Rob!" cried the singer. "Look, Wallace! There he goes now!"

Between them the deck of the *Nantwich* glowed in the tropic sun, overflowing with blond hair. A hundred fair giantesses might have shorn their locks and flung them recklessly on board in a golden mound. This deckload of Davao hemp lay underneath in bales, in drums, in raveling wefts, and flowed on top in pale tresses nine feet long. The morning glare, reflected from them, struck into the belly of the little forestaysail a mild, quivering, buttercup light. Deck and cargo swooped up, swooped down, with the diagonal, shoulder-first movement of scending. The day was clear, and blinding bright. The ocean fetched roundabout its compass of dark, intense, and luminous blue, unbroken, though back toward Sarangani a long swell ran, slowly and mightily changing the floor of water about the vessel, now to a slant uphill, now to a smooth declivity. On board, blocks creaked in a lazy rhythm, and halyards rattled on a spar.

"Look at him!" shouted Tisdale, waving an arm toward the bowsprit. "*'A tant bu de pots de vin*——' Look at him, Robin!"

Wallace, a heavy, dark young man, sighted forward with a wary scowl. He saw nothing to warrant such enthusiasm.

The Ragotin in this case, Captain Rufino

Bravo, of the steamer *Albay,* stood at the end of his towing hawsers, two hundred feet ahead, and over a wake of blue-tinted foam brandished his arms like a puppet enacting sarcasm. A stern bulwark, grimed with iron rust, alone prevented him from reeling into the Celebes Sea. He waved on high a wicker demijohn, and cried across hissing water some Spanish mockery.

"Wants us to have a drink!" Tisdale interpreted. "Do you think it safe—try poison?"

Wallace watched the two hawsers bend upward in parallel curves, drip silver points, and sink under the turbulent snow of the wake ahead. He made no answer. Here, on board the leaky *Nantwich,* was little room for joking. Like a gamblers' table, she carried half their fortune at one throw. Heaped shining on deck lay the outcome of four years' hard work—four years of grubbing in volcanic soil, watching and weeding and setting camotes, calculating by aroba and hectare, cajoling new-planted villages to work, and guiding lazy brown hands to strip the fiber with bone *loc-nit* or steel bolo. Four years of learning how—another college course, on the shores of Davao Gulf; and here the *Nantwich,* towing badly, carried the partners and their first cargo, their hard-won diploma of hemp, toward a questionable market in

Zamboanga. She might sink under them. Rufino, on the steamer that dragged them along, was drunk at the head of his crew. Was this a time to laugh, a time to sing?

Tisdale thought it was, for again his chant came aft, over the glistening, tumbling *abaca*:

> *" . . . a tant bu de pots de vin,*
> *Qu'il branle, qu'il branle!"*

He shook both arms defiantly, and yelled at Captain Bravo, who shrilled a far-off answer without meaning, waved another invitation across the foam, and then, tilting the demijohn, quaffed long and shamelessly. A sordid spectacle this white midget made, so busy drinking, in the face of tropic heaven and eternal sea.

"Mean little greaser! Knows *we* can't!" Tisdale shouted back indignantly. "By George, I'll show him! Just uphold—honor of white men, Rob!"

The young planter tossed his helmet on the golden hemp, ripped off canvas pumps and white jacket, and so, naked to the belt, swarmed up lightly between the knightheads. He stood poised, for a moment, where the bowsprit joined the apple bows of the old *Nantwich*.

"We'll show 'em—save our face!" he cried.

Even Wallace, who knew the fellow's quicksilver habit of mind, stood wholly unprepared for the next movement.

Tisdale sat down acrobatically on the bulwark, swung his legs outboard, and, gripping the tow-rope that chafed against his thigh, perched long enough to let a white blizzard of spray burst over him. His torso gleamed wet like a merman's, as the mist flung its faint, colored arc of Iris above him and dissolved. Then his back muscles knotted suddenly. He went overboard. Nothing appeared of him but his hard, round arms at full stretch, his hands plying rapidly down the curve of the starboard hawser. Tisdale was gone over the side, on purpose.

"Idiot!" cried Wallace, jumping up and down, and shaking at the wheel as though to wrench out the spokes. "Come back here! Thundering idiot! Come back! Drowned! Drowned sure!"

The *Nantwich* swooped her bows down, and gave her steersman a glimpse ahead—a clear view of the hawser as it sagged under glass-blue billows. When it rose, two fists came up on it from the depths, like tiny beads on a great string; two arms shot stretching out of the foam, and then, while the rope lifted to the height of its languid curve,

the fists, the arms, and Tisdale's dripping head went forward briefly and desperately, hand over hand, jerk by jerk, clutch after clutch.

"Drowned sure!" Wallace repeated, under his breath. He gripped the wheel and stared, angrily, at this foregone disaster. "Arthur! Oh, you fool! You fool!"

The hawser bent inexorably down, buried a wide segment. It labored free again, and there, through the hissing white mill race, Tisdale's arms warped his merman body forward, slowly forward, to gain a few more yards on the *Albay's* wake, and to leave the *Nantwich* hurling her bowsprit up against the sunlight, clear of him now, and no longer cutting off the sight of his escapade. He dangled, half out of water, like a wind-blown garment on a clothesline; then the hawser dipped again, soused him under, pulled him onward as a mere streak. His linen trousers melted into foam, the white soles of his feet flashed, and were gone.

It was impossible. Wallace clung to the fact as though for comfort; it was impossible that any man could do what this mad partner was madly trying. The wake of the *Albay,* a blue-tinted lacework swirling in delicate filaments, could tear the rope from any human grasp. Tisdale, though quick and muscular, was no young demigod. Who,

thought Wallace, on sea or land ever conceived a more odd and useless piece of folly?

"What for?" His whole nature revolted. "No *sense* in it! To drown like that——"

In his anguish, he stamped on the deck.

"Goya!" he cried. "Goya!"

From the dusk of the companionway, before him, appeared a brown face, regarding him without speculation. Goya, the deck hand—a grudging loan of Captain Bravo's—rose like a brunette ghost in flimsy cotton, his dark, soft eyes not even blinking as he shuffled out on the glaring deck. He thrust carefully into his breast pocket the symbols of a racial vanity—his horn comb and his little tin-bound mirror—and stood pouting. His heavy lips, flat Malayan face, and stiff, black hair all on end from an hour's combing, gave his head a funny predominance over his frail body, which seemed yet frailer as the white cotton clothing shivered in the breeze.

"Here, Goya!" Wallace gnashed at him. "Wake up, and take the wheel!"

Goya obeyed half of this command by moving aft to rest both hands and one bare foot limply on the spokes, like a supercilious invalid.

"Lay hold," said Wallace darkly, "or I'll lay open that big, empty *cabeza!*"

Without watching his threat home, the planter peeled off his jacket, leaped away forward, sprang up on the nearest bale, and went scrambling and falling over the blond hillocks of hemp. When at last he floundered into the bow, he had lost not only his helmet and his temper, but all track of his companion's progress.

Then he saw clear of the bowsprit, and stood glowering with anxiety.

Some caprice of the ocean swell had so caught the *Albay* and the *Nantwich* that their heavy tow-ropes now stretched high above the foam. Swinging under the lower hawser, gripping it with hands and feet, Tisdale slid into the halfway curve of his journey, waited there for breath, like a glistening white sloth bunched under a bough, and immediately, with fresh vigor, began climbing the forward slant, topsy-turvy on all fours.

"Bueno! Ha-ha! *Bueno!"* Applause flew in shrill fragments against the breeze. The *Albay's* crew had run crowding into her stern, their brown faces all a-grin. *"Animo!* Ha-ha!"

Toward them the gymnast figure labored convulsively up the curve of the hawser, shinning like a toy monkey on a string. A dozen white-clad arms reached down, grappled for him. And just as Wallace concluded that the feat might be pos-

sible, after all, Tisdale went sprawling over the distant bulwark, yanked aboard the steamer.

The crew buzzed over him; laughter came spilling back to the *Nantwich.* Among the stunted aliens, Tisdale's wet body gleamed like a statue; he waved a naked arm, shouted back some breathless impertinence, and, turning away, rounded the bulge of the deck house. Captain Rufino Bravo slapped him between the shoulders as he disappeared. The midget mariners trooped after.

"Got there!" growled Wallace, alone in the bows of the schooner. "Fool thing to do. Just like you. Featherbrain!"

The deserted partner shook his fist at the *Albay,* and flung down a coil of rope he had snatched up. Though a poor swimmer, he had been ready to jump over.

"Just you wait, my buck! Wait till you're back aboard here!"

Muttering hot but vague revenge, the young man carefully collected his friend's coat and helmet, recovered his own, and climbed aft over the bright bales of hemp.

Goya hung on his wheel, and dozed.

"Lively shipmate you are," growled his captain, "for a long voyage!"

Like a sleeper half waking, Goya rolled a pair

of eyes duller than brown glass, chose another spoke for his toes to rest on, and relaxed afresh.

"Fine company," muttered Wallace. He dragged a rattan garden stool to the foot of the main shrouds, where palm thatch, raised on bamboo stilts, made a scant awning or open hut, as if a piece of jungle architecture had run away to sea. Here he sat down in shade, and stared morosely at the swinging water.

The color of it—a blue that glowed and yearned like the inwards of a dark jewel—lay everywhere the same under vertical noonday. Thin, sallow vapor, far off to starboard and trailing far astern, tinged the north horizon where Mindanao floated, a mere exhalation of land. Ahead, the *Albay* slouched through the sea, dragging a foul bottom at five knots, and besmuttering the southern heaven with coal smoke. These things, the brilliant chevelure of the hemp, its reflection quivering in the tiny staysail, were all that could seize an eye jaded with sunlight. The steamer puffed laboriously but faintly, blocks creaked aloft, halyards rattled a drowsy measure, and under these few sounds ran the steady, hushing whisper of foam, quietly commanding silence. Time slipped away like a word forgotten. Sight and sound, thought, life itself, dissolved into an ocean reverie.

Wallace, under his jungle roof, crooked one elbow on the rail, pillowed his chin there, and watched Mindanao drag its sallow haze farther astern. He recalled his last fortnight on that shore; how the hemp they slaved for had lain there, useless; how, by strange luck, and Tisdale's madcap bargaining, they had secured the *Nantwich,* only to find, as an afterthought, that no pair of landlubbers could sail her; how Tisdale again, by another stroke of policy, had won Captain Rufino, had sat all night carousing with that sulky officer, and wormed out the promise of a tow. It was Tisdale who, like a Paul Revere hilarious in pajamas, had run through the village at cockcrow and set all hands toiling by daybreak, hurling their precious cargo from pantalan to schooner's deck. Tisdale, yes, Tisdale could do anything, offhand, just as now he could desert, leave a chap on board here through the voyage, with this somnambulist Goya for company! Vexation ran uppermost through the final waking thoughts of Wallace; vexation, and a last, dull glimpse, under drooping eyelashes, of something low and black upon the northwest horizon. Some funereal blot, vague, yet solid; a mountain, it might be, rearing above the hidden coast. It did not seem to mean much, as he fell asleep.

He woke lonely and febrile, after the fashion of tropical sleepers by day. A voice startled him.

"O Robin! Make fast, there's a good fellow! On deck! What ails you?"

Tisdale's voice rose from below, close at hand. Alongside, though farther off, the *Albay* lay wallowing, so that the two ships, with their tether hauled bow and stern between them, formed a rude letter N upon the face of the waters. It was the face of those waters, the new, disastrous countenance of the whole world, that fetched Wallace out from his hut, tottering, but awake.

His black mountain, viewed so lately through a fading dream, now came rushing toward him in one sheer wall of darkness, a crag of storm cloud that towered from ocean floor to zenith. Sulphurous gleams passed through it, and revealed great downpours of sheeted rain, heavy as gravel. The ocean beneath leaped in small, joggling waves, like blue ink shaken in a basin. On the verge of the storm, high overhead, the sun poised as on a cliff, gave to half the sea and sky one farewell moment of golden summer calm, and was blown out.

"O Rob! Look alive!" cried the voice of Tisdale. "Catch our painter, there's a good chap! These beasts are jumping crazy down here."

In the gloom, a loose bight of rope wriggled across the deck and up over the bulwark, like a snake. Wallace trod on its tail, hauled in, and made it fast. He looked overside, to find his friend already shinning toward him, up from a boat where brown Tagalogs were yelling, snatching at the painter, spearing the schooner madly with their oars, fighting to stave off and to be gone.

"Swine! Swine, all of 'em!" Tisdale grunted, hooking his leg over and rolling on deck. He jumped afoot, to cast loose the painter. "Take it, then!"

He flung down the end among the frantic oarsmen. While he did so, somebody sprang to the rail beside him, and, with a piteous bleat of terror, hopped into the air. Goya, the sleep-walker, had rejoined his countrymen below. His body thumped on the stern thwart, his well-combed head on a gunwale. As he landed, so he lay, while the oarsmen, shouting and catching crabs, lashed away desperately toward the *Albay*.

"I gave 'em ten pesos," Tisdale complained, "to fetch me back to you, Rob!"

The runagate slipped into his jacket, let it go unbuttoned, and, standing thus in comfortable disorder, seemed to expect a reply. In the strange ob-

scurity that overhung the ship—a kind of Resurrection darkness—he had a wild and elfish look, an air of being carelessly at home. His eager, sunburned face, his light-blue eyes twinkling, his tousled crop of yellow hair, were the brightest things on board. His tunic flapped open, baring his chest as if in bravado.

"Ten pesos," he repeated, "to get back with you, Rob!"

Wallace had sourly taken the wheel.

"Ass!" he grumbled. "You came near getting to——" He turned his thumb down grimly. "Fool's trick. Ten pesos? Who *made* you go?"

Tisdale gave a repentant shrug.

"I know," he answered, "it was silly. Didn't benefit the firm, after all. That goat Bravo"—he waved an arm at the gray loom of the *Albay*—"Barcelona goat! Pleased as Billy, he seemed, when I first boarded him. Then he turned peevish, and wagged his black scut at me. Wouldn't hear reason. Delays him, he said towing us here. 'Against my owners' orders,' he kept bawling, and all the time too drunk to swear, even." Tisdale paused, and his face grew more serious. "I tell you, Robin, I don't like it. This"—the speaker took deliberate survey of the darkness—"this turned Bravo green in the face. Wall-eyed, he

was, when I left; sick man—a little sick goat, with a black beard, talking nonsense. Most unholy sight."

Over the helm, the two partners eyed each other strangely.

"Bravo'll do us dirt, you mean?" inquired Wallace.

"Can't say, Robin."

They remained silent.

The schooner quivered like a frightened horse. Her staysail hung dead and wrinkled, in a hot calm. Puny waves jumped everywhere about her flanks, chopping, plashing, ejecting spitefully, with a reverse twist, little gouts of white spray. From the approaching central darkness a cool draft, moist and gentle, swept away all hint of sea air, bringing instead the languid smell of fresh water, a somber, mysterious perfume as of torn verdure and trampled earth. Here on the sea, out of place, it caught the nostrils with a kind of threat.

"She's coming!" groaned Wallace.

A gust whirled over them while he spoke. His roof of palm thatch beat violently against the shrouds, then soared aloft, and with two bamboo legs trailing storkwise, flapped away into the black heavens.

"She's here!" cried Tisdale, and ran to help.

They felt the schooner balk, spring backward, jerk her tether; saw the staysail belly inside out, and a few pale streamers of hemp whisk past them overhead, like the tails of Valkyrie horses riding the tempest; and next moment were conscious only of a wheel fighting them, a wet, smarting blindness, and, instead of breath, a taste of rain water in their mouths. Underfoot, the frail craft tossed and hung and pivoted, crashed into a sudden hollow, swerved uphill again, and poised in air. Snowy blurs went fleeting past, behind a black-and-silver mesh of rain.

All this the two men endured for a long time; but what grew insupportable was a wide roar that swelled beyond the limit of hearing, and stupefied them by mere volume.

Wallace felt a craving for speech. He tried to gratify it, but his words flew down the wind like bubbles. Without hearing himself, he cried repeatedly:

"Hemp ruined! All——"

His friend's lips fumbled at his ear, his friend's laughter rang from a distance:

"Good boy!—— Guessed right!—— So are we!"

The levity of the message, in all this turmoil, shocked him grievously. He would have bel-

lowed some rebuke, but the hurrying noises gave him no leisure to frame one.

"Look!" Again Tisdale's voice reached him, light, weak, infinitely far away, like something in a fever. "Look there!"

The rain had forked asunder, leaving the whole ship visible, for a moment, in greenish twilight. Forward, the rigid hawsers pierced a line of galloping whiteness, which broke and left them to bridge a void. Sharp, smoking crests cut off their farther end. Night grimly closed the vista in a whirl. Yet, on its very rim, there lifted and sank the gray, squablike buttocks of the *Albay,* on which gray human specks clustered and dimly toiled.

"See these, see there!" piped the voice of Tisdale. "Hawsers, Rob—casting off! Bravo's men —I thought so. Beast! Loose, Robin, we're loose!"

The rain flung together its parted curtain. The *Nantwich* recoiled, gave one twisting lurch, and, with her deck at a steep angle, slewed down a vast, unseen hill.

The friends clung to their wheel, and kicked the empty air. Their footing came back from one direction to be lost in another, as the *Nantwich* righted and hurled herself toward some new quar-

ter of the heavens above or the waters under the earth.

The last thing clearly seen was a vision of the staysail exploding, like a bomb filled with dirty rags.

CHAPTER II

THE "NANTWICH" : LOOSE

DEATH—who on land in peace-time steals about silent and modest, like a murderer among decent people—enjoys at sea his true, shameless character, with elbowroom and playtime. Here on the waters in darkness, the young men saw and felt his magnitude, heard him roaring at them, and roaring again, dealing shock after shock, and filling with his eternal voice the frame and vault of things. Death caroused at home, where the intrusion of Life, in their persons, meant no more than if two ants were creeping on the floor of a drunken giant's hall. They felt this, vividly at first, then dimly, for thought departed from them, left but a residue of sensation, or came and went like the rope which—as they were lashing the wheel—now wrapped and fouled their legs, now washed away into oblivion.

"The rigging!" they cried. "Up to it!"

How they gained the starboard ratlines, through that sudden, howling night, neither man could recall; but each remembered their crucifixion aloft, the sluice of cold rain, their gyration with the mainmast in giddy rise and tumble and butt-end blow, as if they were bound to a pile driver without guides.

They heard many noises, but all were tones of that world-wide voice roaring. They saw one sight, gusty upheavals of smoke whiter than marble dust, below, that silently rose at them through the black net of the rain, drove past, and vanished. These must have been waves.

Like the staysail, time itself blew away. The men measured it by aches and pains, by the recurring need to shift their bodies, to unhook and rehook an arm when the biceps, pinched by a ratline, gave out. Once, another lull or "hole" breaking the rain, they saw a kind of muddy, final daylight. The sea wallowed in black edges that ripped into spray, and a snowbank, blowing over the bowsprit, shot high in vertical sheets. The last of their cargo whirled off, seething; tangles of hemp gleamed in a somber valley of water, as if a tremendous woman lay drowning, while her hair floated. Then that blond head swept over one of the hills, and was gone.

A night, a day, another night—all seemed a mad procrastination of the end, a needless and wretched vigilance called Life. Day was full of waves that slowly departed, fading and swinging gray and fading, until black tumult came again.

"It breaks!" Tisdale shouted, at one time. "It breaks!"

He raised his head, which lay under Wallace's armpit on their tarry gridiron. His face was dead white, with charred spots for eyes.

"The moon, Rob!"

Beyond some flying tangle of cordage a pale crescent pierced the bosom of a cloud and vanished.

"Wind's going down," groaned Wallace.

He spoke truly. Nevertheless, at sickening speed, the moon coursed over them from wrack to wrack. Her shape resembled the blade of a chopping knife: that, the men thought, was why she cut so easily those ponderous edges of cloud, ragged and shining, like bright solder spattered on iron seams.

They let her fly along with the rest of the nightmare.

CHAPTER III

THE FLYTRAP

THE cabin floor was a puddle of dirty froth, swashing from side to side, or fore and aft. The cabin ceiling—white paint studded thickly with flies like tacks driven at random—was crossed and recrossed by a similar unrest, as bright, new-risen sunshine performed the same antics at the same moment. In this interior, tight as a drum, every creaking timber and knee of the *Nantwich* found its echo, except when, regular and leisurely, wave after wave boomed without or sent its deeper thrill running within.

Amid all this gambol of light and sound the two men lay sleeping in one bunk, "spoon fashion," with a wet blanket over them.

"Oh, the devil!"

Tisdale raised his head. His blue eyes followed vacantly the sunshine that reveled across the white boards above, that darted through the

skylight and the little prison windows, balanced, wriggling with a hundred smoky wave shadows, and then, as the schooner rolled, darted outdoors again.

"What's the matter?"

Tisdale continued to stare upward.

"This bedding." he answered dreamily. "It smells of garlic; our predecessor. Vile—foh! Robin, I say, we must be alive yet, because we grumble. Good sign. Can you feel your legs, though? Neither can I. Bad sign."

Foul water splashed across the floor, the sea fired its muffled cannon, the sunrise light fumed overhead like burning tar.

"And I was thinking," Tisdale went on wearily. "These flies." He squinted at the black dots on the ceiling. "Poor devils o' Moro flies! We brought 'em all the way from Davao province, to drown out here. Shut in. Seems a pity."

Wallace, lifting his head in turn, regarded them with hollow apathy.

"Not drowned yet," he declared. "And the sea's going down. Else we'd be up in that rigging, Arthur."

The planters moaned, and said no more. Their descent from the mainmast—that agony of crawling—still ached in their bones, with a cold pang.

"If she goes down," Wallace mumbled, after long reflection, "if she goes, I don't like being cooped——"

His bedfellow stretched a hand past him, to point at the ceiling hobnailed with sleeping flies.

"See here, Rob. They don't mind." Tisdale's voice died away, content. "Outdoors or in, they let her wallop. We can do that much. No sailors, but all the same——" He waved upward consoling fingers. "You flies, we'll fetch you through. Topside galow. You wait and see."

Until noon the flies obeyed. No one could strike eight bells for them; the groaning vessel kept her own watch, alone on a sea that smoked and rioted under heavens calm, brilliant, without a cloud. But when midday heated the cabin like a stove the flies thawed, began to crawl over the skylight, fell from the ceiling, flew about, danced in the reflected gleam of waves, fought an airy sham battle, and one after another went winging back to their pestered bed on the ceiling.

The men slept like a pair of twins. At sunset, crimson light throbbed in through the little windows, failed out, and throbbed in, till night closed the red eye of the world. The planters rolled in their sleep.

Next morning found them awake outdoors,

dry clad, comfortably fed, but not hopeful. They stood on deck together in torrid light, puckering their eyes to follow the behavior of their ship.

The *Nantwich* had ridden out the gale, for she floated on a falling sea hardly more dangerous than a lake full of whitecaps; but her survival was a desolate thing to behold. She rode very deep and dogged, her bows low, jib boom gone, cap and stick, from a splintered bowsprit. She took the slap of each wave indifferent as a rock. A kelp-like tangle of hawsers went straying everywhere. Through a breach in the port bulwark forward—bitten out flush with the deck—the sea continually slopped without effort, and ran aft in thin layers creaming like ale. A few last wads of hemp tumbled back and forth as old sponges tumble on a beach. Wooden slats glided along with them, wooden staves, the white shards of a boat dashed clean out of her davits and scattered piecemeal. The schooner was all raffle. Her masts leaned, her motion had a fatal heaviness. She floated, but only as a sick charwoman might crawl home, having caught her death and ruined her little finery in a downpour.

"There's a piece of luck, Rob!"

The two friends, conning their ship, were spick and span. A camphor chest, below, packed for

Zamboanga, held all their best clothing, so that now they wore clean, white trousers, rolled knee-high; white tunics, silver-buttoned with the counterfeit *ticals* that landsmen buy; and, topping all, in lieu of helmets blown away, two fresh turkey-red bandannas folded closely to keep off sunstroke. Barbaric barefoot dandies, the pair seemed, who might have strolled aboard in curiosity.

"Pay my look-see," scoffed Wallace. "Where's your luck?"

"Near enough," replied his companion, "to bite you."

On the cabin roof a small, black dinghy lay upside down. The lightest of clinker-built boats, it rested there whole and sound; the greedy storm had overlooked a thing so humble, after wrenching it from under heavy canvas gripes, and tossing it there.

"That?" Wallace retorted bitterly. "Yes; great slice of luck, that boat!"

Tisdale, an affable blond pirate in his head bandage, appeared somewhat hurt.

"The boat's a good boat," he protested. "One more shove, and the sea could have jackstrawed her like the other. But there she lies. Not luck? What do you call it?"

Wallace turned, in a passion of despondency.

"What do I call it?" he cried. "A joke, that's all; a poison-mean little joke." He struck the boat with his fist. "Tell me—you stand there mighty chipper—tell me, what good on God's ocean can that pack of clapboards do us?" Moved beyond his habit, Wallace flung a gesture hotly at the sea. "Charts? You saw them below there; the charts leave off, quit us dead, somewhere to north of Caraga. Suppose they didn't, suppose we had 'em all; can you navigate? Can I? Here we are, blown away, without sense enough to know where. Mainsail's a bundle of rags tied up—was when you bought her. And you have the face, Arthur, to stand out there in the middle of nothing, and carry on cheerful about a silly rowboat the bigness of a teacup!"

He broke off, convinced and fortified in his wrath.

"I know, old boy." Tisdale had a downcast air, and answered gravely. Looking askance and laying his hand almost timidly on Wallace's arm—— "I know," he repeated. "And, what's worse, I dragged you into this mess."

As if to strike a blow, Wallace wheeled.

"Oh, rot!" he cried, glaring mortal offence, and with his dark features working strangely. "Do you think I'm that kind?"

Their eyes met, the explosion was over. The friends had cleared their atmosphere, and could face difficulty with a better heart. They stood silent, considering the wreckage at their feet, the bright morning sky overhead. Without a wisp of cloud or vapor, the tropic sun mounted straight on high, to restore all the glowing color of the sea. From the northwest fluttered a moist breeze, hot, yet mild, which followed the course of the late storm like a puny clerical spirit trying to expiate the mob violence of devils.

"Well?" Tisdale ventured. "Let's clean her up. See, Rob, we've got a foresail, anyhow. Set that, head somewhere east, and chance it. I don't know where we are, but, keeping easterly, there's Karakalong, Taruna, Siao, Makaleha, what's-her-name, and Cabio. Rafts of islands that side, so thick you couldn't punch a knife blade between 'em. Come now! What's the word, old Crusty? Clean up, and head east?"

The fellow's eyes brightened, as if his bare string of names were magic, to summon land out of the distance. Wallace gave him no reply, except a puzzled stare; could he never see things, this partner, as they really were—not even feel the ship dead underfoot—or was he avoiding the plainest fact?

"Good." Wallace nodded, threw off his white jacket, and, stalking into the waist of the vessel, tossed overboard the first ruin that came to hand. "We'll work the old packet," he cried sourly, "till she drops apart. But no more of your silver linings, mind you, they make me sick!"

This might have been the last word, the order of the day; for, although both partners worked hard, body to body, sweating and grunting under the glare of noon, they quarreled no more about theory. What commands they had to give, take, or dispute, dealt altogether with hot and heavy practice. They cleared the schooner, spiked up a double gallows tree in place of the broken davit, and slung the remaining boat there; patched and ran up a black rag of headsail on a stay which threatened to part from the bowsprit stump; and, pulling on one rope like the Ancient Mariner and his nephew, together hoisted the foresail without speech.

When they had finished, put on their jackets, mopped their heads, retied their scarlet kerchiefs, and taken charge at the wheel, they found a breathing space, but still no mood for talk. Hesperian light covered the ocean from far astern—air and water forming one great golden peace. The *Nantwich,* in the midst, appeared a miracle

of human impudence, like a rowdy cab that should trundle down the chief street of heaven. Yet even the *Nantwich* caught some transfiguring touch, for her aged spars burned red as copper, her slate-colored foresail was tinged with lilac. A few long wrinkles flawed the mirror beneath her flanks, and alone betrayed her motion.

It was the sunset hour, at sea; a good time for talking confidences, and the best place. But the two young men at the wheel found never a word to exchange. With secret, embarrassed glances they watched each other, and waited.

Tisdale turned his head, to look astern. Wallace, holding the spokes, copied him slowly, with an air of expectation. And yet neither began speaking.

The sun lowered, veiling in haze, touched with his lower limb the western sea line, floated there, and, swollen with hot refraction, took the form of a Chinese paper lantern, fat, oblate, and blood-red.

"What was it, Arthur?"

"I didn't speak," answered Tisdale, standing at gaze.

Wallace frowned, then tried again:

"What were you thinking?"

The other came back to close quarters, but only

to be lost in meditation, his blue eyes fixed on the companionway.

"I was wondering," he said, "about that flytrap again." He nodded at the cabin. "Those poor, misguided insects down there. Queer how a trifle sticks in one's head. Wonder what they'll do——" Tisdale suddenly faced his partner with a look of defiance. "What will *they* do, Robin, when she goes down?"

Wallace laughed in his throat—a gruff, satisfied laugh.

"Thought you'd come to that, Arthur." He smiled, welcoming this frankness, after silence and evasion all day. "Cat's out of the bag. She's going down; you said it. There's no steeve to her bowsprit any more. See for yourself." Like any other taciturn man given headway, Wallace warmed to his subject. "She's going down pop—strained a butt or something. Your flies can look after themselves; they have wings. But you and I, and that boat of yours, that half a pound of good fortune there—mafeesh, finish! *I* don't propose to pump all night, for the pleasure of drowning good and tired. Pump till you're black in the face, she's a goner."

Tisdale remained gazing at the cabin sorrowfully. He delayed answering.

"Ugly speech, that was," he said at last, without lifting his eyes. "Ugly, Rob, the sound of it. Did I ever pretend the schooner wouldn't sink? A man might fancy you were sinking her yourself, the notion does you so much good!"

Wallace reached over clumsily, caught his hand, and wrung it.

"Arthur," he mumbled, "so long as we float, I'll rub you the wrong way. Don't mind me, will you?"

The sun pulled under water his fiery arc. Above and below his last gleam, flakes of red slowly vanished. The ocean became a lustrous indigo, and this, in turn, a black, softer than charcoal dust. When the two shipmates turned from watching its dark solemnity, they found evening mounted in the eastern sky. A white young moon hung aloft, frail as a shred of wool, yet dropping little, hard reflections into the deep, like white pebbles that one by one dodged the tremors of the moving ship and rendered the gloss of the water visible while they sank.

"Those," began Tisdale quietly, "give a man the idea—— No bottom, down, and down." He stooped, with a movement as of shivering; fired the mesh of the binnacle lamp, and shipped it; then studied the moon, that faintly kindled with

yellow, to show a greenish pallor in the heavens. "How the old stage lights up, Rob, for our little act! Muted fiddles in the orchestra! But, somehow, for my exit, I'd rather storm off than have all this Moonlight Sonata."

"Yes," rejoined his friend, "if we could choose. I think she'll stay on top all night, though."

They began talking of many things which had neither any bearing on the present hour nor any link with that part of the world. The warm night loosened their tongues, the dreamy, spacious radiance lent scope to their memories. They talked as for a wager, smoked cigars till the only box was emptied, and, though relieving each other at the wheel, and, as a final measure, stowing provisions in the small boat on her gibbet, gave no thought to anything but the pressure of time, the necessity of speaking words, hearing words, which could fill the mind and crowd out that nocturnal silence.

Meanwhile the moon drifted over the topmast, then stole down lower and lower, with a bleared, wintry look. Across her face went winging two black midges, a pair of sea birds that fled past the schooner and melted in a region where stars were gathering. Later, a solitary third fowl crossed the moon path in the same direction, very wearily, and

cried something once, far off, and derisive. Soon afterward the little, ailing moon went down, left the ocean vaulted with great stars, and the vessel, a piece of human driftwood, alone with the oval glow of her binnacle.

"I can't stand this!" groaned Tisdale. He went fumbling down the companionway, to return with a lighted candle lantern, which he set on the deck. "There! A trifle more homelike. That darkness gets under the roots of a chap's hair."

Wallace disregarded the improvement. He was leaning over the helm in a strained attitude, looking down, but as though listening. Bordered with the scarlet kerchief, his brown face resembled that of some old-time Turkey merchant, intent on a bargain.

"Hear anything?" he demanded, all at once. "Do you?"

Tisdale gave heed. Both men eyed each other severely in the lantern light, as if by staring hard enough they could bend their double intelligence into one force of hearing.

"No. Possibly, once—— Those birds?"

The steersman shook his head impatiently.

"They flew out of earshot, long ago. But listen."

Another long effort brought no result. Tisdale

raised his chin, began to sniff the night like a dog. Their staring match thus ended, the partners craned forward, shielding their eyes against the lantern. Two white figures, cramped in the same posture, they seemed to await a third person who, at any moment, might take shape in the starlight, and arrive.

"I hear it now," whispered Wallace.

"By George, I smell it!" Tisdale shouted, throwing up his fist joyfully. "I smell it!"

While they spoke, and as if responding, the ship quivered, subsided under them with a shrinking movement, lifted with a swelling, and, rather playfully than violently, upset both men on her deck.

"She's going!" Tisdale snatched the bail of the lantern as it rolled past, and jumped on foot. "Come along, Rob!"

He seemed ready to run somewhere. Wallace caught his hand, crying:

"No, no! She's grounded. Fast by the head. Feel her!"

Tisdale swung up his lantern at arm's length, with some wild purpose of shedding light on the whole situation. A dim circle of the deck flickered into view, rocked vaguely as the lantern rocked, and then, with great deliberation, collected new movement of its own; everything on the right hand

rose, everything on the left sank, in perfect order and counterbalance. The men had hardly felt their footing start when it canted from under, and they struck the bottom of a steep chute. The lantern smashed on the port rail. Overboard flew the candle, a thread of guttering blue fire instantly quenched.

"That's right enough," Wallace declared, sitting breathless but philosophic in a barrel or so of slopping water. "Heeled over. The sails, Arthur; get our canvas off before the wind comes."

The rag of headsail they doused readily enough; as for the foresail, the best they could manage, crawling and slipping along the deck, was to lower the peak, strain at the downhaul, then let the whole black fabric swirl down past the stars and float on the lesser blackness of the sea.

"So!" cried Wallace. "We've done our possible!"

They scrambled aft, and, using the side of the cabin as a footrest, lay down on deck at a comfortable slant. Before them the sky paled with dawn, the lower stars dried and dwindled.

"I can smell it now," said Wallace, clasping his hands under his head. "Plain."

"Well you might!" Tisdale stretched his arms, yawning. "And I can hear it."

A whisper, like that of a quiet wind pouring through pine woods, stole toward them out of the dawn—the whisper of small waves breaking slowly at a distance. Pungent whiffs of brine and iodine came with it, exhaled by wet seaweed; and these, from time to time, were overwhelmed in a stink of fish.

An hour dragged past; light spread up trembling from the eastern sea; the world became a suffusion of dark, mystical blue; and there, ahead, between the watchers on the wreck and a sudden orange filament of horizon, swam a coal-black, broken lump, an islet. It lay at a quarter mile, perhaps, off the starboard bow. The sun rose hidden behind it, suspending in yellow flame its hard profile: a small, black turret of rock, nicked along the crest with tiny, ragged crenelation; from the foot a strip of beach running off, widening, and sloping into a final mound or hillock, furred with low foliage, crowned with four tall palms.

The planters hung on the rail, seeing all this as over the ridgepole of a house. The snowy fringe of waves, under the beach, stirred and beckoned them. They left off staring, now and then, to grin at each other like hungry men eating.

"Come ahead!" Wallace clambered over to their little gallows tree, and began tugging at the

fall of the boat tackle. "What you waiting for?"

They slid the boat down handsomely across the deck, and launched her in clear, shallow water, frightening a drove of red and silver fishes. Wallace took the oars. Tisdale, perching high among boxes, had almost contrived to ship the rudder, when suddenly he threw it down, caught hold of the overhanging shrouds, and swung back on board the *Nantwich*.

"Steady a bit!" he ordered. "I forgot."

He climbed the deck, and disappeared down the companionway. Presently his voice resounded in the cabin, crying snatches of exhortation. A rustling noise smothered the words.

"Increase and multiply!" His red bandanna headkerchief popped into view. He crawled on deck once more, and stood up, flapping sheets of old newspaper in both hands, as if to make a signal. "Be happy, my children! Shoo! Scat, you fools, fly to leeward!"

The sun, clearing the low impediment of the isle, bathed all the sea and all the vessel in warm light. The cabin flies, a thin swarm glinting like crumbs of gun metal, buzzed and scattered into freedom.

"Off!" cried Tisdale. "There's land for you!"

CHAPTER IV

GODBOLT, A. B.

THE buoyant gliding of the small boat, so intimate and level with the water, was like a breath of liberty. As their oars dipped, the bulkhead clock—a cheap imitation of brass, balanced on Tisdale's knee—struck five bells. The little sounds tingled over the shoal. It was music to hear them, and to know that they rang in a day so fortunate.

"Out round the foresail, Arthur. Mind your tiller."

Tisdale obeyed with a laugh.

"I was listening," he explained. "And watching those fish. Golly!"

They rounded a bank of dirty, swollen canvas where the foresail floated. Wallace backed water, to study everything with care. The schooner lolled in a clean bed—an outermost ledge of the shoal—on yellow sand all crinkled with ripple marks, as pretty as the grain of Norway pine.

"She's there for keeps," muttered the rower. "Now head ashore."

Though laden to her gunwale, the boat drew forward with the same still buoyancy befitting that lake of sunrise. Before her the island had grown clear, and taken color. The tawny beach brightened, the crag—sombre, till now, as a black rook in chess—was painted wet-green with weeds above the surf line, patched red with dulse, fretted and frosted from top to bottom with the roosting of a thousand sea birds. The oars, bumping steadily as Wallace pulled, roused a hollow answer from the rocks, at which a great company of winged creatures—tern, gannet, and frigate bird—flew up and twinkled above the morning sun, their noise and number incredible, and from every crack or shelf of this populous turret the black neck of a cormorant writhed out, like so many snakes raising their heads off the basalt columns.

"Straight in for the beach," commanded Wallace. "No sea running to speak of."

He let his oars drip, and watched the birds above the cliff. Already, their surprise over, they settled in a lively cloud and came flapping to roost. It was they who formed the crenelation of the rocky tower; for against the risen light their bodies crowded in clumps and squabbling families,

which presently became pacified, and lined the crest with rude embrasures.

"Not afraid of us." Wallace took up his rowing. "A bad lookout, their being so tame. Island has nobody living on it."

The steersman, at this, broke out into mutiny.

"Confound it, Rob!" He stared angrily, and dropped the clock with a bang. "Can't you ever be grateful? Don't spoil the whole occasion!"

Wallace paused, between strokes.

"Why, Arthur," he replied, and his voice was troubled. "Why, Arthur, a man must think of possibilities."

"Go on, Father." Tisdale picked up the clock, held it to his ear, and replaced it on his lap. "Think away, old Doxology."

He steered for the beach, a stone's throw from the crag foot. With a long, slow lift as gentle as breathing, the sea carried them forward once and again, then lanced them through hissing, white spume. They jumped out, caught the boat between them, and, with no more difficulty than children might have in rescuing a toy, ran her lightly across this margin, over the wet sand into the dry. For a moment they stood erect, flinging abroad their arms, drinking long drafts of the briny, fish-laden air, admiring the saber curve of the beach,

that plunged its glowing point into the hill of green underbrush and palms, a mile away. There was no trace of man, no sign of life, except a fitful squawking and bickering in the citadel of birds near by.

"Unload?"

"And breakfast. Hai!"

They carried their goods and hauled their boat above the tide mark—a line drawn in rags of seaweed variously and delicately colored. Here, on sand as fine as the siftings of an hourglass, the castaways pitched their first camp, ate their first meal; and here, having stretched an old canvas over two tiers of boxes, they crawled into shelter and slept like dead men.

"A-a-ah! What luxury!"

The sun, still high, faced them out of the west, and poured into their little cave the full heat and splendor of afternoon.

"What luxury!" Tisdale rolled over, yawned, and sat up. He found Wallace already awake, squatting with his back to the sunshine, and thoughtfully chewing a pencil. "Something wrong again, my Knitted Brow?"

Wallace frowned, and, smoothing a paper on his knee, wrote down a word or so. The tide line of weeds—faded pink, faded green, leaf-yellow,

and claret—shone behind him like a Persian carpet torn to shreds; beyond, the surf ran dazzling; farther still, where the bright green shoal deepened into blue, the *Nantwich* lay diminished, her masts leaning at a melancholy pitch, and a flock of sea birds hankering about her, with plangent cries. Against this background, Wallace sat and chewed his pencil, the image of a poet expecting a rhyme. He looked up.

"I've made an inventory." And he read aloud from his paper:

> "Provisions: two boxes tinned meat, one case biscuits, one bag Chinese rice, one bunch bananas, one breaker of water, one bottle whiskey, one-half case Tansan. Tools and implements: four axes, one saw, one maul, one clock, one compass. Miscellaneous: two dozen candles, seven packets pipe tobacco——"

"And fifty-two playing cards, Father." Tisdale drew from his pocket a worn pack, which, with a modest air of contribution, he laid on the sand before his chief. "All the pleasures of home."

Wallace folded and put away his paper, very deliberately.

"This matter," he began, in a sort of calm dudgeon, "happens to be serious."

Tisdale shrugged his shoulders.

"I know it!" he cried irritably. "I know it! But, Rob, if you read out any more of that—that damned trousseau, you'll drive me wild!" He shuffled the cards, arrayed them face upward on the sand, and began, with composure, to play a game of solitaire. "We brought enough to start housekeeping. And, what's more, I want to enjoy the first day of it."

He held up the nine of diamonds, bent forward to place it on the ten of spades, but never finished the movement or the game. Had lightning struck their tent the two men could not have sat more stunned. A voice, a third voice, deep and jovial, broke out in the wilderness and joined their discussion.

"Good boy! Good words!"

They turned their heads, looked, and wondered.

A man sat on the nose of their boat, close by, regarding them steadfastly—a large man with a black, pointed beard, who wore a strange plaited hat like a fig basket, a blue flannel shirt full of holes, and moleskin trousers cut short below the knees. He seemed all bigness and burliness, tat-

ters and ruddy sunburn; but this first impression, of rough size, yielded to a second and a more striking. The stranger, although he merely sat there after his brief interjection, might have been pausing in a full stream of talk, so heartily did humor and persuasion warm his features and shine from his black eyes.

"I've lived on the island one year," said this apparition, in a voice like a deep bell; "alone, one year, and had no more than a pair of pocket scissors. Trim your beard, and look at the sea, and what are the wild waves saying? There's my diary of it!"

The two men in the tent remained gaping.

"You're college boys, now, to make a guess?" He swung his brown feet and smiled. "I bet you are."

"Four years out," said Tisdale, who began to recover.

"Ah, now, I envy you!" cried the stranger, with gusto. "I do, honest. Lucky men! High school was where I stuck, halfway, when father failed—cattle, cattle, they bust easy. You boys know Greek, now, I dare say? Well, there, to think!" He grasped his black beard in his fist, and tugged it sorrowfully. "The orts of that Greek class, I used to glean 'em up—'Anthropos across a hawse,

a hoss on Anthropos'—all about the wise man, and Brick Metcalf reciting, too. Next year, thinks I at the time, I'll catch up those wise men and be Lambano-Lepsomai-Lambasting away with the proudest of 'em. Next year! Lord! And here we are instead."

He swept a big hand toward the surf and the ocean beyond.

"Shows you, that does, how much good comes o' foresight." He returned from gazing; his black eyes twinkled. "Did anybody say tobacco? Speech behaves queer to me, boys, and my overhearing might have gone wrong, because I've dreamed tobacco these last few months."

Wallace tossed him one of the seven packets. He tore open the wrapping, took a long, critical whiff, stood up, sprang into the air, and cracked his bare heels together three times before alighting.

"Wow!" He sniffed the tobacco again, and beamed. "That's honey on the stinger! Thank you, boys, thank you. Wait a minute, I'll be back."

He balanced the packet carefully on the boat's nose, turned, ran off across the beach at remarkable speed, and, bounding up the bank like a greyhound, was lost in the undergrowth.

"What do you make of that?"

The two friends had scrambled out from their shelter, to watch for the stranger's return. Wallace tapped his forehead.

"A little crazy, I'm afraid."

"Oh, Rob!" Tisdale protested with scorn. Then, more mildly—"I don't care if the man is," he declared. "He's a buster!"

The plaited hat shone once more among the greenery. The stranger sprang down upon the beach and came racing back, a harefoot for lightness.

"All correct now!" he shouted as he ran; and, without drawing short breath more than twice, plumped himself down on the sand by the boat, laughing. "Now," he boomed, "for a smoke! Went to fetch my pipe!"

His pipe was a white sea shell, with a short reed stem. He crammed in the tobacco, shook out his hand eagerly for a match, struck a light, drew and exhaled a slow draft of smoke, then wagged his beard with ineffable relish. For a while he said nothing, but rolled his eyes at his two benefactors, and squatted there, a big, swarthy figure, puffing at his white sea shell like the peasant murderer in "Robert Helmont."

"Well!" He spoke at last, between clouds. "Well, now, I'll unfold it. 'Who's this wild man?'

you been saying. Oh, yes, you have! Natural to. So, here goes. Godbolt's my name—Francis Godbolt. The rest is soon told. Now to start fair and open——"

Tisdale, sitting cross-legged beside him, put in a word:

"To start even, on both sides, you ought to know something about us, and how we got here."

The smoker laughed.

"Can see how you got here," he answered, pointing his pipe toward the wreck on the shoal. "That's how. And she'll never budge again, if I'm any sailor. As for you boys—why, Lord bless you! I could tell by your faces. No fear!" Again he pointed at the schooner. "She looks familiar, too. What might be her name?"

"Nantwich," Wallace told him. "We bought her for nothing from a drunken old reprobate who died next week."

The ragged islander clapped his thigh.

"Thought I knew her," said he, and sat looking beyond her masts into the distance. "Poor old Captain Hardmood, gone to glory. He stole that schooner over in the Carolines. And so he's dead, and his vessel done for. You see, I knew 'em both. Barratry, plain barratry, it amounted to. And Hardmood's the only man ever de-

feated rum. But I wouldn't just call him a reprobate, either. Lots o' good points to Captain Hardmood, there was, before his daughter went—— Oh, well, he's dead now, poor man!"

This bit of sea dirge caused another silence, while the speaker twisted his beard.

"But that's not *my* story," he continued, by and by. "And first thing I saw you boys asleep here, and her aground, I ran home to put my clothes on —been going naked a good deal, to save 'em—and then came back to introduce myself proper; for likely we'll stay aboard the island some time together. Now here's mine, and every word true, though I don't amount to much, and look so."

He sat smoking and collecting his thoughts. A white gull soared and tilted overhead, came floating close, peered down at the men with curious bright eyes, then squawked, lowered its pink web feet as a brake, and, planing the air at a new angle, escaped.

"One o' my chickens," said the man, watching it. "For a year I've been a bird farmer. Before that—everything!" He knocked out the sea-shell pipe, and refilled it. "When father failed, and died, and then my mother, I—I just cut loose. A parson was good to me, but he went as missionary to China. I agreed to help him take two cows

and a bull there. Better'n my word, for I discharged them *and* a calf at Woosung. Cunning little dogy, the calf was, Triton by name, being born at sea. From that time on, as I say—everything, everywhere, sailor mostly, all over the East. Thirty-two years of age; able-bodied. That's all. Able-bodied is my degree; can thumb out Latin—almost came to smelling distance o' Greek. Now tell me, boys, is there any sense in a life like that? I wondered a lot, here."

He looked up wistfully. His eyes, bold and humorous until now, became very sad, gained all at once a surprising depth of melancholy. Tisdale encouraged him with a nod, handed him another match, and said:

"But you didn't tell us how you came here."

"Oh," replied the wanderer simply, "got left. I went life-line man on a shelling schooner—Malay crew, Arab skipper. She put in here for eggs and turtle. No turtle, either. I dropped asleep in the shade, being dog-tired, and when I woke up she'd gone off and left me. Too lazy to row back, I suppose, when they found I wasn't on board. Here I was, anyhow, and here I stayed, eggs and fish to my chow."

Wallace hung his head, as if weighing this narrative.

"What chance do you make," he inquired seriously, "of our getting off this island, or being taken off?"

The black-bearded man became equally serious.

"Mighty little, to be candid." There could be no greater candor than that in his clear, black eyes. "Mighty little, either way. I flew my cinglet, for a flag, on the tallest of those palms, till it blew away one night. Did no good, so far as being sighted. And for *getting* off—— Well, here's your boat, but where's to make for? Land's near enough, some point of compass, but the devil knows which. My crowd, the shelling schooner, was two weeks out, and blown off her course." He got on foot, and, still smoking, looked aimlessly about, as if to find something new in the same old ocean and a sunset of plain blue and yellow. "No. I'm sorry for your sake, boys, but I can't pretend not being glad o' company."

Upon this remark, Tisdale also stood up, and faced him.

"We're glad of yours," he stated warmly. "Your talk does me good, Mr.—Mr. Thunderbolt."

The sailor broke out laughing, and shook hands.

"Godbolt," he amended, in a voice that made the name sound like profanity. "I knew you'd

turn a joke on it. They always do. Sainty, some call me, because that's many a point off my nature."

The sun hung low and sank. The ocean, running its dark-blue bar across a vast brightness of pale blue and gold, divided the real sky, above, from that mimic sky beneath, where, as all three men stood thinking, the wet sands brought sunset home to their feet.

"Well, boys," continued Godbolt, turning, "while daylight holds, better lug your goods up to my house."

When they had sorted out three armfuls from the general store, and spread their canvas over the rest, they crossed the beach and climbed into a little path hidden by green shrubs. The sailor led the way slowly, often halting to set down his burden. "For," said he, "you boys look worn out." It was dim moonlight by the time they gained the final hillock and the taller bush, where the continual crying of birds came fainter, and fragrant verdure blotted the smell of salt weeds and fish.

"She steps all four masts plumb in her bow," said the lord of the island. "And here's my house, between 'em."

A clumsy cone of dry thatch, like a beehive raised on legs, stood among four palm trunks in

the dusk. Under this roof Godbolt made his guests welcome, by lighting a candle and sticking it in the dry sand that served as floor.

"Take your supper, now," he ordered, "and get to sleep. No more talk this day." Drooping over the candle, they ate like weary figures in a dream. Their host—meanwhile gnawing a biscuit with grumbles of delight that it was neither fish nor egg—came and went behind their backs, till he had shaken down a bedding of dry leaves.

"Good night," he said abruptly, blew out the candle, rolled over to a post, lay flat, and began almost instantly to snore.

Late that night, when the moon stood over the palm tops, Tisdale, happening to wake, heard low footsteps passing and repassing the open side of the hut. He sat up, vigilant, then crawled outdoors, and peered round to see who was prowling. The surf had grown higher on some distant reef or bank, so that these nearer sounds, coming and going steadily, were often lost in the deep tone of breakers. A moving shadow appeared beyond the palm trunks. Tisdale walked over toward it.

"Woke you, did I?" The shade spoke in Godbolt's mellow bass, paused, and moved on. He was marching back and forth, naked, in the moon-

light. "Sorry. I can't sleep when that old fellow gets to calling out there. Calling. Listen."

The night walker again halted, to raise a giant arm that glistened as cold as bronze.

"Calls me out o' my sleep, the old chap does. What does he want?"

The surf, through a sharp whisper prolonged like the tearing of silk in immense strips, gave its hollower summons.

" 'Come and find out,' he says. 'Come find what sense there is to a life like yours. What sense?' "

Tisdale laid his hand on the outstretched arm.

"We'll find out, some day," he replied urgently but quietly. "Some day, perhaps. To-night—— Come back to bed, Sainty."

The great arm quivered strongly, lifted, and struck him across the back.

"Bells o' Beulah!" cried the sailor fiercely. "It's grand to hear a nickname again!" He started walking obediently toward where the ponderous beehive roof glimmered like a mound of snow among frosty plantain leaves. "You're right, my dear boy. Back to sleep, and wait."

He halted once more, leaned one hand on the column of a palm, and raised his bearded profile,

keen as a hawk's—a strange listener in a strange white nocturne.

"You're right," he repeated. "But all the same —it's crying."

CHAPTER V

A TO IZZARD

THEY took an early breakfast on the march, eating as they threaded the low bush down to the beach. At sunrise they rowed out to the schooner, accompanied by a screaming cloud of gannets and gulls, whose pinions whitened the air like flying paper—a snowstorm of ravenous birds flung down, torn apart, blown high or skimming the water, but always thickest where the boat swam.

When all three men had climbed on board the *Nantwich,* to look about for salvage, Godbolt threw up his hands in amazement, doffed his fig-basket hat, and swept an ironical bow.

"The Lord nourish fools!" He saw the whole vessel at a glance, and his black eyes snapped. "O Lord, nourish fools forever! Excuse me, boys, but He slid an island under her forefoot without stopping to think twice. You never gave Him time."

Wallace, whom the shadow of tribulation still overhung, looked ashore dolefully, and shook his head.

"Not much to brag of."

The other rounded on him, laughing heartily:

"Not much?" He called the wheeling birds to witness. "Providence, my son, Providence never did a quicker hand's turn!"

"If we're to live and die here," Wallace retorted, "alone, sole alone——"

"Well, there!" Godbolt swung into the companionway, and climbed out again, shouldering the yellow camphor chest like a feather. He set this load down, before taking up the argument. "Sole alone?" he echoed, and gave a wink of satire. "Ever live in a house, did you, Mr. Wallace, packed roundabout and chock-a-block with relatives, your nearest o' blood or marriage? And did you always love 'em all, dear and steady? Or walk a street, Mr. Wallace, and see those lovely faces go a-streaming by, and the right hands o' brotherhood all poked out to fondle you?"

He disappeared below, to stagger blindfold on deck with a pair of mattresses over his head.

"Phew!" he cried, bundling them into the boat. "My late friend Hardmood took to garlic also, I understand!" He straightened up, wagged a

forefinger at the island, as though aiming one last dead shot of wisdom. "Mr. Wallace"—he leveled the finger after every word—"there's lots worse things than living alone!"

Next moment he was down in the cabin, rummaging, and singing over and over to the air of "The Irish Washerwoman":

> *" 'Oh, John Darling lived well,*
> *And his father lived well,*
> *And his father well knew*
> *That John Darling lived well!*
> *And John Darling lived well,*
> *And his father lived——'*

"O' course," he shouted up, suddenly, "a man can sit on his prats and think Omar Key-West all day, if he's that much concentration!"

So began their second day on the isle, with wrecker's work, debate in philosophy, and always the cat-like fighting of sea-birds. So their days continued. The schooner, gutted of all things useful, let fall both her masts, and settled, a rotting, grinding hulk between sand and water; by which time the trio had forsaken her, except as a mark to swim round in their morning bath. Athletes, training, when the world was young, to race for a

strigil and a parsley wreath, could not have led cleaner lives than theirs upon this mile of beach. Sunrise woke them in the beehive house; and when Tisdale had won at the swimming, and Godbolt, without effort, had flung them both over his head in a wrestling match, or outstripped them a hundred yards in running a mile, there followed wholesome hours of porterage and carpentry under perpetual sunshine. The mainmast of the *Nantwich* they raised, after great labor, on the hill, and rigged with halliards flying all Captain Hardmood's color-box of signals; the cabin roof they floated bodily ashore, then rebuilt as a go-down to hold their meagre property. Birds haunted them at work or play, mewing in their ears. Sunset painted the water and the sands, never twice alike, but gorgeously; evening lit stars round their dungeon wall; the birds left their screaming, except when beaten fishers, that flew home late with talons empty, woke their fledglings to hunger and disappointment in the dark; and so night after night, wide, still, and more consoling than the night of cities, brought sleep to all but the outlying surf.

"No man," said Godbolt, one afternoon, "could ask for better, some respects. The old sand-bank —she taught me to think, I shouldn't wonder."

They were walking, three abreast, over the bleached gold-dust of the shore, toward the crag. Towering between his two friends, the bearded speaker had been meditative. He took a roving sight along the island.

"Yes," he went on, like a dark sage full of doctrine, "she's the world in one volume, boys. Life —you never hear people ask outside o' print, but all hands keep guessing one way or other—what the devil is Life, anyhow? This island, she speaks up pat, and tells you, from A to Izzard."

At high flood, a little channel, a shallow brook of salt water, cut off the birds' ledge from the sand-spit. Now, at half-tide, this channel had vanished, leaving a few clear pools among matted heads of wrack. Toward one of these the sailor bent, like a man who could lay his hand on anything required.

"Here's A," said he. "I'll show you Izzard before long. Here's A, the fore-side o' life for you, plain."

From under brown sea-weed, he dug an old, flat shell, in shape like a huge ear. Rough sea-handling had polished the nacre into soft colors and gleams. It held a dirty handful of gray stuff clotted together like wet kernels of barley.

"What's those?" demanded Godbolt.

Neither of his pupils could answer.

"And you know Greek!" he laughed, poising the shell over a sand-basin filled with brine. "Come to school, my sonnies! Sand crab eggs, they are. Look sharp, now, and you'll see a miracle—a holy terror: the Word made Flesh, and no mistake!"

He squatted by the pool in the sand, a burly worker of magic. The shell dipped, the gray clot crumbled apart, floated—and faster than eye could follow, thicker than sparks, the barley-kernels, melting, set free a thousand black motes that darted hither and yon through the water. Life had begun, creatures were born to Fear. Not an egg burst, but that a living midge knew the great motive instantly, and fled, and in a flash, burrowing the sand, was hidden. Birth and flight, birth and flight unerring, by myriads: to watch this boiling helter-skelter, and see these black atoms dart straightway from the Devourer, was to credit them with foreknowledge.

"Someone has coached 'em," said Godbolt, peering down. "Someone drills it into crabs for years ahead:—'Quick as you're born, get under cover!' —See 'em pelting, the little beggars, away from the wrath to come. That's Life—to be scared, hey?"

Sudden as it began, Godbolt's miracle ended,

like a pinch of powder dissolved. An empty shell lay on bottom, reflecting aërial hues.

"Now for Izzard." The master of this nativity show, laughing quietly, stood up. He tramped on through puddles of shining sea water, and began to climb an iron-red buttress of the crag. "Same time, we'll set our bread for breakfast, too."

The crest of the rock, won by hard climbing, bore a spectacle at which the men, even after daily visits, could not cease to wonder. From the solitude of their beach, they mounted into more noise and smell, more color and movement, than those of any fabulous bazaar. It was the Chandni Chowk of sea-birds, the fort and crowded capital of Aristophanes's kingdom. A flat half-acre, coated thickly as with white lead, was covered by a winged host of every size and name, gannet, boatswain, mutton-bird, snowballs of baby fluff, shapeless Easter rabbits with vermilion noses, young Phæthon feathered in white satin, and breeding frigate-birds whose bare throats shone raw scarlet, as if scraped down to the arteries. Beaks of blue, beaks of amber and black and sulphur yellow, turned idly as the three men advanced through a lane which opened and closed round their passage, no broader than the birds chose to waddle from underfoot.

"I'll set our bread overnight." Tisdale stooped, and pinching his nostrils, smashed a square yard of varicolored eggs. He took the bearings of the spot carefully, for to-morrow's breakfast, new-laid, would cover it. "Whee! Let's move to windward—— Now where's your Izzard, Sainty?"

Godbolt, shin-deep among staring fowl, tugged his black beard.

"Right there," he answered, and pointed gravely to an outmost pinnacle of basalt. "There they wait. No joke, boys, the end o' the alphabet."

Apart from the crowd, apart from one another, on shelves and edges of the rock sat a few drooping birds, old noddies and old coots. Most of them hung motionless, dejected; though now and then one shifted his awkward feet, wagged his tail-feathers weakly, or craned his neck with painful striving. Too old to fish, too feeble, they sat patiently awaiting the end of all aches and hungers. Behind them, eggs might hatch, males fight, loose females go squinnying and squawking; they, the superannuated, stared blankly before them, and shrugged the wings they could not lift.

"I watched 'em, often." Godbolt's deep voice was lowered as though he spoke beside a human

sick-bed. "Often. There's the finish, mates. That's the one blessed thing I felt afraid of, living alone—that kind o' sitting still, and flapping yourself, and no purpose to anybody."

The glow of late afternoon streamed over the ocean, gilded the cliff, rosily warmed the huddling whiteness of the birds, and lighted soft metallic sheen on colored beak or burnished feather. Toward the rock, from every point of the horizon, the fishers flew homeward—here a black cormorant, whirring low, like an ill-made, unbalanced top with wings set too far astern; there a gull, dropping for another dive, and yowling, and flogging the air as he rose to soar again; above these, above the light, a great frigate homing in one swift line, with scissor-pointed pinions reefed for the final swoop; far over all, a white star that winked by daylight in the blue, came high-flying Phæthon, the tropic-bird. The noise of each laborer joining his family, followed shrill and loud after the three men as they returned along the sunset beach.

They walked in silence, for that parable of the old noddies remained; somehow, it drew about them the heaviness of their prison-house, closer and more darkly than at any night-waking hour; and yet, as each man plodded thoughtfully on the heels of his long-drawn shadow, he was revolving,

not their own confinement on the island, but that wider confinement of which it seemed an image—the old jail of mortality, and the invisible jailor.

At one place on the beach, they found themselves halted by a common impulse, as though they had reached the same point in a brown study.

"Godbolt," Wallace broke out, "I take it you're a pessimist?"

His question seemed to know its answer beforehand, and approve. The sailor, casting down his eyes, shifted uneasily.

"Why, no," he muttered, juggling the sand with his toes. He had a shamefaced, hang-dog air. "I ain't even that, thorough. You see——" He faltered in growing embarrassment—"you see, boys, I never had the schooling. I read some, but never so far's to *be* anything. Now, does your pessimist ever get jammed into squeaking out a prayer, might say?"

Tisdale gave a delighted laugh.

"Not until he's met a real scare, Sainty."

Godbolt glanced up, with a smile round his black eyes; then, more sheepish than ever, looked down and juggled his toes.

"Why, there you are: I wasn't even scairt. Don't see how I ever came to do it, unless——" He paused, as to confess a crime—"unless being

lonesome. You know, something began to carry on fierce, inside here"—He struck his chest like a drum—"fierce, a-toothaching and a-smouldering where you couldn't reach her, the way soft coal sweats afire in the hold. Diagnosis hit me all aback, one day. I never made a bow nor crooked a joint, but stood right up in my tracks with a big fresh boatswain's egg in my hand as it happened, and 'O Lord,' says I, 'if you're hatching the whole hurrah's nest, as some let on—here, take charge o' my soul, if that's what I'm suffering from.' "

The bearded apologist made but one gesture, as if plucking something from his bosom and tossing it into the air. Tisdale smiled and nodded at the pantomime.

"What result?" said Wallace.

"Result?" cried the other. "Never bothered since!"

He started on briskly, toward the green hillock, the palms, and the mast beyond, where the string of signal flags fluttered in warm light. His alacrity had returned full force: even his companions caught the infection, and copied his pace.

"So you're happy"—It was Wallace who reopened their peripatetic argument—"to live here always, till we drop off into the water, like those sick old birds?"

The sailor was not to be pent by narrow consistencies.

"Happy? Not for Joe!" he bellowed in wrath. "Think a man's a fool? Happy? It drives me fair cannibal!"

He bounded up where the path, a rivulet of yellow sand, came tumbling through the bush. Here he stopped, to fill the sea-shell pipe with tobacco. Matches being too precious, and their vestal fire of banked embers too far ahead, he struck no light, but puffed his "dry smoke" with moderate satisfaction.

"We'll get off," he mumbled, gazing to sea over the green tops of shrubbery. "We'll win off the island, boys. The means will come. All in good time."

He stood listening to the surf, a dreary whisper roundabout; then flung a hand impatiently, and marched inland.

The means would come, sooner than they thought. It was not on land, or sailing the sea, or traveling in any form the wisest of them might have guessed; but already it was on the way, to bring aid by fighting its own battle, enduring its own hardship.

CHAPTER VI

THE SPENT MESSENGER

A GREAT wind startled them at bed-time, rushing through the leaves and rattling the beehive thatch. All night a gale poured westerly, plantains flapped their ragged pennants, palm fronds crackled like hail, the four palm trunks bent and creaked. Sleep came by fits; but even to sleep was to be carried in spirit down a river of air, through tossing trees. Next morning, and all day, the hubbub grew. No rain fell, but the bush hissed with driven sand, a dark conflagration of clouds rolled overhead, and as the sea bombarded with huge guns on every hand, wraiths of tall spray drifted falling across the island. The castaways lay low, rubbed the dust from their eyes, shivered, and swore; for of all things, wind and hopping sand they felt were the most tiresome.

"*'C'est le vent de la mer qui nous tourmente!'*" sang Tisdale, to vary the uproar. The other two

kicked at him, crying "Shut up!" Their torment was plain enough. They had no hint that any courier was riding the blast.

"She," declared Godbolt, naming the gale by allegory, "she's only whisking the tail of her skirt over us, here. She's going somewhere else, though, to raise hob."

On the following midnight, they woke to find every leaf quiet, the air warm again, stars burning, and all hushed but the terrific boom of the surge.

And so next morning, when they went to fish, hot sunshine blinded them, outrageous noise made them deaf. Their fishing was robbery. They had only to scale the crag, creep among the seafowl, and watch for some bewildered noddy, dodging the frigate-birds and other pirates that darkened the air, to alight and drop his catch. Thus, in a forenoon, the men could steal a basketful of live fish, purple, silver, red-striped, or motley blue. As the defrauded bird, screeching with hunger, always flew up and off to sea again, they thought their method cruel even while they snatched; and therefore, by a kindly figment called the Game Laws, they were forbidden to steal fish after midday, or more than thrice a week.

This morning, they tramped to their sport

under a white, roaring rampart of surf. Timbers from the vessel dotted the strand like charred piles hammered askew; there was a villainous odor of stale eggs, smashed by the gale; nor was it wonderful to find, here and there along the beach, a dead bird jumbled with weeds, or dryblown into a quivering tussock of sand and feathers.

"There's a white one," said Tisdale, pausing. "What kind, Sainty?"

They stood near the tidal brook, or channel, darkened by the morning shadow of the crag.

"Young gull," Wallace declared without looking. "Storm killed it."

On wet sand, just above the foam and whiter than the foam, lay the body of a small bird, with head and wings outstretched. So often had they found stray fowl, of unknown species, lying dead in the same flat exhaustion, that they might easily have passed this white stranger, and let the next wave roll him away.

"Gull?" Godbolt crouched over it. "Gull—your aunty's pet canary.—Why! Look! Boys—by goles—it is!"

He rose, lifting the bird tenderly. The wings, limp and white, spread across his flannel shirt as though the Dove of Heaven had flown straight into his bosom, and expired.

"A pigeon, boys." He slid one hand under the rumpled feathers, and stood very still. "Alive? No. Can't find the heart. Warm, though. A young he, looks like. What's a pigeon doing at sea?"

His friends drew near, and watched him turn the bird carefully over, holding it in the crook of his arm, and smoothing its white feathers. The pink claws were shriveled together, gripped in one last agony of flight.

"Look!" All three cried, regardless, jostling and disputing. "Stand clear! Look! Get out o' my light! What's that?"

A pigeon it was, alive or dead—a pigeon, but something more. Its legs, though both powdered with sand, were of different colors—one rosy coral, the other puffed by some yellow excrescence or scab.

"Homer!" Godbolt shouted. "A homer!"

"A what?" cried the others, marveling at him.

"Homer!" He bellowed fiercely this name of a blind bard, and pointed at the yellow leg as if Troy had fallen through this very ailment in pigeons. "A homer!"

Tisdale and Wallace bent their turbans yet more closely. Both at once, they saw what Godbolt was trying to say. The pigeon's leg was

glossed and swollen, not by any sore or disease, but by a wrapping of oiled silk, ringed with two ligatures of yellow thread.

"A carrier!"

Godbolt snorted.

"What else have I been telling you, this half hour? A homer he, 'tis. Carrier pigeon, with a message. Here!" His right hand fumbled in the pocket of his moleskins, and drew out a pair of old stubby scissors, bright-polished with sand. "Behold—*ecce signum!* I wondered, many's the time, why that instrument got left ashore with a man. Not just for clipping a beard, was it, now? Talk about shears o' fate! Comes handy." He spread the blades. "Here: take a purchase on his off claw."

Wallace held the bird's leg. Deft as any surgeon, Godbolt snipped the bands of thread, unrolled the yellow silk, and from under that covering peeled off a cylinder of tough "onion skin" paper, which came free in his hand only to curl again, tighter than a cigarette.

"There's writing inside." Godbolt returned the scissors to his pocket; and his fingers, which a moment ago had worked so neatly and steadily, began to tremble. "Ink shows through. Take it, Arthur! I'm all thumbs. Read off, quick!"

He handed over the spill of paper; then, coddling the pigeon in his arms, he sat down on the sand, turned his face away, and seemed to avoid the shock of unbearable tidings.

Yet when Tisdale had pitched his voice higher than the surf, what he read sounded tame enough. The first words dealt with latitude and longitude, and a date now two days old; the rest might have been carpet phrases from any parlor.

"Dear K."—ran the message, as it unrolled like a snip of ancient manuscript—"Dear K., I trust this will find you all well at Pulo Princess. I am in capital health and spirits, 5 days out, everything on board extremely comfy, if rather a bore. Please don't allow the Grandpater to fret. I feel confident of setting matters right. You will ignore the Pretender, of course; for as I told you, the man is imbecile. He can do nothing but threaten. Be well.—Yrs., W. F."

Three or four waves roared in, tumbled up the beach, slid down again, before anybody spoke.

"Well, that's something." Tisdale, holding the paper ribbon at full stretch, re-read it silently, and frowned.

"Something!" cried Wallace, bitterly. "I'll take my oath it's not much!"

He had been staring voraciously over the reader's elbow. Suddenly he struck at the paper, turned, and clapped both fists on his temples, as if despair could pierce like a headache.

"No," agreed Tisdale, calmly. "Not much. Queer things—hopes. Aren't they?"

Godbolt sat quiet with his Dove of Heaven. He had never stirred. A deaf mute could not have shown less emotion. Presently, without looking, he reached round one hand.

"Let's wedge that writing open," he demanded, in a voice which made the other men jump. "There's meat for us in the nut, if we can crack her."

He laid the pigeon across his knees, and with a stern, dogged air sat reading the paper band from top to bottom.

"English hand of write," said he, "if I can tell a B from a bull's foot. English. Book style o' thinking. What a whale of an Ego, boys: all about his dear little gory self, his health and his comfort, while calling other chaps imbecile.—Princess Island—no such place! Porto Princesa we know, on Palawan; but this says Pulo Princess Island. Ever hear o' that?"

The pair of listeners could not help him. They shook their heads, gloomily; but still, to miss no chance word through all the uproar of ocean, they bent down in leap-frog fashion, hands on knees.

"Me neither." Godbolt sharpened his black eye-brows over the writing. "'W. F.' That sounds probable. 'W. F.' Funny, if it was!—'Dear K.,' now. What sort o' woman, you s'pose, his dear Kate?"

Wallace rebuked this trifling.

"Woman?" he jeered. "K might stand for Kenneth, my friend, or Karl."

The sailor nodded at him, shrewdly, with twinkling eyes.

"So it might, so it might," he confessed. "But your Karls and your Kenneths, all the King's horses and all the King's men, can't wheedle their old grandfather out o' fretting. That's a woman's work, son. Kate's her name, I'll bet my scissors."

Tisdale gave a laugh, for he liked the by-play.

"Kate or not, Sainty, she couldn't help us much."

Godbolt looked up, surprised and offended.

"I'm thinking she could," he boomed, angrily. "Help us or hurt us—that's a woman's livelihood, too. Makes a remarkable odds, people say. Which kind will this Kate be, when we get there?"

His indignation rang out so honest, he spoke of the future with so much heat and perplexity, that both the leap-frog players rose erect, and stared. He must have read the riddle, after all. They cried together, eagerly:

"Where? When we get where?"

Godbolt shook the paper strip at them.

"When we land where she lives, o' course."

A torrent of questions beat upon him. The leap-frog backs were bent again.

"Where's that? What do you mean, Sainty? Look here. How do you know? Does the paper say? Don't sit there and grin, old boy. Where is it? Who is she?"

The sailor promptly cast a wet blanket on their ardor.

"Who? How should I know? Never heard of her before," he grumbled; and letting the written message curl back to its former shape, he put it in his pocket. "Guess-work, that's all. But the document's plain enough to figure on."

He stood up. The white bird spread lifeless, wing and wing, on his breast.

"No fishing to-day. Let's get back under shade, boys, in the bee-hive. Council o' war—large talk and hefty, we must hold."

He stalked away homeward, wrapped in his

own thoughts. Over the storm-littered shore, up the dune, into the windings of the bush, his two friends followed close at heel, like a pair of Hamlets imploring a stalwart ghost to halt and speak in full daylight. Thus they came to the loggia of palms, and entered the bee-hive.

"Now for your talk," said Wallace.

"Yes," replied their leader, absently. He placed the bird on a mattress, and began hunting roundabout, with the lack-lustre eye of one who searches rather for an idea than for an object. "Yes. We must make that cage. A little cage. Sticks will do, or splints o' palm. A tidy little cage, now."

Tisdale stepped in front of him, took him by the shoulder, and gave him a shake.

"Your mind outruns your tongue, Sainty. Aren't we to work together, all three? Come back, my wandering boy, and look me in the face. What are all these murmurs about a cage? And what's that paper?"

Godbolt returned slowly out of his musing.

"Paper?" He drew from his pocket the roll of stubborn tissue, and held it up. "That? Why, that's our walking-ticket. Don't you understand? Our sailing-orders. I told you."

Tisdale shook him again, laughing.

"You never said a word. And here we are, ready to split with ignorance, old fellow."

Godbolt echoed the laugh, his white teeth flashing in his beard.

"Wouldn't that scandalize your mainsail!" he crowed. "And me taking it for granted! Shows you: when a man talks too much by habit, like me, he thinks he's talking all the time. Well!—— Sit down, boys, and have it out."

They squatted on the floor of sand. By instinct, all three faced the dirty mattress where the clean bird lay.

"I felt it in my bones," declared Godbolt, "before you read it out: 'Here comes our sailing-orders. We're not long for this island. No more tarrying here.' And somehow it hit me a solemn poke." He nodded slowly at his companions. "Like dying, boys. Will it be better, s'pose, or worse, where we're going?"

Even Wallace felt a shade of presentiment; but waving it aside——

"Where do we go, then?" he began, briskly. "Where, and how?"

Godbolt stroked his beard before answering.

"Where and how? That's it, Rob. Where and how, if we're set free at all? Depends." He raised his black eyes, to glance toward the mattress

and the spent messenger lying there. "Whole thing depends, Rob, on whether that pigeon's been told to live or die."

CHAPTER VII

CRAS INGENS

"LIVE or die?" Godbolt repeated his own words, flippantly. "Go or stay?" He took a pinch of sand from the floor, tossed it in the air like a jack-stone, and caught it on the broad back of his hand. "Head or tails? A cage for the bird, or—this cage for us? If he lives, we follow him and go; if he dies . . . Well, that bundle o' feathers is buried easy, brothers, cheaper than most of us; and we stay. Been happy here on the old island."

Sunshine, flickering among plantain leaves and scrub ironwood, poured under their stilted dome a changing, holiday light. It made the shadows dance, played on the men's faces, and like a fiddler outside a church, mocked every word with bright allegro.

Tisdale unwound his red turban, folded it away, and rumpled his hair for the debate.

"Francis Godbolt," he opened formally: "you are a man of two tongues this morning. You say the bird may die, and leave us here for keeps, if I understand you; but in those big prophetic bones, you're feeling the bird's to live, and we're to go—somewhere. Now why? Deliver yourself, Ancient Pistol, like a man of this world. Whip her out: why should our lives hang on a pigeon's?"

Godbolt played with his pinch of sand, until the last grain slid through his fingers.

"Ever hear the nursery moral," he began, sitting up and squaring his elbows, "about the kingdom lost for a horse-shoe nail? Because this is that kind o' concatenation, too. Men and pigeons count about even, though we can pout bigger.—Now, then, pay attention!" And his deep voice flowed on, pausing only to let the greater waves resound and cease beyond the trees.

"Pulo Princess: that, I make it, is a fancy term, a private nickname for some place where an English family lives. The handwriting's English; and they love to clap a tom-fool title on their house and garden-patch. They'd clap it on an island, like as not, and then settle down to their tea, all proper. Now, Fraye's Atoll's an island. Fraye's Atoll does lie somewhere in these waters. Fraye's Atoll, I've heard say, does contain a British family. Tea-

pot, too, that case. Well: 'W. F.' might be some W. Fraye Esquire, in good health, says he, and rather bawed.—That's a long guess, though. Now lay hold o' facts."

Godbolt began tracing the sand with one finger, intently, as if drawing a map of his thoughts.

"Carrier that brought our dispatch—the pigeon, here—flew against the wind. Flew east, the spunky little mite did, beak to storm until he dropped. Stands to reason, then, that W. F. Esquire and his vessel are off to west'ard, well to west'ard; and that——"

Both hearers cut short his lecture, slapping him on the back, and trying to shake three pairs of hands all round.

"And that Pulo Princess lies to eastward . . . Fraye's Atoll . . . to eastward . . . near by! Yea-a-ay! English, too, there's luck!——

" 'Forever let Britannia wield
The tea-pot of her sires!' "

In uproarious high spirits, they fell upon Godbolt and mauled him, shouting abusive compliments. He laughed, and like a good-humored bear, administered one cuff to the right, another to the left, which laid them flat on the sand.

"Down, whelps!" he cried. "Moderate your transports. To east'ard, yes: but east'ard's a big order. Northeast, or southeast? You tell me that: for by gravy, it makes a difference, ye wildcats!"

They sat up, mortified and humbled.

"So it does," they admitted. "Which is it, Francis? How shall we know?"

He tugged his black beard, and gave a still more chastening frown.

"I've seen Kanakas," he resumed, after a long pause, and in a reminiscent mood, "I've seen Ellice Kanakas follow a tame frigate home between islands. Nigger padres trained 'em, those birds, to fetch and carry letters. Well, set your compass by a pigeon's line, and steer so? Three days out, say, and if you don't sight land, back home again, no harm done. Why not?—unless that pigeon goes dead on us."

Wallace jumped up, and made a step toward the mattress as if he would wrench the little sufferer back to life by force.

"Hands off!" commanded the sailor. "Put a cup o' water alongside, and let him alone!"

Tisdale stared at the dove, then at his protector.

"Sainty," he faltered, "sure he's not dead?"

Godbolt calmed them both, beckoning sternly.

"Sit down. Sit down and wait. I'll bring the water. No false hope, now, boys, but—I felt his heart flitter, like, while being carried."

He rose, reached down a tin cup from a hollow in the thatch, and disappeared outdoors. His voice died away and then returned, carolling through the sun-lit bush:

" 'Hop up, jump up, pretty little yella-bird,
Hop up, jump up, don't fly away!
Hop up, jump up, pretty little yella-bird,
Stay a little longer, it ain't quite day!'

"Time," he announced, coming quietly as into a sickroom. "Give the bird time, Rob. That's all I meant, speaking to you so brisk."

He placed the brimming cup on the mattress. A white spark of sunshine fell through the water, and started phosphorescent gleams to quiver and dazzle in the apex of the roof. The men sat watching in fascination, like crystal-gazers, the spark that winked from the cup so mocking and vital, the pigeon that lay beside it so dead.

Gradually, this contrast faded. The water in the tin cup grew still, the light went out. High noon smothered the island and filled the bush with

hot, narcotic smells. When all the world lay buried in drowsiness, Tisdale bent forward.

"Ssh! It moved."

Each man thought his heart was pounding more loudly than the surf. They joined hands for a moment, to repress one another, and to form a current of anxiety.

The pigeon's eyelid, a horny gray film, had wrinkled. A slit appeared. Then suddenly a round topaz eye considered the trite question of individual existence, and shut up.

"Alive! Coming to!"

The trio stole outdoors, hid behind a palm-trunk, and there consulted as if that weary topaz eye might be watching their privacy.

"Build the cage," whispered one. "Sit by him," said another, "so that he can't fly off."—"Overhaul the boat."—"Feed him."

They separated like plotters bound on various furtive errands: Godbolt into the bush, to gather splints for a bird-cage; Tisdale home, to make ready a diet of rice, and stand guard; Wallace toward the cabin go-down, the stores, and the boat. They met for supper, and passed a silent evening in the hut, extravagantly burning the remainder of their first candle. No king had ever a death-bed more jealously attended than this dingy mattress

where the pigeon lay. Nobody spoke; all suffered an acute suspense. It was a hot, windless night. The candle-flame rose long and sharp as a willow-leaf; indoor and outdoor shadows hung on the verge of moving, afraid to start; and round the yellow funnel of the ceiling, even the neat sailor-made stitches of coir showed like drops of jet lengthening to fall.

The ship's clock rang four bells. Not long afterward, the pigeon gave a little shudder, drew his wings in slightly for support, and lifting his bill, winked peacefully at the candle.

Before eight bells on the midnight, he had drunk water, and gone safe to bed in the clumsy cage of Godbolt's plaiting.

"The king's going to live!" sighed Tisdale. "Long live the king, fellow physicians!"

"Lucky job," said Wallace.

They were for shaking hands boisterously, but Godbolt's manner chilled them.

"Good so far," was his only comment. "Sleep well, boys."

He blew out the guttering candle-end, as he had done before, on their first night together. And later, while Wallace lay snoring, and the sea flung down rumbling burdens in the dark, Tisdale heard the same light footstep pass and re-pass without,

among the palms. As no answer came to his call, he let the footstep continue, and fell asleep, wondering.

Within two days, the small boat *Nantwich Number Two*—the black lap-streak—lay ready for launching, rebuilt with a Malay outrigger and a huge spread of canvas finned out with battens, like the sail of a Chinese junk or a Marblehead racing dory. Her voyage would be a race, indeed—a dash toward unknown fortunes. Her pilot, the carrier dove, was beating his white feathers on the bars of his cage, and pecking out angrily.

Godbolt came to breakfast in low spirits that day.

"What's wrong, Sainty?" inquired Tisdale. "Britannia's tea-pot? Afraid of W. Fraye Esquire and the everlasting muffin? Come, play the man! We sail to-morrow."

Godbolt, eating a *chuit* egg, left the spoon in the shell.

"I know we do," he replied, heavily. "Ain't there a Latin piece, 'Cras Ingens' . . . I forget. 'To-morrow,' it says, 'we hoist up on the ocean'?"

" 'To-morrow on the huge' "—began his friend.

He groaned, and raised a hand.

"To-morrow the Big," said he, as if the fragment more than satisfied him. "That's it. Let

the rest go.—To-morrow the Big. It's a good kind o' motto."

He sat thinking.

"Too big for me, this time!" he declared, shaking his head. "Queer feeling—never had it before. A qualm like a woman's. I hate to go, somehow. Boys, you'd better leave me behind. Don't cross your luck."

The two landsmen sat like angry Buddhas turned to stone.

"Leave you? Great Heavens, man!" they implored, when speech returned to them. "Leave you behind? How'd we know the way, even? You're captain for the voyage. Don't you see? We're lost, if you . . . Sainty, old duffer, you're captain!"

They argued, reviled, and for a quarter hour sang his praise without effect. He waited, not so much harkening as letting a mood pass. At last, suddenly, he confronted them with black eyes bright and ready.

"Captain? Good!" he said, curtly. "On condition, this way. You, owners of the *Nantwich Number Two* boat, hire me to fetch her to Pulo Princess, if possible. You take my orders while afloat, or I log you to your face. For serving as master, you pay me: two and a half packets o'

tobacco, already advanced; one red bandanna, like yours, for I'm mortal sick of packing my head in a home-wove basket; two suits of white drill, Rob's for choice, he being thicker set; and the use of a razor. There's every term, article, stipulation, and emolument, for you to take or leave. Amen."

He hung his head, as though ashamed. The owners made a mistake by laughing.

"Why, Sainty, you could have taken those things any day, for the asking!"

Godbolt stood up, haughty and straight.

"May be," he answered, stiffly. "But a man don't ask.—Shore ways for shore. To sea, discipline, with your wage and your papers all understood. You know my terms, gentlemen."

He was marching out among the palms. Wallace ran after, overtook him, and held out a propitiatory gift—a worn leather case.

"Here, Mr. Godbolt, for God's sake," he stammered. "My shaving-set. Let's have no quarrel."

Tisdale's tribute was an armful of white clothing.

"Go draught your papers." The sailor took this earnest of his bargain, and moved off, grinning, down the path which led toward the spring. "Draught your articles, I'll sign 'em. All right,

boys. The fit is passed off.—To-morrow the Big; whatever she is, let her drive."

The document binding owners and captain was hardly penciled, Wallace and Tisdale lingered revising it over the remains of breakfast, when a returning shadow fell across them in the hut. They glanced up, and found a strange man smiling at them—a stalwart, martial figure in a white uniform, tightly buttoned. The stranger was Godbolt without his beard, transfigured, his cheeks very pale, and across cheek-bone, nose, and brow a red scald of sunburn like a highwayman's vizard, or a birthmark. His face greeted them for the first time, clean and youthful. A quirk of melancholy humor caught the lips: their full curve might have formed the Cupid's bow, but that experience, hardening certain fibres, had given to the mouth, as to the eyes, a trace of cruelty. It was a proud, sensitive, contradictory face. Long afterward, Tisdale was haunted by a resemblance, until one day he saw again the portrait of Graham of Claverhouse, and that sad glance from painted canvas, bidding a harsh world—"Look out for yourself, and I'll look out for the Viscount Dundee." But now, on a tropic morning, it was only strange to see Godbolt's new features, full of life and passion, as though he had torn off a disguise.

"All or nothing, your sea rule goes for beards," his voice rang out, like a bell. "Hand your pencil over. There: signed, sealed and delivered. My first command, that is, and reads pretty. Tomorrow, then, we sail."

They sailed on the next morning. Their little crowded boat flew up and down through outrageous waves, gray with boiling sand. Her sail, the web-foot canvas, caught the wind bellying till every batten pointed stiff. Spray drenched the three men, darkened their red turbans, ran down their faces like sweat and tears. They crouched to windward; and as Godbolt calmly coaxed the tiller, they saw the island swing into view, complete and verdant, then sink behind a gray mound of sandy water. Regret was their chief emotion: regret at seeing the black tower with its living battlements, the bare signal-mast of their prison rise, and sink, and rise again diminished, and so dwindle by glimpse after glimpse beyond raging waves.

They stood far off toward the morning sun, so that no hungry sea-fowl might confuse or baffle their experiment. When the last gannet squawked farewell, and wheeled away toward the island, Godbolt gave his first order as captain.

"Mr. Wallace," he said, formally, "turn loose your pilot."

Wallace held on his knees the rude wicker basket. He drew the linch-pin, opened the door.

"Oh, the little devil!" he cried, in grief.

The carrier dove refused its liberty, and remained inside the bars, resting bewildered.

"Give him time," Tisdale advised. "He's cowed."

Several waves, the glittering blue glass of open sea, rolled smoothly under them, heaving and yawning. There came a sudden flutter and fright in the cage. The pigeon tumbled out all awry. Then, with the whinny and whimper of wings that no other bird can make, he flew up, cleared the finny leach of the sail, hung high in sunlight, white and twinkling, a point of quivering stability like a kingfisher about to dive. Next moment, this troubled speck seemed to mount in spirals, as if snatched upward by a gust. All at once, directed by some unerring secret, off it sped on a bee-line, and melted into the glowing snow-peak of a cloud.

"Go!" cried Godbolt, and through his mask of sunburn peered at the compass. "It's a go! He's not forgot his orders. Straight up to beat Elijah, and away. He'll tole us home. Come and find out, eh? Follow and find out. East by south."

PART II
PULO PRINCESS

CHAPTER VIII

VOICES

For three days, liberated on the ocean, cramped in a skiff, they held the pigeon's doubtful vanishing-point toward morning, east by south. It was like following a dream, confiding their bodies and their goods to any airy fable, believing in a dove that already had flown home to a sacred mountain. Light airs filled the sail, passed, and let it crumple, with battens rattling together like the sticks of a broken fan. Time and again, the voyagers called out, and pointed across an ocean quiet as the sky, to where a black ridge broke the horizon; but always this form of their desire cheated them, detached itself like mirage, and trailing above a steel-bright band of water, dissolved—another cloud of black rain spilled in the very impulse of rising.

Hope thus rose and fell to waste. But on the third day, in a glaring noon, suddenly the faintest

of all these ridges held its foundation, sprouted with outlines. Far ahead, to starboard, it perched like a bar of written music—black quarter-notes, upright on that steel rim of the world.

"No shower, there. Not much!" The men spoke quietly, but nodding a conviction solid as the land. "Real thing, this time!

As afternoon drifted by, the quarter-notes multiplied, grew larger and more distorted, until one by one changing form, they stood like a row of beetles impaled on long pins. The late afternoon glow revealed them, at last, in true color and proportion, shaft by leather-brown shaft, bundle on green bundle of cocoanut palm, overtopping many a tufted lance of areca. The bar which underscored them shone out a living green, a fresh-water green, like that of flags in a marsh. Below this, a smooth patch whiter than ice broke into agitation, tumbling higher and wilder as the boat approached—a ring of surf hemming the island all about, leaping, and every moment clamoring louder.

"Same voice," Tisdale observed at random, thoughtlessly. "There's your old man again, Sainty, got here before us."

Godbolt shot him the dark look that means a confidence betrayed.

"No time for nonsense," he grumbled. "Down sail and out oars, Mr. Wallace. Here's your low island—Fraye's Atoll, for what I know. Stiff and ugly piece o' rowing." And when some land-gazing delay followed his order—— "Damn it, Mr. Tisdale," he broke out, "d'ye think it's a basket picnic on them reefs? I may talk moonshine in my sleep, but not all day, thank you. Tide's favorable. Ship those oars, unless you *want* to drown!"

They rowed, slowly at first, to keep their strength for a crisis. The bright green island broke in two before them, parted right and left like sliding doors, and showed, between two banks of theatric verdure, the pale gleaming mirror of a lagoon. Thus the atoll opened its gate, toward which the waves galloped in thunderous charges, to trample and destroy one another before the breach. No time to see more: the boat sprang into the thickest of the froth, was whirled ahead, flung end-long, sidewise, churning and smothering the wits out of her crew. The oars bit deep, or winnowed smoke, until a rising vortex burst forward and belched her into the strait. Both green headlands bared their fangs of coral, gray and dripping, to gnash at her. She flew between them up-hill, on the steep snow-path of a wave.

"Steered!" the rowers panted. "Well steered, Captain!"

Godbolt rubbed salt water from his eyes, and said nothing.

A great inland calm received them, even while the din of ocean fell astern. They had fought their way through a battlepiece, and now went skimming an eclogue of still waters. Evening light poured after them, to gild a broad circular lake in a tropic forest. All milk and fire in the centre, the lagoon lay shining with reflected clouds, like an opal. Round it, the osier-green of the shore floated double; a thin white arc of coral parted the true foliage from its watery likeness—shadows below, sun-bright reality above, moving only where palms held up clusters of sparkling sword-blades. The boat lost way, and drifted. The men forgot to row.

"Nobody here," said one.

"I smell queer stuff burning," declared another.

"See the pantalan?" asked the third. "A landing built there, boys."

Across the lagoon, in fact, a slender jetty stippled the dark inverted image of the leaves. This was the only mark of habitation—this, and a faint breath of aromatic smoke diffused from the embers of cocoanut husks, hidden among the trees.

Wallace took up his oars again. Godbolt turned the boat's head to port, and let her glide close under the curving woodland, in a green shade, pleasant and cool.

"Did you ever see the like," Tisdale was saying, "for stillness? The fish-pools of Heshbon . . . "

He stopped and stared. From the bush that leaned above their heads came an echo, or something pat as an echo, but more musical, and uttering its own words.

"Oh, go back!" it moaned. "Oh, go away!"

It ended in a wail. The boatmen sat looking foolishly at one another, then up into the foliage. Nothing appeared there, nothing stirred. For a moment they heard only the surf grumbling behind the leafy palisade and a rattle of palm-fans like gravel ground by rapid wheels. Wallace mechanically dipped his oar-blades.

"Oh, go away!" chanted the voice among the leaves. "O men, go away!"

So might a wood-nymph, hiding, plead in terror and without hope. The call, prolonged and tremulous, passed like a piece of melody as the boat slid onward. But now another voice took it up, ahead; then another, and another, till all that screen and canopy of shore repeated the warning,

from various places, in the same low note, not of command, but of helpless lamentation.

"O men, go away!" implored the sorrowful, scattered choir, like children who had no faith in what they sang. "O men, go away!"

Godbolt stood on a thwart, trying to peer through some cranny in the boughs, ferns, and creepers. These grew impenetrably matted, bristling from their basis of round coral, as if rooted among heaps of skulls.

"Ahoy there! Show yourselves!" he bellowed. "We don't mean you any harm!"

Not a word followed. He had ruined some elfin spell. A slight rustling passed here and there through the bush, and something like a sigh, a whisper; then louder rustling, and grunts, and a patter of departing steps, too quick and small for any human feet.

"Row, boys, row!" Godbolt sat down and snatched his tiller. "Row hard! Running off, they are. 'Catch 'em! There's a break in the trees ahead."

The boat rocked with the violence of their strokes. They surged along the white beach, and shot past the mouth of a tiny clearing where, for a boat's length or so, the Golgotha of broken coral stood bare. On the nearer side, bushes parted.

Three black pigs galloped awkwardly across the glade, tumbling and squeaking in their rush for safety.

"Pigs?" cried Wallace, like a man imposed on. "But somebody was talking—English! What's wrong with this place, anyway?"

His fellow-voyagers could only shake their heads, and look ashore, and listen. The pigs had vanished, tearing through ironwoods. Their sudden appearance—fat bathos scampering out from a fairyland of disembodied voices—left a curious shock, not altogether comical. It was like having routed the swine of Circé.

"Wrong? Yes." Godbolt pulled himself together. "Make for the jetty, and we'll find what. Give way!"

They no longer coasted the green reflections of the bank, but steered out across the lagoon silently in a blur of dancing heat. Whiter than cotton, the beach swelled its thin line to a broad, horned crescent, which radiated fiercely the glow of sunset, and from which the little pier straggled into the pool on black wiry shanks. Beyond, by a darkening stroke like that of snow-blindness, the whole eastern semi-circle of the atoll was painted flat in sombre green.

The boat grazed the wet spilings of the jetty,

at last, and tied up. When her crew had climbed a ladder, and stood easing numb legs on the pier-head, they broke out laughing. Each man carried an axe. They had seen nothing but three black pigs; yet here they brought weapons ashore.

"Can't chop down a solitude," Godbolt averred. "We look silly enough for coots." All the same, he kept his bright axe ready. "What's here?"

Nailed to a post, a white bulletin board confronted them. Neat block letters covered it.

"VISITORS WILL PLEASE TAKE NOTICE

1st. That no natives must be allowed on shipboard, without written permission signed by the Proprietor.

2nd. That fish caught in the lagoon should not be eaten unadvisedly. Certain varieties are poisonous.

3rd. That water will be furnished at 9s. 6d. per ton, to cover coolie hire.

Thomas Masterman Fraye."

"Hmm!" said Godbolt. "There's a thoughtful man. Did I earn my pay? It's Fraye's Atoll, fast enough."

They turned their backs on the sunset, and began marching up the jetty. Now, raised by this light platform above the glaring beach, they could look deep into the colonnade of palms, and see, mottled with shadows brown and green, a thatched house hidden like a long hay-stack in a grove. Huts peeped from ambush in the distance; a row of boats lay side by side among the tawny, slanting trunks; but nothing moved, the sunset poured under the trees and touched no living figure.

"Queer," said Tisdale. "Queer. It troubles me, all of it." And halting where their scaffold joined the land, he pointed at the sand below. "What do you make out of those, now?"

Powdered coral swept away on either hand, forming a high concave bank, steep as the turn of a race-course. Along it were scattered blunt little ends of refuse, like mushrooms thrown up by the tide.

"Champagne corks?" cried Wallace, bending over the edge of the jetty. "Champagne corks!"

Godbolt nodded gloomily.

"That ain't Britannia's tea-pot, even," he declared. "A yacht club must 'a' been cruising hereabout. Corks: by the dozen. Far worse than pigs. Drunkards, I don't like 'em."

Greatly puzzled by the sight of this bacchanal-

ian flotsam, the comrades went forward, crossed the ramp of the pier, and set foot on island soil. Winding between borders of gilt-spattered crotons, a trim brown path led them toward the house. Throughout this many-masted grove the western sky and the burning lagoon lavished their brightness, only to be mixed with twilight, absorbed in tranquil tones of brown and green. An English flower-garden shone softly variegated in the general dusk, and spiced the salt air with a breath of cloves. The men themselves (and they alone) brought movement and discord here. Barefoot, black with sunburn, clothed in filthy linen, with savage red turbans on their heads, they came shouldering their axes like pirates.

"Where are the people?" muttered Wallace. He could neither forget nor explain that litter of wine corks on the beach. "Are they all sleeping it off?"

Tisdale reviewed the garden.

"They're not that kind," he answered, "whoever they are. This path was swept to-day. And smell the pink stocks!"

"Clove gilly-flowers," Godbolt agreed, halting and sniffing. "Mother used to plant 'em, always." He strayed from the path, plucked a stalk of crowded blossoms, and stood thoughtfully inhal-

ing the well remembered sweetness. "No: gilly-flowers, they don't go with champagne."

Holding the colored tuft in his hand, he moved on. Between great banks of roses and of honeysuckle, the garden path went straight to the veranda of the house, which stood with open door and windows facing the grove and the sunset. It was a bamboo structure, rambling, rudely plaited, overhung with thatch, yet neat as the whole environment and shining like dull gold. Nobody moved inside it, but a small red morocco book lay on the steps, with a handkerchief marking a reader's place among the pages.

"Call to 'em," Godbolt whispered, clamping Tisdale's arm in iron fingers, and pushing him forward. "There's a woman round the place. Speak to 'em, Arthur. You're the youngest. Women don't ever like me."

Tisdale laughed, but without confidence. This desert peace weighed down the spirit. His blue eyes widened and grew blank. He, the ready speaker of the company, could find no form of words.

"Oh, I say," he began. "Is anybody at home?"

The dark windows of the house remained staring, vacant, over their heads. But now, while they listened eagerly, they heard a long, difficult sigh, as of a man drawing his breath in pain.

Tisdale again called.

This was an afternoon of voices. No one came to door or window, but from within the house another voice, clear, and full of rising courage, replied.

"One moment," it said. "Do you come from Mr. Mace? Sit down and wait, please. I'll be out to you."

Godbolt started as if to run.

"There! That's Kate!" he whispered. "Bet you! Wish we were out o' this!"

CHAPTER IX

THOMAS MASTERMAN FRAYE

THEY stole off to hide their axes under the croton border of the path; for somehow, having heard this latest voice, they felt no desire to be caught there armed, like a gang of free-booters.

Glass rang, a spoon jingled, inside the room. A murmur of consultation followed. Then came a quick, light tread, a rustle of skirts; and in the doorway, all at once but very calmly, a girl appeared—a girl not above middle stature, yet gaining the advantage of height as she looked down at them with cool brown eyes; a girl dressed in dark blue, her fair hair shining against the deep background of the room, and her young arms bared to the elbow. Her pose, her look, were full of scorn.

"Mr. Mace chose a poor time," she began, quiet and straightforward, "for sending you."

As though to offer the narrowest possible mark,

all three men turned shoulder foremost, and glanced up cringing, like so many copies of Bob Acres under fire.

"A poor time," she repeated. "Not that Mr. Mace would care; but my grandfather has been very ill indeed."

Her throat, like her arms, was bare. A pulse throbbed in it. She could not be so cool, then, as her eyes would have these cowards to imagine.

"Why, really . . . We are sorry." Tisdale, the spokesman, took heart. "There must be a mistake. We never heard of Mr. Mace before, upon my word."

The girl, like one preoccupied, whose courage points to higher matters, had shown no surprise at seeing them, all grimy and barbaric as they stood. Men who tied their heads in scarlet rags, who wore silver buttons in the dirtiest of jackets, might have been her daily visitors—inconvenient, base, but not dangerous. Now, when Tisdale spoke, a light crossed her face, the light of unmistakable surprise and relief.

"Mace didn't order you?" She gave a start. Her brown eyes kindled, and saw them all anew. "Indeed, by your faces . . . No! You haven't come to threaten a woman and a sick man—an old man who is very ill? You haven't; have you?"

It was strange, pathetic, to see her pride turning into supplication, and hear her voice change and falter. She had stood above them as on a stage, rehearsing a defiant part, which now she broke off short, to speak in her own character.

Tisdale bowed.

"We are ship-wrecked," he said, briefly. "We've just landed. It's a piece of our luck to bring you more trouble at such a time. Can we be of help?" Looking about, in his embarrassment, as though for some act of homage to perform, Tisdale spied at her feet the little red volume with the handkerchief. He picked it up. The gilt letters of the title caught his eye. "Ah, *Le Foyer Breton,*" and he smiled as he offered her the volume. Childhood—fairy tales—the sound of his mother's voice reading aloud in twilight: old secret memories thronged and vanished. "My mother," said he, on the impulse, "was of that country . . . France. That is twice," he added, glancing back to Godbolt, who overshadowed them from a humble post in the rear, with eyes downcast, and the gilly-flowers in his hand—"that is twice we have been reminded, already."

The girl, though puzzled by his words, seemed to gather something of their spirit, and to cast off her own misgivings.

"Wait, please, a moment." She smiled at the bedraggled wanderers, and turning, disappeared within the house. They heard her speaking to somebody, but could catch none of her words except—"I believe them"—and again—"Not the slightest doubt."

The men, waiting below the veranda, exchanged a glance and a nod.

"Hear that?" said Godbolt. He had held aloof like a stupid boy forbidden to join a game; but now he drew near, took his friends by the shoulders, and whispered earnestly. His big, black eyes glowed with admiration; and across them, although sea wind and tropic sun had burnt his cheeks, the red scald reappeared for an instant, by some effect of pallor. "Did you hear? She believed us! That's the kind she is. You spoke well, Arthur, you spoke up like a master hand!"

The sun went down. Through the darkening grove a strong blue radiance poured from the lagoon, more like the promise of dawn than the failure of another evening. By this half light, they saw the girl's head shine in the doorway. She beckoned them. They untied the bandages from their heads, and went upstairs.

The room they entered was dark and cool, filled with a fresh pungency of camphor-wood.

"Good evening, gentlemen." A man's voice greeted them from the farthest corner. It was a pleasant voice, like the girl's, but somewhat ironical. "Forgive my not rising, won't you?"

In a long rattan chair, beside one of the opposite windows, lay a figure wrapped in gray—a little white-haired man, perfectly still, though at first glance his body seemed to move because of a restless shadow passing over him from head to feet, from feet to head again. This shadow came and went as a huge, brown man-servant, who stood half hidden by the head of the chair, kept swaying back and forth a two-handed punkah, the stalk and leaf of a palm.

The little white-haired man lay watching his three visitors; while they, pausing on the threshold, bowed to him.

"I am glad," said he, in the same cheery but satirical tone, "I am glad you appear so able-bodied, my friends. If you came to remove me, you may have to do so feet foremost. Not that I'm obstinate, gentlemen, only sick. Old age, old age!" he chirped. Then suddenly sharpening his white eyebrows at them in the dusk—— "Well?" he demanded bitterly, "does Mr. Mace provide a stretcher?"

He put all his force into the question. The

sound of his breathing followed, dry and hard and short. The dark giant who swung the fan, gripped the butt of it between his toes, and rolled the whites of his eyes, placidly wondering now at his master, now at the strangers in the door.

"Oh, Grandfather!" cried the girl. She had stood midway, intent and motionless, at the corner of a table. Nightfall obscured her face, but her voice rang out reproachfully. "I told you the men were honest."

"Be quiet, Katherine," retorted the old man, sharply but not unkindly. "Let the men speak for themselves, if they can. Well?" He repeated his challenge. "Why delay? Proceed, gentlemen. We're quite ready, quite helpless, as you see, and not in the least afraid of you."

Daylight had forsaken the place. In the gloom, Godbolt stepped forward so angrily that the slave of the fan forgot his duty, and shrank back.

"We never tried to scare you," he declared, with indignation. "We're shipwrecked, sir, and that's a fact: whether *you* believe us or not. She did." He swung on his heel. "Good night, and beg pardon. Let's go out, boys. We've slept in the bush before now."

The white head roused from the chair.

"Well delivered, sir. Well delivered—deep

from the chest." The master of the house peered, with a different and a keener motive, from beneath the swaying punkah. "Katherine, take note: you judge by faces. Quite wrong. As a man speaketh, so is he. *Nulla fides fronti,* my dear. All the same, friends, come, let me see your faces. You find us at a very uneasy hour. Katherine, go tell Consolacion to fetch a lamp. I doubt if the wench has filled one."

His grand-daughter obeyed, silently. She passed into a dark veranda at the back of the house, clapped her hands, and remained there, as though listening. It was now too dark for outlines; but the three men, as they waited to undergo their singular ordeal of lamp-light, thought they saw the girl suddenly bend her head, clasp her arms on her breast, and wring them with passion. Dim guess-work, the adumbration of movement, it spoke out like a cry of gratitude. She raised her head, clapped her hands again, calling:

"Consolacion?"

For answer, a nimbus came toward them through the grove behind the house—the soft, circular glow of a lamp, indoor comfort straying among palm trunks. A little brown woman, whose bare feet stole in and out under a yellow skirt, carried the lamp slowly up the steps, and dropping

an odd curtesy to her mistress, followed her into the room.

"Trimmed and burning, after all," the old man chuckled. "A wise virgin to-night, my child."

Consolacion, a plump mestiza, placed her lamp on the table, and knelt before his rattan chair.

"We love you, Master," she moaned.

She rose and stole to the door, a sleek-headed mouse of a woman, in yellow and white gauze. Her voice was like those plaintive dryad voices among the trees, where the black swine had galloped.

"Come," said the master, impatiently. "Come, gentlemen, step up and show your faces." He struggled, and bent forward in his chair. "Here is my face. Exhibit yours."

Wallace, Godbolt, and Tisdale ranged themselves by his chair, and let the lamplight speak. They saw below them a figure no larger than a boy's, wrapped in a gray dressing-gown; the face ruddy, round, jocose, betraying its years only by the tolerance that twinkled in brown eyes, and by the hair and moustache whiter than milk.

"What are your names?" he snapped.

They told him. The girl, the mestiza at the door, and the swart giant with his punkah, stood listening while they spoke.

"Mine is Fraye. Thomas Masterman Fraye. And there's my grand-daughter Katherine," said the sick man. "Mr. Wallace, you look young and thoughtful. Mr. Tisdale—ah, my boy, you might come to a bad end, if you had not been well brought up. And Mr. Godbolt? Well, Captain, there is room in your lungs, I see, for that cathedral chime of yours! You are—somewhat—older?"

He reached past them, signaling toward the doorway.

"Consolacion? Dinner? Run, child, and set the table. In the grove, to-night. Places for four. No, Katherine, not I. Old Pantaloon will sup his gruel alone, where he can make all the noise he likes in breathing. Four places, child."

The girl had moved between his chair and the window. The breath from the punkah set her bright hair fluttering like a lambency about her head. For a moment she stood looking—with parted lips and eyes that sparkled—now down at her grandfather, now up and across his body at the young strangers.

"You do believe them," she said. "I knew you would!" And then, laughing happily, "Gentlemen, if you knew how much you have done for us! It is wonderful, your coming here!"

She made a quick and speaking gesture, like one who throws off a burden.

"Tut, tut, tut!" Mr. Fraye grimaced at her, working his white brows and pouting his white moustache. "Not so fast, young lady, not so fast. Men are not shipwrecked to please you, altogether. More than that——" His ruddy, round face grew composed, even serious; once again his eyes were the only part of him to move, as he raised and fixed them on the three friends. "The question has now become, not of our believing you, but your believing us. That's not so easy to arrange, offhand."

Tisdale made a deprecatory sign.

"Let us return the compliment, sir."

The old man shook his head slightly, and allowed the great palm leaf to sway back and forth, back and forth, before he answered.

"No. Conduct, I find, grows more difficult as a man grows older." He smiled up at them, slyly. "Our case—you must learn it for yourselves, and judge. No first impressions, please. On my part, I sha'n't bear witness against my neighbor, false or true. Yes, my dear," he said, as the girl started angrily. "Yes, my dear, it's a neighborhood matter. You found us afraid, though on that point, just now, I lied to you in self-defense; you found

us backward in welcome, and suspicious; don't ask me to put all our worst feet forward. We sha'n't try to prejudice you. Wait, and see, and choose."

"Grandfather," began the girl, reproachfully.

He stopped her with a hard glance.

"No, I'm not silly, Katherine," he declared. "I'm only doing right."

His body writhed somewhat under the gray robe. He was evidently in pain; but as he lay considering, the boyish look of mischief did not leave his eyes. He began to gasp with open mouth, more and more audibly.

"Rust in the bellows," he panted. "Good leather yet, though." And then, snatching an interval of ease—— "Wait and see, my boys. You know the old Jacobite lines?

" 'Who that Pretender is, and who that King,
God bless us all, is quite another thing!'

There's your situation, to a hair. But wait and choose for yourselves."

Katherine stooped, and spoke a few words in his ear.

"Nothing will!" he cried petulantly. "Nothing will happen to-night. I've told you so all day."

He forced out the last words. To breathe be-

came a slow struggle, a long distress. Closing his eyes, he sat up and strained for air.

"You are hungry," said Miss Fraye to the men, quickly, pointing toward the back veranda. "I'll join you out there."

A white cloth shone beneath twinkling candles, close by in the grove. Out at the rear door and toward these the young men filed. As they went down, they heard the loud sighs of their host. "Aaah, ha ha ha!" he repeated slowly, like a deaf man who read the words aloud and had never heard of merriment. "Aaah, ha ha ha!"

"Plucky little devil, that," whispered Godbolt. "Could see him staving the fit off."

The round, white table, set with silver and lighted by four candle-lamps, stood there, brightly familiar, on the frontier of a great darkness. All three men, regarding it while they waited, felt this contrast with peculiar force. The black vault, beyond the candles, might have been thronged with watchers.

Tisdale gave his friends a quizzical glance.

" 'Thou preparest a table before me,' " he quoted, lightly, " 'in the presence of mine enemies.' Odd effect, eh?"

They both smiled at him, nodding, as if he had put their feeling into words.

"Enemies? Well," growled Godbolt, "they'll see a hearty appetite for once. What's this Pretender business, though? Remember the writing on the pigeon's leg? What's all the scare about, inside there?" He jerked his thumb back toward the lighted windows. "What's the Pretender? And who's Mr. Mace?"

They shook their heads, not expecting an answer.

CHAPTER X

THE TABLE IN THE GROVE

"Ah? Yes—it's I."

The words were spoken casually, near at hand —so near that the three men started. Nobody had joined their group; and at first, as they turned to stare hither and yon through the darkness, they saw nobody. For a moment their eyes took counsel together. They were puzzled. The cry of the surf, hoarse and mournful, summoned their hearing through the grove, across the island, off to sea beyond the uttermost reefs. Palm tops high overhead set up a dry clashing, which subsided into silken rustles. Overhead, but much lower, sounded a muffled "Rou-cou-tou-cou" of doves in some hidden cote. These voices of the night explained themselves; not so the human voice.

"You called my name?" It spoke again, slow and cool. "I thought you did, in passing. If not, I beg pardon."

An elderly voice, gentle, with a slight tremor, it might have come across the table. Peering in that direction, the men saw above the mild radiance of silver, white linen, and candle-flame, a face watching them with shadowy benevolence. A face, and no more, told them where the speaker stood —a long, narrow, wrinkled face with thin features, dark, vague eyes, and lofty but narrow forehead. Bareheaded, clothed in black, the stranger melted bodiless into the gloom, and left only this visage to float and waver beyond the wavering candles. It was long and sleepy and kind, like the face of an old horse.

Tisdale was the first to answer.

"Oh!" said he. "Mr. Mace?"

The visitor was seen to bow, gravely.

"Yes," he replied; and after a thoughtful pause—— "I chanced to be going by." There fell a second pause. "But I see you were not calling to me, gentlemen." The face moved away, slowly fading toward the right; then hung stationary. "I trust," continued the gentle voice, "I sincerely hope that Mr. Fraye is better this evening?"

The question had an odd sound, tentative, reluctant, as if it came with effort.

"Better?" echoed Tisdale. "That I can't say,

sir. Mr. Fraye seems ill. We're strangers here. We came only now, by accident, in a boat."

The face, dim almost to vanishing, suddenly approached the light again, grew somewhat clearer.

"By accident? Ah! Strangers." Mr. Mace had lost his equine look. His dark eyes were no longer vague, but wide awake. In his pale cheeks the wrinkles moved and worked, as though he were chewing the cud of some new idea. "I'm very much afraid, young men," he observed ruefully, "that you came at a bad time."

A thin, white hand stole up and stroked his chin, after this rebuke.

"It's hardly our fault," Wallace grumbled. "Shipwrecked men can't choose their times for landing."

"No! No! Indeed they can't!" agreed the other, quickly. His hand fluttered aloft; animation seized his voice; he seemed to have conquered a fit of shyness. "No, indeed. Quite right. I was thinking of poor Fraye, only. Poor Fraye! He's so hospitable, the dear old chap—feudal generosity, you know—that he'd take you in at any sacrifice."

The white hand sank to rest on his chin. This time, it was Godbolt who took offense.

"Sacrifice?" cried the sailor. "A bad time? By the Humphrey Hell-cat, there it goes again! Look here: we don't bother sick men, do we, boys?" He turned wearily on his friends. "Come, it's the same thing I said before: we'll go bunk in the bush. There's more on foot than what we understand."

Again the countenance above the candles took a different aspect. Mr. Mace was smiling, frankly, but watching his own smile, as it were, down the length of his nose.

"There, now!" he chuckled. "You mistake me. I'm a blundering old fellow; what I'm trying to say, is this." The dark eyes looked up, full of amusement. "Under the circumstances, won't you come stay at my house? Bachelor quarters!" he laughed. "Bachelor quarters: but I can make you snug, and nobody there will count your *stengahs* when you're dry! Company's rare with me: I'd like dearly to have you?"

The three companions glanced at one another, awkwardly, in consultation.

"I see how it is," the speaker added, with pathos. "You'd find it dull, no doubt. But while poor Fraye's down sick . . . Come to-morrow," he begged, his thin face warmed and shining. "Come by daylight and view the premises. If you

like them, they are yours—the freedom of the place. We want the islands to keep a good name for hospitality. Come and see me, at any rate!"

Tisdale, reading the looks of either shipmate, spoke for them.

"Thank you, Mr. Mace," he answered. "We'll come to see you."

"Good. I'm delighted." Wrinkling with satisfaction, the long face once more receded in darkness. It returned for a moment, smiling cannily. "Never tell Fraye that I was bidding for you, though! Dear old Tom!—he'd be furious! Don't forget: I expect you to-morrow morning. You'll find it the best arrangement. I'll send a boat, of course."

He was gone. They heard a slight crunching of sand, as he went softly away toward the right. Aloft, the palms crackled and fell silent; the surf resounded round the distant confines of the night; the candles flickered or burned steady on the table, and lighted three musing figures of men.

"Something's up," said Wallace.

"Let it wait: I'm hungry," Tisdale scoffed. "What's fretting you so hard, Sainty?"

Godbolt stared at the candles without answering, for a while.

"I was thinking." He shook himself, at last.

"There was less trouble on the old island, wasn't there? We'll never see them again, those days. But here we are. And that's best."

They were too weary, too bewildered, and too hungry, for any further comment. The grove, the bright dinner-table, evening, and the prospect of sleep: these were all pieces in a fantasy, the name of which was drowsiness.

Half dozing, they heard behind them the brush of skirts. Miss Fraye came toward them and toward the light. She was bringing a decanter on a silver tray.

"My grandfather is better," she called out as she came. "He'll join us before long."

She put down the decanter—a shining globe of pale sherry—in the midst of the candle-sticks; lifted a silver bell, and set it tinkling; then, with a smile and a little wave of the hands, made her guests welcome at table.

They were hardly seated, when from nowhere, like a familiar spirit, appeared a small, rotund Chinaman in white livery faced with blue. Still as a ball of thistledown, he passed round the table and out of sight again, leaving at this point in his orbit four cups of bouillon, and an impression that with three blinks from a slanting eye, he had studied the full history of three strangers.

The men drained their cups without speaking, but looked at one another and sighed—a threefold, heartfelt sigh. At the sound of it, they laughed, and found their hostess laughing with them. Good food had worked a magic: hardship, loneliness, careworn voyages were over; cramped bodies, tired minds belonged to the unreal world of fatigue. Here they sat already warmed and fed, awake and laughing. The girl understood; or so her brown eyes told them, shining in the candlelight.

Again, while they laughed, the Chinaman glided through his comet path, leaving fish as by accident, with a faint, plump smile of condescension. When he had vanished, there came from the house a quiet scuffle of bare feet, and four dark men-servants in the white and blue livery set down a burden at the edge of the light—Mr. Fraye's long chair, and Mr. Fraye himself, lying still under his robe as if wrapped in lead.

"You sound very merry," said he, nodding his white head. "Go on. Proceed. I can enjoy myself listening."

The men, who had risen, sat down again. Katherine touched the decanter, and glanced toward Godbolt, her right-hand neighbor. He looked for her glass, found she had none; looked at his own,

with a doubtful air; and suddenly flushing red through his sunburn, passed the decanter on. "Here, Arthur," he mumbled. Tisdale poured himself a glass, and gave the decanter to Wallace, who followed his example.

"Sherry's not bad, Mr. Godbolt," said the little man in the chair. "It rounded the Cape of Good Hope when I was your age."

The sailor faced about to answer; but the answer would not come. He seemed in great confusion and distress, looked once toward the girl, then avoided her eye.

"It ain't the reason, sir," he faltered at last. "It—it really ain't the reason."

Tisdale came to his aid.

"Miss Fraye, is that a dove-cote behind you—the peaked thing I seem to see overhead, at some distance? We thought we heard pigeons cooing. Your carrier got home safe, I suppose?"

Never did a subject change by a more thorough somersault.

"Home? My carrier?" The girl's face was all bright wonder and surprise. "How did you—— Have you seen Walter? Where was he? Did he say—— Did Walter give you any message?"

Tisdale shook his head. It was a pity, he

thought, looking at her, to overthrow such hopes, whatever they might be.

"We haven't seen Walter," he replied. "Don't even know who he is."

Miss Fraye bore the disappointment well.

"He's my brother," she stated. "I was anxious to hear. I am sorry." Then leaving her anxiety out of the question—— "But how did you know of my pigeon?"

Tisdale raised an eye-brow at his friends. They laughed, and gave him the telling of the story. When he had finished, when his last sentence came home, like the pigeon, to this dark and peaceful grove surrounding them, they all remained silent for a time.

Miss Fraye turned toward her grandfather.

"How strange it is! What do you think of it, happening so, to-night?"

The old man stirred in his gray shroud.

"Ask these young men. What do they think?"

She fixed her brown eyes on them in turn, seriously.

"Well? What do you? What does it mean to you, Mr. Wallace?—having my pigeon lead you here?"

"A queer coincidence," Wallace replied, honestly. "A thing we never dreamed of."

"And to you?" The brown eyes rested on Arthur Tisdale.

"To me?" laughed that young man, bowing: "our very great good fortune, of course."

Miss Fraye turned, somewhat impatiently, to Godbolt.

"And you?"

The sailor raised his head, and gave her that steady, sidelong look of his.

"I don't hardly dare to say," he answered quietly, and lowered his eyes. "It might sound foolish.

She leaned toward him quickly, her arms on the cloth.

"No. Do! Say it!"

Godbolt looked at her again, but shook his head.

"Not now."

She held his glance with her own.

"Later—some day?"

His dark face lighted, as though she had divined his thought.

"Yes," he consented, gravely. "Some day."

The girl's face glowed likewise, perhaps because it took, near and full, the brightness of the candles. The color tingeing her brown cheeks was not a flush, but fine transparent youth; the lumin-

ous quality about her came by chance, as the reflections fluttered round her hair, or caught a deep and lively answer in her eyes. Whatever the cause, the effect was brief. She nodded slowly, thoughtfully, at Godbolt's promise; withdrew her arms; and sitting as before, appeared to veil this momentary lustre.

The silver bell tinkled under her hand. The Chinaman came noiseless out of limbo.

"Kopi," she ordered. *"Tiga."*

When the plump phantom had vanished, returned with three cups of coffee, and vanished again, the company kept their former silence.

The surf grumbled, far out. But for this, the grove was still as an empty forest.

Presently, Tisdale spoke, with his cup half-way to his lips.

"That's queer," said he, glancing about. "We're alone, and yet I keep feeling . . . "

Miss Fraye caught his words up, lightly.

"What do you feel?"

Tisdale shot another glance, puckering his eyebrows.

"As if," he began, and halted. "As if we sat on a stage, behind footlights—with all the dark full of audience! Yet we're alone: you can *hear* how much we're alone."

She looked mischief at the trio.

"Are we?" the old man chuckled in his chair. "Are you?—Look and see."

The visitors obeyed. On the girl's right, they saw the house, a long, low bulk deserted, with dim orange squares for windows and door; behind her, behind her grandfather's chair, nothing but a hint, a looming apex of the dove-cote; roundabout elsewhere, the night, a high wall of blackness overhung by stars which, marvelously near the tree-tops, marvelously thick, seemed painted in soft streaks of phosphorescent gold.

"Look lower," advised the girl. "Lower yet. Near the ground."

They looked. Inside the ring of light, they saw nothing. Outside, nothing at first; little by little, after hard scrutiny they discerned formless white things arranged knee-high along the floor of the grove like stunted bushes covered with snow. The light fell short, divulging no more. But among these white things it appeared, now and then, as if tiny movements passed fitfully. At last the movements could be named or guessed at: here, the crooking of a white-sleeved elbow; there, the turning of a shadowy head, so that eye-balls or white teeth glimmered. The darkness had a living hedge at its border—a line of people, almost

invisible, who lay or squatted there to watch and overhear.

The three friends faced the table again, rather stiffly, like men who at a banquet find themselves threatened with arrest. The discovery embarrassed them. They sat here, the focus of many eyes, their privacy the privacy of gold-fish in a lighted bowl.

"Curious, how I felt them," said Tisdale, throwing off his constraint. "Long before you joined us, even." He laughed, and repeated boldly—" 'Thou preparest a table before me . . .' "

Miss Fraye smiled.

"They're not enemies, though," she broke in. "Friends, all friends, our islanders. You're not offended? We let the poor things look on, sometimes of an evening, because it comforts them."

Wallace, aware of that semi-circle of eyes aiming like arrows at his back, stirred uneasily.

"You have plenty of protectors," he ventured.

At this the girl laughed.

"Protectors?" her grandfather chuckled, and shook his white head. "They're afraid of the dark, our children there. Take a rattan switch, and you could drive them all into the sea! Jump up, Mr. Wallace, and make toward them as if you were angry."

Wallace hesitated, then sprang afoot and took one stride from the table, with hand uplifted.

A flutter, a confusion of little squeaks and whispers, took place in the darkness. The vague row of watchers burst and melted, in white groups that fled crouching. Wallace borrowed a candle, and held it above his head. The grove, as far as one could see, lay vacant.

Mr. Fraye called from his chair:

"Good night, my friends!"

An answer, from various distances, came back as the fugitives pattered away through the palms.

"Good night, Master!" the voices mournfully chanted, like those which at sunset had floated over the lagoon. "Good night, my Master!"

The old man's eyes twinkled.

"You observe their valor? In three generations, they can get the English tongue, but not the English backbone!"

He lay musing, with a look which passed through and beyond the folk at table.

"A life-time—a dream!" Mr. Fraye spoke to himself; then louder: "Time for grandsires to be in bed. Ring for my bearers, Katherine."

The girl rang her bell. Her guests rose with her, and stood waiting. The four dark servants

appeared, salaamed, and were about to lift the chair when Mr. Fraye signed for them to pause.

"The Chinaman will show your rooms, gentlemen, whenever you choose to turn in. My boys have drawn your boat up. Ask for anything you want. Good night! It's a great pleasure to have you here."

The servants raised and carried him. Miss Fraye went before, a candle in her hand. Halfway to the house, he suddenly cried:

"God bless me! Cigars! I quite forgot. Katherine, dear, run fetch the poor chaps a box."

When the girl had returned, bringing cheroots, she bade the wanderers good night once more.

"I'm glad you are here!" She looked them in the eyes, but her voice trembled. "I mustn't tell you how glad!—Till after breakfast, then?" she added, and was moving off.

"Oh! Boys!" cried Godbolt, all at once. "We forgot some, too. Miss Fraye: a man went past, before dinner, and asked us to go . . . That is . . . " The sailor floundered. "I mean, he asked after your grandfather's health, and wanted us to . . . "

The girl's face altered.

"A white man?" she inquired, with a flash of incredulity.

"Mr. Mace."

"*He* came?" Anger shook her—a visible tremor of the body. "*He* came and asked?"

They wondered at her vehemence, her paleness, above all at the restraint which kept her from saying more.

"We promised," Godbolt stammered, "to go see him in the morning. Please . . . We weren't to tell your grandfather."

Katherine viewed him coldly.

"Ah? Then go," she agreed, with bitter unconcern. "Go by all means."

She started walking toward the house, but halted somewhere under the trees. After a long pause, she came hurrying back toward the light. This time there was color in her cheeks, warmth in her eyes.

"Forgive me," she begged; and the sight of her, so pretty and so contrite, moved the men strangely. "I did not mean to be rude. And do, please, make your visit to-morrow morning, for it may help you to understand."

She slipped away quickly, as if ashamed. They saw her cross the veranda and enter a lighted doorway.

Not long afterward, they heard her singing in the house. The song was not for them; only a

private matter, with breaks and delays while the singer busily came and went between rooms. It was something about a dove and the Grail.

Her own dove-cote was fast asleep; so was the grove; but the three men stayed as she had left them, astonished, forgetting the presence of tobacco, and staring at the desolate candles.

CHAPTER XI

A MORNING CALL

THE bedrooms to which the Chinaman guided them, were in a bungalow hid by a small forest of its own—a heavy cluster of broad banana sheaves. Each room, lighted by candles, stood open to its neighbor and formed a gallery of cool spaces, with clean white wallcloth, brown polished floor, and beds veiled cubically in mosquito gauze, like so many tall boxes of mist.

While they undressed, the friends paid visits back and forth, straying barelegged or barechested, smoking, inspecting one another's quarters, talking by snatches, after the fashion of men at bed-time.

"She faces the lagoon, this bungalow," Wallace proclaimed.

All three heads popped out at window, to admire a lake full of stars beyond the foliage. Ashore, a stone's throw distant on the right hand,

they saw a pair of oblong lights that suddenly went out as Mr. Fraye, or his grand-daughter, put the main house to sleep.

"Pretty girl, that," continued Wallace.

Tisdale snorted.

"Feeble, Robin. Very feeble terms for her, aren't they, Francis?"

Godbolt flung his cheroot into the dark. When his reply came, it was fervent, but indirect.

"Kings couldn't treat us handsomer!" He turned indoors. "Mosquito-bars that hoist on pulleys clean to the ceiling—mark that, boys?—And the bottom hem all weighted full o' shot, flush to the floor, so's a gnat couldn't crawl into bed with ye!"

After lights out, he was heard to stretch in a Capuan luxury of linen.

"Boys-oh!" he yawned mightily. "The sheets here smell o' cedar-closet, way they use' to at home!"

Surf grumbled and whispered; landlocked water lapped the distant foot of the jetty; and to these sounds the men sank through a region deeper than dreaming.

They woke to find the sun over the island, and their plantain thicket dazzling in broad pennons, apple-green and silver. The lagoon pieced every

gap with the same shining colors. Against this background, there stood in the veranda a breakfast table all complete, with red roses crowning a bowl, and a little glass tower in which coffee steamed and bubbled fragrantly. A tall man stood waiting there—the brown *punkah* giant of last evening.

"Good morning, sirs!" he greeted them shyly, in a mellow baritone. "My master hope you have slept well. My master send the kimono"—he held up an armful of colored vesture—"and bathing *sarong*. Your clothes are being ironed. I will bring them after breakfast. If you wish anything, sirs, call out for Anak. My name is Anak."

Parting both hands in a magnificent gesture from the forehead, he bowed low, and strode away.

When they had bathed in the lagoon, and brought great appetite to breakfast, they found this Anak—child by nature as by name—waiting timidly to serve them; and after breakfast, as they lounged in cool blue kimonos, he fetched not only their own clothing—fresh and smooth, with buttons polished—but also two wicker trays, one heaped with canvas pumps, the other with Goalundo pith helmets, whiter and lighter than snow.

"My master wish you try these," murmured

Anak, offering the gifts. "If they not fit, my master say, plenty more in the go-down." He withdrew among shining plantains, and to another obeisance, added more shyly than ever: "Sirs, I think Mr. Mace have sent a boat. His man waiting."

Clean-shaven, light-hearted, spotless from toe to helmet, they set off at last on their morning call. A foot-path took them down the drooping banana glade to the beach; and as they deployed there, each man smiled to see his fellow move so brisk and soldier-like in the vainglory of new apparel.

The beach glared like an immense bunker full of salt. Where still green water curved into it, below, lay a boat with a little boatman dozing under a toadstool hat. At their hail, he squirted tobacco juice over the gunwale, straddled wearily out upon the wet coral, and in a sort of cringing apathy, let his three fares climb past him into the skiff. With spidery brown arms he shoved off, and took the oars. As he rowed, his naked ribs, collar-bone, and point of scapula strained out glistening, like knuckles in a rubber glove; at every stroke his knee-caps pointed through his cotton trousers. To any question, no matter what, he agreed unthinkingly with a—*"Bai Tuan"*—hoarse and broken-winded, while his eyes followed his moving hands.

"A Bugi, this fellow," declared Godbolt. "Always chewing a fig o' tobacco, Bugis are. That's no voice o' this island, neither.—*Apa nama,* ye corrugated runt?"

"Satrap, Tuan," wheezed the rower, and spat, like a man whose name meant nothing in this world or the next.

So forlorn a puppet had no business on a stage so brilliant. The candescence of the beach floated along their port side, fiercely white, but now at a bearable remove. Calm as any midsummer pond, the imprisoned bay reflected all things in a blur, as though the shore had begun to melt and run. Dragon-flies hotly burnished, now single, now coupled in tandem, darted past the boat or stopped above it, thrilling with motion, yet seeming to stick fast in the oppressive air. It was odd to see them—familiar ornaments for woodland and meadow waters—quivering over this ocean pool in whose pale green chamber the sea fishes gleamed, shadows of ginger coral wavered, and monstrous clams on bottom lay gaping with blue-beaded lids. Dragon-flies close aboard; white gulls that wheeled and mewed far off; the whiter pointed wings of little fishing boats clustered beyond them, across the lagoon; the farther beach, a thread of snow beneath dark woods—everything,

from submarine foundation to highest glittering palm-blade, moved or lay steeping in excess of light.

"Yesterday was Sunday!" Wallace exclaimed, like one who had guessed a riddle. "We lost count. Sunday! That's why the place was all so empty, when we got here."

Godbolt nodded, squinting under his lashes at the fishing-fleet.

"You clinched that nail, Rob," he muttered approvingly. "Slews o' brand new, clean canvas over there, too—none o' your rotten mats. Mr. Fraye keeps his natives Bristol-fashion. But where does old man Mace hang forth, anyhow?"

Their boat answered him, by turning a promontory of palms and ironwood, and opening a small channel, choked with reefs, through which they caught a glimpse of ocean tossing its white mane. Another tiny cape, ahead, concealed the mouth of another channel, for there as here the ebb-tide poured out, pulling flaws in the glassy water. Thus the men became aware that Fraye's Atoll, which they had taken for one island, was really three, conjoined or overlapping a circuit; and that now Satrap, the lean rower, was heading for the middle fragment of shore.

"Good lads, good lads!" called someone, as

they disembarked among hopping sand-crabs. "I began to fear you wouldn't come."

They looked up. At the head of a blinding foreshore Mr. Mace waved his helmet abroad. Tall, wiry, in gray flannels of a sportive cut, he seemed anything but that obscure passer whom they had seen doubtfully in the grove, last night.

"Come, come up!" he chirruped, gaily. "I've a cold welcome for you! Better than a warm one, this weather, eh?"

He shook hands eagerly with Tisdale and Wallace. Godbolt came later, having paused to give the boatman a cheroot, with a word or two, although neither gift nor speech evoked more than a blink of understanding.

"Good lads," cried Mace, "to visit an old fogy! Aha, Captain Godbolt, your hand also! Come, come!" He began to herd them inland, very spry, very fussy, and talking all the while. His long visage beamed, his gray cheeks reddened with excitement. "Welcome to Mango Island! Not so grand as Tom Fraye's place, but—well, you wait, my boys! Such as it is! A cold welcome, you may say. It would make a cat speak, though! Oliver Mace keeps his own ice machine!"

With these and other blandishments, he urged his company through mottled palm shade, into a

hot clearing and a great attap house that sprawled there. Indoors, a cool, dark room stretched away like a sail-loft. After their first plunge from sunlight to blackness, the callers found themselves grouped about a rattan table, where four glasses of champagne stood seething.

"Here's fun!" Mace greedily set the example. "Boys, I'm a bachelor, too. Ageing, the calendar says, but full of pepper. Jolly bachelors all. Here's to you, my contemporaries!"

Wallace and Tisdale raised their glasses.

"Captain?" Mace turned with an injured air. "You're never T.T.?"

"I'm up the pole," explained Godbolt, carelessly. "Don't mind me." He wandered about the room, studying the walls, on which hung many barbaric trophies: match-locks, targets of painted wood or buffalo hide, treacherous campilans in the split scabbard; but most often things of feminine import—brass-wire hoops from a Dyak woman's corselet, a silver fig-leaf, or the leering ingenuity of Cantonese fans, reversible, in water-colors. Before these the sailor pondered, like a man lost in a museum; but when he spoke, it was of an outdoor matter, quite beside the point. "Which way," he called, "does the current set from here, Mr. Mace, flood running?"

The jolly bachelor was rattling a bottle among cakes of artificial ice, in a bucket on the floor.

"Which way? Over toward Fraye's beach—dear old Tom's landing. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Godbolt, and moved farther down the room. "That's my trade—currents, and winds, and general drift of orts. . . "

His voice trailed off to suit the words, a rumble of sound from a corner. The other men allowed him to go, and soon forgot him. Mr. Mace was telling stories, fluently and well, with a kind of crabbed humor. At sea, or on the Isle of Birds, there was no such fun as here. This was Bachelors' Hall, built in attap, large and dark and cool, where the wine was good and talk abounding. Time passed.

"Here, Sainty!" A convivial shout went up. "O Francis! Captain, come here a moment!"

The unsocial wanderer stood near a window, reading. He laid his book aside, and came down the room in his easy, rolling gait, unhurried.

"Well? What is it?"

"Why, look here." They all spoke at once. "We'd better stay. We're going to camp here. You're right about it, Mr. Mace. Look. Sit down. We've been talking——"

"So I heard," interrupted the sailor, drily. He

crossed his arms over the back of a chair, and looked on, big, sunburnt, and droll as a bad boy. "Saying anything, to speak of?"

"Here's our problem, Captain." Mace held in sinewy fingers a wine-glass, and smiling, watched the bubbles that crowded up its hollow stalk. "We've all agreed—I'm happy to say—that Mango Island's a better place than Fraye's. For you to live in, I mean, while poor Tom's ill. Delights me to have you think so." He nodded kindly at his auditors, and continued, smiling and dozing over the words. "Now, then. He's a touchy old nabob, is Tom. How shall we word our message to him, a nice little chit, polite and smooth, so as to hurt no feelings?"

Godbolt shot one hard look at his friends.

"Afraid I can't help you."

"Another bottle can." Mr. Mace got nimbly out of his chair. "Composition's a dry, thirsty performance. Wait till I unlock the bin, for there's no trusting these brown devils with liquor."

Jingling a bunch of keys, the speaker ambled across the room, through a doorway, into some backward penetralia of the house. He was hardly gone, when Godbolt, pouncing ambidexterously, whipped away the glass from either friend, stepped lightly to the nearest window, and flung

a double jet of champagne froth into the sunshine.

"There!" he grunted. "Now come to your senses."

The two men at the table stared, by no means amiably.

"I must say," began Tisdale, "that's rather high-handed!"

Godbolt swept a commanding paw at them, for silence.

"You babes in the wood!" he whispered, his bright, black eyes dancing. It was impossible to tell which was uppermost in him, anger, caution, or a desire to laugh. "I never figgered you'd fall so easy to that old fox! You! Drinking against him, you—you infant class!"

At this, out flared the moody Wallace.

"We're of age, thank you. Perhaps you're captain on land, still?"

The sailor blazed up in his turn.

"No!" he boomed, indignant and scornful. "No, I ain't forgot! Seems to me you have, though. Seems to me you sat there gullible enough, drinking in taffy and fool-wash—— Oh, I can hear the length of a room: I heard old Butter-Tongue a-complimenting round ye. Smooth and polite, says he—— No, I ain't a captain; my only command was a joke; and small need you had,

Rob, to remind me o' that! But if I was the mangiest fireman out o' Mersey river, I'd show more grateful than what this comes to!"

The pair of revelers wondered at him. His heat overbore their petulance.

"Grateful? What's wrong, Sainty?"

Another voice echoed the question.

"Yes, what's wrong, indeed?" Mace had reentered, softly. He paused at the door, a lank, gray figure carrying weight, two bottles in each hand, like some pedestrian John Gilpin. "My dear men? What on earth is all this hubbub?"

Godbolt faced him, unabashed.

"It's a hard thing, sir, to speak out in your house. But here goes. Mr. Fraye treated us handsome, not to mention—others. They were looking for us back to-night. Why, Lord knows: any more'n why you're frolicking to keep us here. But for myself, Mr. Mace, and all due thanks to you, well, home goes Goosey!"

Like a pin-setter in a bowling alley, Mace carefully planted his bottles upright on the floor.

"If you must go?" he replied blandly, as he rose. "The three of us can manage. We'll miss you, Captain."

But Godbolt had not finished.

"You boys," he went on, sternly, "can choose

how you like best. You come of age recently, I understand. All right. Mr. Mace he's getting you sewed up. Better stay."

"Sainty!" cried the young men, in rebuke.

"Better stay." Godbolt, apparently cool, went searching round for a helmet. He stopped, and cracked his fists together. "Stay, and disappoint a woman who believes in ye! Stay, and forget an old sick man that fed ye, housed ye off the sea, never asked no question, but shod ye with what you're standing in!"

He found his helmet on a chair. The two culprits uneasily watched him. Their festivity was ended. They felt, in this long, still room, the conflict of two stubborn wills.

"Good-bye, then," said Godbolt. "I'm going back to main island."

This farewell, being simple, carried the day. Tisdale rose; Wallace followed; each mumbled something of regret and leave-taking; and both awkwardly awaited the next movement.

It came from their host. Oliver Mace drew toward them, slowly, his face grayer than his flannels.

"So, Mr. Godbolt?" he drawled, and there was venom in his look. "When your highness finds a place dull, nobody else can stay there? What—,

what——" He stammered and choked; his eyes grew smaller, and in a shrill outcry that seemed to vent years of hatred—"What damned lie has Fraye been telling about me?"

"There, boys." Godbolt spoke with cool disgust. "There. Judge for yourself. That the kind o' language we heard last night? Pick your choice."

This quarrel had begun strangely enough; it now came to a stranger end. Mr. Mace, his arms clasped rigidly behind him, went pacing up and down the room, angrily at first, then more and more thoughtfully, with a footfall retarding to a dead pause. He had gone from red to pale again, from hot to cold; and when he spoke, it was hard to believe that a voice so gentle could have assailed their ears, a moment ago, like the wicked scream of a sea-gull.

"I never meant that," he said quietly, chafing his lips as though he had taken bitter medicine. "I'm heartily ashamed. Heartily. What a misfortune it is, gentlemen, to inherit a vile temper!" He shook his head, with a melancholy smile. "And to let it go—of all times!—when I was hoping you might think well of me! Ah, dear chaps, you know my worst failing now: you can understand how I've come to be living alone!"

Pathos marked this recantation. The man sent a forlorn glance round his great room, as if already he saw it a desert place, and himself the lean companion of shadows.

"Well! 'Twas ever thus, my fond gazelles." Mace nodded, shrugging his shoulders. "I can't force you to stay. Tiffin first, however. Pot-luck. Oh, but I insist! You sha'n't leave without tiffin! It's ordered. I'll go tell the *mandur* to serve you at once."

Retreating past his row of bottles, Mr. Mace left the room. For all his humility, and in spite of a shambling gait, there was something grim about that exit.

Wallace and Tisdale immediately closed on their comrade.

"Sainty, what the dickens?" they whispered. "What got into you?"

The obstreperous captain only laughed, and wagged an iron fore-finger.

"Watch!" he growled. "Watch old Oliver Be'lzebub there! He's got a bushel of mischief coming!"

CHAPTER XII

THE SECOND WHITE BIRD

MISCHIEF might be afoot, but none appeared. High noon glared through the windows and chinks in the plaited walls. Mace did not even return; and when at last a footstep broke the tedium of waiting, it was only the scuffle of bare soles. A morose, elderly native, in cotton jacket and blue kilt, entered from the back of the room, and crossing it without a word, sourly beckoned the three men to follow.

They filed after him, through the front veranda, the torrid clearing, the palm belt; until, with a nod of scant courtesy, their guide halted, slid aside, and deserting, let them pass on toward the gleam of the lagoon.

"There, Sainty!" cried Tisdale. "That ought to shame you!"

The shore at this point fell steeply away, almost without a beach. Tall "monkey-laddered" palms

hung slanting, their heads over the water, but their matted shadows so falling as to cover the verge of land. Under this high protection, like a monarch's divan beneath umbrellas, a rude platform or gazebo stood, and on it a table set for tiffin, with three chairs. Nobody was in sight, nor any food except a mound of golden papaya and sliced lemons; but from below, at the water's edge, a husk fire sent up its aromatic smoke, and an iron pot was clinking. A pair of gulls hovered, peevishly complaining, between the water and the tree-tops.

"Aren't you ashamed?" repeated Tisdale. "Here are coals of fire for your stubborn old head!"

Godbolt had nothing to say. They leaned, all three, on the rail of the platform, and looked over. Down at the foot of the little precipice, a half-naked man was mending the fire. He glanced up once. It was the emaciated boatman, Satrap. Near him, on a hand's breadth of coral powder, lay his boat; and on the forward thwart, a basket in which shone a great fish.

"I feel like a fool!" groaned Wallace, viewing the preparation below. "This Mace—he's an eccentric if you like. But he was doing his best, poor old fellow. Why under heaven, Francis, did you cut up so?"

The sailor took his elbows from the rail, and pointed easterly across the lagoon, toward those low woods where, some three miles off, Fraye's jetty showed a black nick in the curving water.

"Flood running," he replied, slowly, "the current sets over there. Mace told me—you heard him. Well: you saw Fraye's beach, when we first come, yesterday, all one litter o' champagne corks. Who pulled them corks? Mace did; Mace does; —and they drift over, day in, day out. Thick as grasshoppers in the fall, they are. I wouldn't pin no faith to words, 'polite and smooth,' you understand, when a man does so much elbow-work. Would you?"

He turned on them, earnestly, for corroboration.

"Go ahead," they urged. "What else?"

He laughed.

"Not much. Not to count much, anyhow. Ever lived fo'c's'le, 'twould cure the squeams and make ye easy-going. But in there——" Godbolt jerked his thumb back towards the house they had quitted —"In there, some things that old customer hangs on his walls. They're filthy! Filthy! You can put that down, boys: they were too strong for me!"

Again he laughed, but there was no sound of pleasure in it.

"That's all?" said Wallace. "I don't see, now, what made you get so hot!"

Godbolt patted him on the shoulder with one hand, reached out the other to collar Tisdale, and so, leaning between the malcontents with his arms hooked over their necks, spoke in a lowered voice.

"Hot? Got hot o' purpose, I guess. You see, it lies about so-fashion, mates." He parted sharp glances between them, nodding now at one, now at the other, to enforce his thought. "You see this far into the mill-stone, don't you? There's two camps on the lagoon: hers—Fraye's, I mean—and this old superannuated bob-cat, Mace's. Two camps; and a feud between 'em! Feud?—If ever you nosed one in the air, you ought to now, my duckies! Last night, when we rowed in off the sea, you heard 'em singing out and whining, the pig-tenders there in the bush, begging us to go away. Because why? Because they took us for scouts—a boat-crew o' Mace's. And when we landed, and tramped up the jetty, with axes, mind ye!—who comes out to us but that girl, playing bold as a queen? 'Mr. Mace sent you?' says she, first crack. 'No,' says we, the gang o' mudlarks. And she believed us!"

Godbolt gave his hearers a little argumentative shake.

"Katherine, she believed us!" he cried. "And her old man, too sick to breathe, what of him? First crack: 'I ain't afraid o' you,' he allows, 'and Mace had better provide a stretcher!' Game as a bantam. Game all the way through, that pair! And when they found us for strangers that never heard o' Mace? What happened then? Not a word! Not a word, pip nor yip! 'Neighborhood affair,' says they: 'judge for yourselves.'—The feud coming to a head, plain; Mace to have next move, whatever it was; and them sick, and frightened, and lacking help. Did they call on us? Not for Joe! they wouldn't lead us into trouble blindfold, not their kind, by thunder!"

The sailor ended with a passionate swoop of his arm. The two great fishing-gulls took fright, and flew off, to squall and circle at a better distance.

Tisdale gave in with ready grace.

"You do our thinking for us, Sainty. It's we that ought to feel ashamed."

"And so we do!" cried Wallace, glowing darkly as he caught the fire of suspicion. "The Pretender—that's Mace. I see it! Mace wants to grab the island, somehow; and we might stand in his way. It's A. B. C., boys! No wonder he cottoned to us so!"

Godbolt smiled on his pupils.

"Love at first sight was Mace's complaint," he assured them. "Mace came a-scenting round the cook-house door last nightfall, to see if 'dear old Tom' was dead, I shouldn't wonder. What he saw, instead, was us—three hard-favored runagates, if ever was. A tough pill to swallow. But I give Mace credit, fellows: he came nigh swallowing us to-day!"

They winced at this view of their conduct.

"Oh, well, that's over!" cried Godbolt, hastily. "I judge we all agree." He balanced right hand against left. "Here's Pretender, and here's King. Not to mention a fine young queen of a girl. Which camp are you for, Arthur? Which camp, Robin, old socks? Mace's camp, or Fraye's?"

Before they could utter their choice, a most unwelcome sound, from behind them, cleft their conference in two like the fall of an axe.

"Ah! So?"

Oliver Mace had rejoined them, or come at least to the island edge of the platform. The steward in the kilt stole past him, placed on the table three yellow glasses of "Mango Fool," and shuffled away through the trees. Mace leaned one hand on a palm-shaft. He was hatless, pale, older and thinner than he had seemed before. His

face hung down, weary and long and stupid, like that of a cart horse looking over a fence.

"So?" His free hand groped in the air, as though fingering after some difficult word. "You recognize the situation?" He raised his eyes, quickly; and they burned with a nameless question, imploring, threatening, evading. "Which camp," he cried at last, in a harsh, dull voice, "which camp are you for, then, gentlemen? Speak now, or forever after . . . " He broke off with a scared look. "I . . . that is . . . I beg you to think twice. I warn you, I did my best to . . . to prevent . . . anything!"

The three friends bowed. They felt a sudden respect, not for the man, but for the grave, secret matter which could leave him shaken and stammering, and could even weigh upon them also.

"We have chosen," said Tisdale, quietly. "For the Frayes."

Mace lowered his eyes again, and slowly shook his head. He let his fingers crumple and slide from the palm trunk, so that hand and arm fell inert. It was a lifeless, pathetic gesture. He stood there, visibly trembling; and as if to mock his agitation, a spot of sunlight was juggled by the branches overhead, and set to playing touch and go across his gray hair.

"You're quite determined?" The man's voice failed. He cleared his throat, pulled himself together by a shambling hoist of one shoulder, and for the moment seemed ready to let go a rush of words. None came. He drooped again, and repeated lamely: "Quite determined?"

"Quite, thank you," they answered.

In his gray flannels, Mace had the air of a tall, sick priest.

"Sit down," he counseled, weakly. "Take your tiffin, I beg. Pot-luck. I—I cannot join you now, gentlemen. Excuse me for the time. I am not well. An old touch of the sun. Pray be seated. Satrap is cooking it fresh for you on the beach. I cannot eat. Do, please, do. Oh, gentlemen!" he stammered, piercing them with a subtle, fervent look, "enjoy yourselves to-day! Who knows where we shall be to-morrow?"

And even while he posed this ancient riddle, Mr. Mace abruptly turned, and went tottering back toward where his house lay hidden. The path was too narrow for him. He grazed the rugged shafts as he went.

"Drunk," said Wallace, haughtily.

"Not a bit!" retorted Godbolt.

"No," Tisdale echoed. "He gave me the creeps."

Indeed, as they watched that lank figure dwindle through inter-crossing palms, they felt the same unknown discomfort. So might a great gray spider fade into his waiting cobweb; so might a sorcerer go home.

"Well, it beats me!" they murmured, one to another. "What's the old man got up his sleeve? —Yes, what? Humph!—Doesn't love us a bit, now, does he?"

It was Wallace who recovered, and outdid his nature.

"I'm going to eat," he said, and sat down at table. "To-morrow? Your friend's talking Omar Key-West again, Sainty. Who cares about to-morrow? I'm going to eat and be merry. Come on. Mango Fool is Mango Fool!"

The other two laughed. Godbolt laughed for friendship's sake; Tisdale because at that instant he saw not only his giddy self but his careful partner changing, succumbing to this plain sailor who had no thought of mastery. Would old Rob have spoken thus, half a year ago?

They ate the Mango Fool as it should be eaten, spoonful by Epicurean spoonful. The platform had a pleasant perch, between green woods and green water. They saw the lagoon, close below, as a pair of crystal arcs; the arc inshore a pale

receptacle for coral buds that shimmered in crinkling yellow; the arc beyond, a deeper light for clouds to float in. The two fisher-gulls went swerving and crying over this parti-colored cove, now almost under the bamboo rail, now far aloft.

Suddenly and quietly the kilted steward came, took off their empty glasses, and brought, after some delay, a platter with two great fishes that steamed under heaps of rice. The steward left this grudgingly, and departed. A savory, tempting course, it had come hot from the kettle on the beach.

Godbolt divided one of the fishes, and served the plates. The rising vapor smelled like an invitation. The men were about to eat.

"Tuan, tida!" came a loud whisper. *"Tida—ikan!"*

They turned in their chairs with a start, for the whisper seemed to spring out of the ground. They saw, level with the platform floor, a shock of coarse, black hair, a dark, sunken face, and brown eyes blinking at them in terror. Satrap, the boatman-cook, had shinned up one of the palms, and like a tree-toad, clung hand and foot to the "monkey-ladder" notches in its trunk.

"No, no!" he whispered volubly. "The fish! No, no!"

Unhooking one hand, he made a frantic motion toward the table.

"Fish? What about it?" The friends stared from him to their platter, and back again. "What's wrong?"

The starveling turned his head, and in palpable anguish looked over his bony shoulder at the trees which hid his master's house. He hung thus, peering, for an instant; then, with a sign that the men should wait, he went nimbly down the ladder-notches, dropped into the sand, looked upward—as if to entreat their utmost caution—ran to the basket in his boat, and lifted out the big silver fish remaining there.

"O Sir!" he whispered up to Godbolt. "See! It is the same you are eating. Watch now!"

Holding the fish by the gills, Satrap drew from his belt a bloody case-knife. He pointed this heavenward, but aslant. The act seemed ritual, or mere nonsense, until, following the direction of his blade, the three men saw that he was pointing at the gulls, where they flew.

"Itu!" grunted Satrap, *"Iyah!"* And with a quick downward slice, he ripped the silver belly of the fish. Back went his knife into sheath. Satrap grinned morosely, and held up a handful of red entrails.

"Iyah!" He dropped the fish, stepped forth into the water, and waved his skinny arms. The two gulls dropped from the blue, to come racing; and as they came, Satrap flung the entrails to meet them.

Hardly the red offal had struck water, when the foremost gull was on it, pouncing with rigid legs. His beak flashed scarlet as he dodged his yelling mate, and rose, to gulp the morsel on the wing.

The tiffin party stood by their platform railing, and watched. Satrap, they thought, had given them a simple-minded entertainment, after all. They would have drawn in their chairs, had he not cried up to them, earnestly. Knee-deep in the water, he still pointed aloft.

"Yes, yes!" They requited him with careless nods. "Very good!"

But the frail bronze manikin was not content. He gave another guarded cry. As he did so, upon his pantomime was clapped a vivid sequel.

Down through the sunlight, heavily, zig-zagging like a boy's torn kite, fell that gull which had won the entrails. Its big white body splashed into the shoal, its pinions flogged the water weakly, then collapsed; and there, before one might comprehend, it floated as a lump of dead feathers, the centre for widening ripples.

"Mata, mata!" The little Bugi man ashore took from the sand his mangled fish, and flapping it for emphasis, jerked his chin repeatedly after the floating bird. He rolled his eyes at the men above him. "Dead, dead!"

His part was done. They understood, next moment, with an ugly thrill.

"Poison."

All three framed the word upon their lips, but none could tell who uttered it aloud. In stupefaction, each man bolt upright behind his chair, they looked at the platter as though waiting for it to move.

"Poison." They heard one another mumbling, in a kind of trance, without heed, without belief. "Same fish. Bulletin board on Fraye's jetty, remember? 'Unadvisedly': that's so, boys; shouldn't be eat unadvisedly. Same fish."

Death lay in the platter, covered with snowy rice. The word lost all its triteness, the common dish became a wonder, a vessel of wrath and trembling. Death lay there so near, so quiet, so homely. Woods and sea-lake remained the same —a passion of color mirrored in tranquility, like the poet's thought; palm-leaves pattered crisply overhead; flecks of light maintained a flittermouse dance across the table-cloth; and because of what

lay there, all these things had gone pale, and spoilt, and hollow. The distemper of mortality infected them. All these things, and all else, might soon have been as nothing, forever.

The three men looked up, each to read this in a pair of thoughtful faces.

Alone, the live gull hovered round its drifting fellow, with a clamor of surprise.

CHAPTER XIII

ACROSS COUNTRY

A MISS was good as a mile; but so it did not seem at the first chill, when escape from death was a new and solemn thing, at which the heart still bounded. Sunshine, the stream of days flowing on, were enough to be grateful for; and the men had little room, at the moment, for more than a long, awkward silence which meant gratitude.

They moved and spoke at last, each according to his private thought.

"That makes two," said Tisdale, pointing at the dead gull on the water below. "White birds are lucky for us. There goes the second, poor thing, that came along to help us."

Walter looked up from the platter.

"Poison?" he sneered, his honest brown face full of heat. "By George, I'll tend to Oliver Mace! You wait——"

And doubling his fists, he would have run ashore from the platform.

Godbolt snatched him by the elbow, and held firm.

"Wait, Robin! No, ye don't; I got you!" The captain was captain still, not to be shaken off. "Quit your wrestling, man! Look here. If you let fly one word to Mace, he'll skin our friend Satrap alive, down there. God knows the Bugi can't afford to lose none off his bones. He warned us. Don't give him away. Hold still, ye Turk!"

Thus, continuing to live, they heard and felt the obligation of life. It was not enough to have passed the bitterness of death; they must pick up their wits, go forward, and act.

Tisdale acted, by crumpling a little rice and fish into the plates, and flinging the rest with a great spatter cleanly into the lagoon.

"There!" said he.

Godbolt approved.

"Good! That's good. Mace'll think we ate his chow. Come on, we'll do a sneak for home."

They gave the shoreward palms a careful watching. No one was there; and so far as sight and earshot could penetrate among the leaning trunks, no movement came from Mace's compound. Brown soil, brown pillars, monotonous green foliage—all Mango Island took a noon siesta.

"Come on. Easy, now!"

Wrong-doers could not move more easily. One by one, the three men straddled the port railing, clutched the nearest "monkey-ladder," and so dropped beside the cauldron and the sweet-smelling embers on the beach.

Satrap, drying his cotton leg-wear by these embers, hardly vouchsafed a look. All his energy had gone into the late pantomime; but though it had been successful, though it kept three strangers alive and they crowded round him whispering praises, he did not appear to care. Dull Malayan eyes hid his motive; the dull, perverse Malayan heart kept its own counsel barred and locked away under the grating of a sunken breastbone and cadaverous ribs.

"Here, take it!" Wallace and Tisdale offered him what coins they found in their pockets. "Take 'em! It's little enough."

Satrap hitched his trousers, wriggled his toes under the pot where he had been cooking death for these men. He would have none of their money, none of their thanks.

"Here!" said Godbolt, impounding the handful of silver. "Take it, ye Griddle-Iron!"

The native glanced at him slyly, reached out, and like a nervous ape, pilfered the coins out of

the sailor's palm. He studied curiously the face of a peso, stamped with Mayon's broken mountain-top; then slipped the whole tribute quietly into his belt-purse.

"What made you do it for us? Tuan Mace would fix you, if he overheard! What possessed you, old Palsy-Cage?"

And then a remarkable thing happened. The belt-purse had two compartments: from the inner one, Satrap drew carefully some fragile object. He grinned, showing red and black teeth filed to the gums. What he held in his fingers, was the half-burnt stump of a cheroot—the cheroot Godbolt had given him on landing. *"Tembako,"* he said, and grinned again. Here was the cost of friendship: this, with a chance word or so of kindness, had been the cheap ransom for three lives.

"By the Lord Harry!" boomed Godbolt. "No more'n that? And I'd clean forgot it!"

The little Bugi put away his burnt stump, carefully as before. He cocked a startled eye at the impending bank, to make sure that nobody saw his doings; then, beckoning, he dodged under the bamboo girders of the platform, and began to lead the way. His debtors copied him in every movement, hugging the foot of the sandy crag, and stooping under the lower palms; for they had no

desire, now, to let Mace know the means of their deliverance. Thus, for a hundred yards, they crept safely along the stifling hidden way of the beach, until, as they rounded a point, Satrap halted. He gave a vigorous nod, to signify their course lay plain before them, and then, turning without a word, bolted for his kettle and his post of duty.

He had brought them to the end of his master's domain. Here Mango Island dipped its coral boundary under water—the water of that little strait, or channel, which divided Mace from his neighbors. The tide was at young flood, the channel a clear green brook, scarce ankle-deep; so that the fugitives, rolling up their trousers and carrying their pumps, waded across through calcareous, fern-like weeds, among sidelong crabs and terrified gray mullet. On their left hand, as they waded, the dead white gull went drifting for company.

Safe upon Fraye's island, they shook the water off their feet, as though apostolically crying quits; but Tisdale, more impudent, made a long nose at the opposite shore.

"So sorry not to stay!" he called. "So sorry, dear old Oliver!"

Fraye's territory, the mainland of the atoll,

proved greater than they thought. A faint trail, much impeded by wind-fallen banana stalks and wild *kati* papaya, brought them through mile after mile of woodland, rich and dense, covering a brown earth—that guano and dead-leaf earth which crowns with magical fertility the aged ocean-work of coral. Their homeward journey was longer, more circuitous, than by the beach; but it was cool, shady, a tangled country to explore. Now they crashed among thickets, where tame birds—weavers, thrush, and green ground-pigeons—hardly rose from the boughs. Now they broke through the honey-combed soil where land-crabs—brown and varnished, like Caran D'Ache toys made to imitate their sea cousins by wooden-jointed art—spanned away into the bush on clinking pincers. Once in a while the barrier surf fired off its heaviest cannonade far to the right; and except for this, the forest might have stood leagues inland, not the middle part in a sickle-bladed isle, but the very core of a continent. The feeling of seclusion grew deeper, in fact, as the men advanced. Their trail deserted them from time to time; and what with finding it again, what with wandering after this glimpse of a strange bird, or that glimpse of a strange fruit-tree, they found the afternoon sped. The sun, going down behind

them, shot with golden light the topmost leaves of guava shrub and tamarind; evening drew over them in the wilderness; so that when they heard a quiet tinkle of bells, near but scattered among the trees, they were glad to think the sound might come from flocks in open pasture, within reach of human kind.

Suddenly a ram dashed off before them through the undergrowth; bright spaces glimmered in front of him; and soon after, they came out into a broad green field, streaming with long shadows.

It was here the bells tinkled, for sheep were grazing—a few buff-coated New Zealanders, cropping coarse grass here and there down the undulations of a great clearing. Specks of red shone among them in the sunset. The place was not only a sheep walk, but a golf course marked with flags. At the edge of the shadows, a young woman, bareheaded, all in white, was bending over a little white ball. She moved. The ball rolled neatly across the green, and disappeared.

"Good evening!" Katherine Fraye rose and waved her iron. "Glad you saw that! My shots weren't all so good."

A shy brown urchin, pot-bellied, in *sarong* and skull-cap, was holding her leathern bag and a red pennant on a bamboo. He stared at these three

tall gentlemen of the silver buttons, before taking the putter from his mistress and sliding it down among the other clubs.

"You had a pleasant day?" She walked to meet them, swinging her helmet by the chin-strap. She was young, light-footed, flushed with exercise, a figure of liberty; but round her waist, they noted, she wore a black belt and a sagging holster in which a pistol hung. "You enjoyed yourselves?"

They laughed, and lied without premeditation.

"Oh, very much," replied Tisdale.

They went with her down the field, talking as if nothing had happened that day. Whether she understood or not, the girl accepted their fiction.

"And do you always play here?" Wallace was saying. "Every afternoon?"

Katherine patted her bright hair, restoring with little touches that vulnerable part of beauty. The men saw, and let the action pass; they admired, rather, to have her join their fellowship almost as though she were a fourth man. Few women could have done so: she did, without second thought.

"No, not every," she answered. "To-day the Grandpater's better. Your coming has cheered him up. And then, the village has worked faster. You braced them, too, poor creatures. Every man Jack fetched in his four hundred nuts on time. So

I got away early." She looked up, forestalling their questions. "Oh, yes, I see to the copra nowadays. Somebody must. We ship twenty-five thousand piculs a year, you know. And there's *'kudu* bark, about thirty guineas the ton, and *bêche de mer* for little pig-tailed epicures in Canton. . . But that's all shop. No: I golf only when I can; and to-day because grandfather made me come out."

Godbolt brought the party to a standstill.

"You mean, you oversee all that?" he demanded. His black eyes were snapping. He pointed at the girl's waist. "And you always carry a gun?"

Miss Fraye was suddenly and greatly abashed.

"Oh, no!" She unbuckled her weapon, and crowded it into the caddy's bag. "That was to—to shoot sea-hawks with. That was for fun."

However well women are supposed to fib, not one of her escort believed her. Hawks, indeed! Godbolt himself took pity on her.

"What's your game o' golf?" he inquired, with his own rough tact. "I've seen pictures of it, but never in the open air before. How might she go, Miss Fraye?"

The girl gave a mischievous look at Wallace and Tisdale.

"Try it, Captain," she said; and to the little boy—"Drop a ball for this gentleman, Krian."

The caddy, consumed with eagerness, did as he was bid.

"And you whack it with this?" Godbolt drew by chance a brassy, and along with it, the girl's belt and pistol, which tumbled out on the ground. "Stand clear, all hands!"

He addressed the ball after a fashion, drew back his mighty arms, and smote.

A scalp of dusty grass flew, and lighted perhaps a rod away. The ball trundled not much farther. As for the club, it shivered into three pieces, and left the splintered stock in Godbolt's fist, like a tool in the hand of Kwasind. The man was not built for anything small and clever.

Everybody laughed. Even the youngster forgot his decorum, and tittered. Godbolt picked up the fragments ruefully; but seeing how the girl shared and led the general merriment, he also broke out in a peal of boyish laughter.

"Well, there! Poetry o' motion, that was!" He stowed the pieces in the caddy's bag. "I'll mend your little whipstick for you." As he spoke, he took from the grass her belt and holster. "Playing with this"—he patted the revolver-butt —"playing with this, now, a man might hit!"

Her challenge came at a flash.

"The ball yonder? Could you hit that?"

Godbolt drew the weapon—a regulation Webley—measured its dark symmetry with a scholar's eye, and glanced at the golf-ball ahead.

"Sure!"

He spoke cheerfully. Katherine gave him no time to weaken.

"Do it!" she commanded. "I hate people who boast. Do it now, quickly, or else . . . "

Whatever her threat might have been, the revolver cut it short. Godbolt had raised his arm and fired before they saw he was aiming. A long scar ripped the grass; two white chips flew into the sunlight; and there was no more golf-ball. The nearer sheep cut an absurd caper, and ran bundling away with a flurry and jingle of bells.

Katherine clapped her hands.

"Oh!" she cried. "You can!"

The sailor had in fact retrieved his reputation. Little Krian, the caddy, wondered at him with round, solemn eyes. Wallace and Tisdale laughed no longer.

"If that's your way of hitting," declared the girl, "I like it better than mine."

Godbolt shook his head.

"No. Here, sonny." He flicked out the empty

cartridge, stuffed the Webley back into its holster, and gave it to the boy. "Good gun there, Miss Fraye. No: your way's better, with the whip-stick."

Something in his tone made her look up quickly.

"Golf better? It's a silly old game, croquet by the acre!" she cried. "Your shooting—why, that's an accomplishment. It's beautiful. Robin Hood, in the story book, couldn't do what you have done."

He shook his head again.

"It's no good," he rejoined, staring down the long, bright pasture. "A trick that don't help a living soul. It's no good. Unless you wanted to kill a man."

He spoke with a regret half whimsical, half genuine.

"But," said Katherine, smiling, "suppose you wanted?"

He looked down at her, suddenly, with great good humor.

"Why, there!" he exclaimed. "Suppose I wanted. By Joe, I wouldn't have the courage! And that's a fact."

So, loitering in a pleasant coolness, they followed their shadows over the sunset field, homeward, to the vesper tinkling of bells, the bleating

of a scattered flock, and that unending, all pervasive sigh—like a slow forest wind sifting through pine needles—which was the mournful voice of the sea.

CHAPTER XIV

ASHES

At the corner of Fraye's bungalow, Katherine took her leave.

"I must go stimulate Yee Poy toward his dinner," she said; and before disappearing round a honeysuckle bush—"Won't you please tell grandfather anything you care to tell him, about—about where you spent your day?"

The honeysuckle swayed in the dusk. And they, captain and owners of the *Nantwich Number Two* boat, were left to give an account of themselves.

"Arthur," commanded Godbolt, "you got to do the talking."

They skirted the front veranda, went up, and entered the lamp-light in the main room.

Thomas Masterman Fraye sat playing chess at a mahogany table. He was alone. Dressed in white homespun, made gay by a red cravat, he bent over his battlefield of crowded pawns and

pieces, humming as he weighed their chances. It was a kindly picture that he presented, so neat and plump, his cheeks so ruddy, his moustache and hair frosted with so many years. He moved a boxwood knight, and took great pleasure in the outcome, for he snapped his fingers and whistled a few bars of some lively jig. Jack Horner with his plum could not have been more juvenile; indeed, for the moment he seemed like a jolly, rotund little schoolboy at a masquerade, who had forgotten that he must act the grandfather. His black eyes twinkled as he glanced up, nodding.

"Well, young men? Have you slept the clock round?"

His three visitors laid aside their helmets, and took the chairs to which he beckoned them, round the chess board. Evening was now at that most home-like hour, the first hour of lamp-light; and while a sapphire glow from the lagoon faded in the western windows, this comfortable room, fragrant with camphor-wood, was like an old familiar place.

"No, Mr. Fraye," replied Tisdale. "We slept wonderfully, thank you; but to-day—we went visiting."

The knight had captured an ebony pawn. Mr. Fraye dropped this quietly into the box.

"Have you?" His voice was bland, but in his eye they caught a sparkle of humor. "Visiting already? My neighbor, I suppose?"

Tisdale copied his manner precisely.

"Your neighbor, Mr. Oliver Mace, of Mango Island."

Fraye chuckled.

"True," said he. "Of Mango Island at present. Thane of Cawdor, now; but who knows what title may follow? How did you get on?"

"Not at all, sir."

The little chess-player tugged his white moustache.

"Not at all?" he echoed, in the mildest ironical wonder. "That seems a pity. Did Mace inquire for me, by the way?"

Tisdale kept up the diplomacy.

"Oh, yes; inquired with great solicitude," he began.

But at this point Godbolt, swollen with indignation, could contain no longer.

"Called you pet names!" he burst out. "Called you 'dear old Tom'!"

The spark fell into the powder with a vengeance.

"Did he, though!" cried Fraye, ruffling and reddening. He sat up, a little bundle of hot tem-

per. "The damned impudent——!" And he struck the table, so that the weighted chessmen hopped upon it. "Mace calling me pet names, by Heaven!"

It was no mere pride, but the passion of a just man suffering outrage.

"Mace! And I forbade him the house, this twelvemonth."

The gust blew over. Mr. Fraye's hands were trembling, but he folded them in his lap.

"Gentlemen, you see I despise the fellow," he continued, quietly. "You see that: I dare say it's as well you should. Let me tell you why; or try to."

He pointed past them, toward the windows and the darkling blue of the water, barred with slender trees.

"Fifty-one years ago, I saw that lagoon for the first time, as you saw it yesterday. We came in through the channel, my father and I. We found wild savages here, a poor, spiritless handful, scared, and wearing leaves—*'unum folium ante, retro alium,'* like the Jesuits' report of old Hainan. My father, Sir Charles Fraye, was cruising for pleasure. He died here. I was younger son. 'Tom,' said he—he died under a big palm, on the very place where we sit to-night—'Tom,

you're a fat little comedy imp. If you go home to England, the devil is sure to grip you, with an armchair and a bottle of port. Stay here and work out your weight.' So father died, and left his ashes here. I *mean* ashes. We burn on the island, we don't bury. Dig a few feet, and you'll understand why. Land-crabs, coral worms. . . . "

Mr. Fraye had forgotten his wrath. He was looking down at the chess-board, which might have been a deep pool full of memories. His voice, also, came from the distant inward spaces of the past.

"I stayed," he went on, smiling. "I had sense enough to go home, first, and marry Kate, and bring her here, all on a risk ten thousand miles wide. Thank God we took it. The children grew up, Frank and George and Amy, the little girl. She lies with her mother, on this island. Ashes, under the big rock. George went down at sea, with the old family schooner. Then 'twas Frank and I that stayed, and worked out our weight, to the muscle, by Jove! And Frank married, and this pretty little child Katherine was born—named after my Katherine, you see; but before she came her father was dead, and her mother soon after, of grief. Yes, my boys. The Lanao pirates had happened in, feeling cocky, with a big prau mount-

ing brass swivel guns; and we—we two, my son Frank and I, with the only dozen men of spirit in the village—we beat them off, smashed 'em on the beach, shot 'em in their boat, picked off steersman after steersman as they rowed away howling, and sunk them, at last, in that channel you came in through yonder, so that the water was black with heads! And what came ashore, a few, I took and tamed. Frank got a bullet, though, on the point by the channel mouth. He died there among the seaweed. What do you think he said? 'I'm sorry,' says Frank, 'to leave you all the work.' That was my dear son Frank, this girl's father: ashes, like the rest now. Ashes! But you'll admit the family had mettle, once?"

His hearers answered him with shining eyes.

"More than once!" Tisdale murmured, pointing at a small glazed coat of arms that hung on the wall cloth. Azure, it read, three mullets argent—silver rowels on a blue field—with the canting motto—"Fyrst in Fraye."

The old man looked at them sadly.

"I was not thinking of that," he said. "I was thinking of Walter. Katherine's brother, my grandson, Walter. I forgot to mention him! I sent him home to college—my college, and my father's; it's a good old nest of buildings, too; but

Walter is . . . different. I wonder about the mettle. The mettle! The fire in the ashes . . . "

He stared once more among his chess men.

"The island's prosperous," he declared, as if to himself. "Our natives do well, all of them. Slaves that rowed in the pirates' prau; South Sea men, the whalers kidnapped, that slipped overboard and swam ashore at night; Mace's riff-raff, such as could stomach him no longer; sick foremast hands—they and their children all grew rich with us. Weak, broken-hearted, homesick natives from everywhere; whoever came, has done well. Riches, we can give; but not courage. You saw, last night, how they ran away. Grateful, oh, yes! They love us to any point short of fighting!"

The three friends waited for his narrative, and said nothing.

"Well? We've done more than well. Katherine ought never to feel want!" he cried, regaining, for an instant, his air of the plump martinet. "Katherine—God bless the child—she stuck by me! Too long. I beg her to go home, live with my brother's people, and be happy. Not she! Katherine stands by the old sick man. She's Frank's girl. She's all I have left out of a lifetime, is Katherine. And here came this hell-hawk, Oliver Mace!"

One to another, the young men stole a secret look of comprehension.

"If you're afraid about Mace," said Wallace the blunt, "we'll promise you——"

Mr. Fraye plucked up the tallest piece from his chess board, a white king, as though to hurl it.

"Afraid!" he thundered. "Afraid of Mace? No: of him, nor his harem, nor his poor black ruffians behind him! Old age can harden the arteries—it's doing so for me—but thank Heaven it can't make us chicken-hearted altogether. Afraid of Mace? Let me tell you . . . " And Fraye used the white king to hammer his words with. "Mace came here, eight years ago, when I was away taking the children home to England. Mace landed, with his slaves and his women, half-starved Siranis, and white females—very white and pale and powdered, I assure you—the discards of sea captains. Don't be offended, Mr. Godbolt: every trade has its blighters, even at sea. Well, a pretty establishment greeted me on Mango Island when I came out again; sweet neighbors; and ever since, this dog, this Oliver Mace, with what remnant of wit he saved from liquor and sunstroke, has tried to oust us from our island. Ours? There comes the hitch. The place remains private ground to this day; we have no status."

"No status?" repeated Wallace.

"No flag," said Mr. Fraye, impatiently. "Under no government; open to the first who takes. Mace began flirting with the Dutch. We addressed England, but England can be the slowest of sure things on earth. That's why Walter has gone—against my will—to keep the far end of a cable hot, praying for Letters Patent and all the rest. But we prayed before. Great men are deaf. And meantime, where's the law? The law's Mace, or it's me. There is no other way now on this island. A hard predicament: take Mace, or take me, for your law."

Wallace made a second and a better attempt.

"It's you, sir. I meant to say, if you want us, we three take your side."

Fraye looked keenly under his white eyebrows.

"Come what may?"

"What may," Tisdale responded, and the others gave a nod.

"I offer you nothing sure," objected the old man. "Danger and trouble. Mace has forty odd men at his back—bad ones. Mace can bite."

"We know that," they assented. "He tried to enlist us. Oh, yes, sir, Mace tried all his might. Offered, sir? Why, he offered champagne, and then a fish—poison."

"What's this?" cried the other, sternly, yet without surprise. "A fish . . . Poison?"

Among them, they described what manner of tiffin Mace had provided on his platform, that afternoon. Mr. Fraye heard them out, a quiet little red-faced judge who sat balancing every word.

"Walter was wrong," he cut in, at the close. "Venom. I said so. Should never have let you go there. That man Oliver Mace—he's full of venom. Toad under a stone, as I knew all along, but Walter wouldn't see it. College turned the boy's head: he contracted sweetness and light there, the *suaviter* fashion without t'other half. All for nice persuasion, is Walter; he'd send a lady-like piece of rhetoric to do a good cudgel's errand. Persuasion? You can't persuade born devils, or socialize 'em off, because a sub-sub-assistant secretary lived in your staircase at college! No. Walter was wrong. This means fight, here and now."

Silence followed his declaration. Mr. Fraye put the white king softly back on the board. Had he looked up, he might have seen a brisk movement, a three-fold squaring of shoulders. But he hung his head.

"Would you fight," he asked of nobody, "would you fight for a few square miles of copra planta-

tion, two hundred people without a backbone amongst 'em, and—and a handful or so of ashes?"

His proposal had not long to wait. The young men made a broken remonstrance, and came grasping at him over his game of chess—three pairs of hands all in a jostle to catch hold of one. What words happened to fall, fell very gently.

"There now, Mr. Fraye. There, sir, don't you fret. We'll see to that part. Lord save us, what else have we got for a pastime?"

They drew back, ashamed of their ebullition. As they did so, a sound entered the room through the front window—a slow thumping of oars, from somewhere on the lagoon. Tisdale wheeled about, listened, then laughed.

"Hold on!" he cried. "I think our friend's coming to inquire again."

He ran out through the front veranda. Darkness lay beyond. They heard his feet fly down the garden path, and ring hollow on the jetty; soon afterward, his voice, cheery and insolent:

"Good evening, Mace! How are you to-night, my dear Oliver?"

The oars had stopped. There was no reply.

"Aren't you coming ashore?"

Lagoon water chuckled, under the growing starlight.

"Do come!" Tisdale was heard beseeching. "We're all here. Do come take pot-luck, a little rice—and fish!"

Again the starry void ignored this mockery. Then somebody muttered, and the oars creaked in their row-locks, departing.

"The boy shouldn't expose himself," said old Fraye. "Go call him in. Mace is a dead shot, whatever else he may be."

Tisdale's yellow head appeared in the doorway. He was smiling. But before he had rejoined the party by the chess table, he was quite serious; for so were his companions.

"That was Mace," he said, "coming to view the remains."

The beat of hostile oars passed away, steadily, toward Mango Island. In point of dignity, that sullen boat was carrying off the honors of the first engagement.

Mr. Fraye began to gather his playthings into their box. Godbolt stooped over and helped him.

"Is it only this island?" the sailor asked, in his deep voice. "Only the island that Mace wants? Nothing else?"

The little man stared up into Godbolt's eyes, amazed and frightened.

"How did you guess?" he whispered. "How

did you? That reminds me of Frank, my son Frank: you think too much, Captain."

Godbolt showed no mercy.

"Is it? Only the island?"

Mr. Fraye glanced round the room in a sort of terror.

"Hush!" he ordered. "I never said that. She might overhear you. She has quick ears, little Katherine . . ."

CHAPTER XV

IN CHARGE

HERCULES crossed the great sea in an earthen pot, and left an allegory for human flesh and human spirit. Mr. Fraye might urge the spirit forward, but his vessel was too old, the clay had worn too fragile; and that evening, at dinner in the grove, he was forced to call for his bearers, and be carried in his long chair to the house. Wallace, Tisdale, and Godbolt had a private audience in his bed-room, while he lay waiting to be undressed by meek brown Anak, the lubberly nurse.

"My dear good boys," he panted, looking up with grateful eyes. "If I should go suddenly (I don't intend to, but if I should), you watch after Katherine. You understand. Let Mace take the island if he can, and the devil take Mace if he will. But keep her harmless. Aaah, ha!" he sighed, and caught back his breath like a staggered fighter. "Keep Katherine safe. Take her home, should anything go wrong with Walter. I see you

will. Here's your commission. Read it, please."

He handed them a long envelope. Wallace read out the enclosure.

" 'During my present illness, I appoint Messrs. Robert Wallace, A. R. Tisdale, and Francis Godbolt as my agents to safeguard my interests and those of my grand-daughter Katherine Fraye, here on Fraye's Atoll, sometimes known as Pulo Princess. The aforesaid gentlemen will employ all justifiable means to preserve the peace and good order now existing in this island. The village has received word, through the headman and the schoolmaster, that until further notice, or until the arrival of Walter Fraye, all orders given by my agents herein appointed, shall be considered as issuing from me.

Thomas Masterman Fraye.' "

The old man watched them keenly.

"Do you agree to that?"

The three men bowed, and one by one took his hand silently.

"You know my feeling," said he, "better than I can express it. Firearms on my dresser. Serve out, Anak."

The barefoot giant, looking frightened, gave them each a black pistol, well-oiled, and a packet of ammunition. They slipped these into their pockets.

"I trust you'll find no need for—anything of that kind," said Mr. Fraye. "Good night, then."

Authority had fallen upon them, the command of his island. They went out from the bed-chamber, deeply affected. As they passed through the living-room, Katherine stood by the front door.

"All's well?" she faltered, smiling pitifully. "You left him well?"

Remorse took hold of them, to see her—young, lonely, bright as only wholesome youth appears to wholesome youth, so near with her starry brown eyes, and yet so unutterably removed from them. They had laughed with her on equal terms, just now at the dinner table; her grandfather had almost taken them into the family with her; and for that very reason here she stood all the further away, entrusted to them on the pinnacle of their honor. She was a girl with red lips and throat of gipsy tan: she was their ward, Katherine.

"All's well," they stammered. "He's only tired." And they edged out of doors in a hurry, before they could say too much. "Good night, Miss Fraye. All's well."

Once in their bachelor quarters, they showed the hollowness of that agreeable fiction, by holding a conference round Godbolt's table. Their candles burned low, and still the talk flowed on, in an undertone. They sat as a Committee of Safety—three conspirators, with sunburnt faces hard and cautious, ready to turn and listen at any sound.

"Here!" said Wallace, when the last candle began to sputter in the socket. "Here are the things we have to do, in order. Look sharp, you fellows." And he read the penciled minutes of their meeting.

" 'First. Every night, beginning now, shall be divided into three watches; the watchman to patrol the grove, garden, shore, and main house.

" 'Second. Every day, a look-out shall be stationed by the jetty, with binoculars, to sweep the beach and especially the near point of Mace's island; to give warning immediately, if he sees either a boat putting off, or any person wading the channel toward us.

" 'Third. Picked natives shall camp near the sheep walk, to prevent any approach by land.

" 'Fourth. Armed escort for Miss Fraye, everywhere outside her house.' "

The conspirators eyed one another across the dying light.

"Hold hard!" put in Tisdale. "Point four is delicate. Who's to be escort?"

Blank looks followed. No one had foreseen the question. They had cut straws for the night watch; but here was a duty which demanded something more than rotation in office. There were no volunteers. Tisdale answered himself.

"You, Sainty."

The sailor recoiled in his chair.

"Me?" he cried, like one accused of monstrous iniquity. "Me, the hulkingest . . . to look after her? Bells o' Beulah, you're lunatic! Go get the Pope o' Rome!"

But Wallace basely gave his vote, nodding at Arthur. They were two to one. The candle snuff leaned over, and burned blue in a welter of wax.

"Ye skulkers!" Godbolt stood up, incensed. "Putting it on me! Shirkers!"

Tisdale caught him by the hand, pleading.

"Sainty! You're the oldest. We can't, and somebody must. What else did her grandfather say to-night? 'Let the rest go. Look after Katherine.' I'm not fit to, Rob's not. You must, old boy. You're the only real shot with a gun. She might depend on that, if the pinch came. You must!"

The long black candle-wick curled into its

brazen cell, and expired. Darkness filled the room —a darkness that gradually became gray starlight. The doorway glimmered at the top with heavenly stars; at the bottom with glow-worm stars reflected from the lagoon; and in this frame, half blurred against the shadow of plantains, Godbolt's tall body loomed like a cross, with both arms outspread as he gripped the jambs. He leaned there for some time, without replying.

"If I must," he muttered, rather to the night than to the room, "I must."

His broad shadow dropped its arms, and faded from the door.

"My watch now. Go to bed."

He had shouldered the island, and taken their first patrol. Ocean made the sole disturbance, beyond its barrier.

Dawn came in a pink mist, morning blazed red through areca and plantain, a multitude of birds "warmed their little loves" with twittering complaint among bush and tree-top. Nothing had happened. Oliver Mace and his forty odd men might have levanted in the night, so far as any life appeared from the dark-green bulk of Mango Island, floating on the southwestern glaze of the lagoon.

Soon after breakfast, Godbolt reported for

duty—the duty which his fellows had put upon him over night. His mode of reporting was like the man, blunt and apparently simple.

They were all assembled at the rear of the house, Mr. Fraye lying in his long chair, the young commissioners leaning on the rail near by, and smoking. Sunlight poured through the trees, and gilded the brown floor of the grove, as if an eastern gate swung wide to let the earliest morning flood a cloister. Not far off, though partly hidden by shrubbery, Katherine stood beside the pole of her dove-cote. Her head caught the light; and from time to time her hand rose in a graceful motion, like the hand of a sower flinging seeds broadcast. Pigeons fluttered above her, dropped behind the shrubs again—now a white pigeon, now a russet-mottled, or a pair of blue "leadies." The girl was talking to them all, as they rose, and circled, and fell with their peaceful whinny of wings.

"You think, sir," said Godbolt, "that these boys are right about . . . her?"

Old Mr. Fraye searched him with a kindly smile.

"Quite, Captain. We confide her to you for the present."

Without more ado, the sailor got up from the

railing, went down into the grove, and marched straight over to the dove-cote shrubbery.

"Miss Fraye," he broke out, "would you take me for a guardian angel?"

The pigeons whirled aloft, in a medley of lustrous feathers, eddying upward, so that Katherine's brown eyes and fair hair gleamed, for a moment, through a storm-cloud of wings. When the sunshine cleared, she stood holding a single member of her flock—a white pigeon, that balanced on her fore-arm, and leaned his bosom against her blue dress.

"How did you happen to say that?" she rejoined. Either Godbolt's sudden appearance or the flurry of pigeons, had given her a start. "Why do you ask?"

He wasted no preamble.

"Your grandfather'd feel easier if you had company," he said, with a vague gesture, "whenever you go—roundabout like, next few days. 'Twould freshen the nip on his mind, sort of. I don't want to hamper you none. But——" The sailor's black eyes cast a flickering glance toward the veranda; his cheerful outdoor voice descended to its lower notes. "But you running free, like, and me within good hail, somewheres—why, you no need to carry yesterday's gun from now for'ard!"

Katherine stroked her pigeon. Whether she was annoyed, or merely trying not to laugh, Godbolt could not be certain. Then she looked up; their eyes met; and he knew that she had taken the spirit, not the form, of his poor words.

"You're very kind, Captain. Perhaps you'll see me to the village, by and by." She paused; and smiling, held out her arm with the bird upon it. "Don't you recognize your old friend?"

The pigeon spread his white wings and tail, shifted his rosy claws, and caught a new balance on his perch. He was the carrier, the spent messenger from abroad.

"The little tyke!" cried Godbolt, joyfully.

As though averse to nicknames, the bird sprang from her arm, and flickered up to join his companions on the sunny ledges of the cote.

"He brought you here," said Katherine.

They both stood looking overhead, watching him strut and wheel among the others.

"God bless him for that!" boomed the sailor.

Katherine turned away, rather quickly.

"Shall we get ready for the village?" she asked. "It's time we oversaw the husking."

So began a week of peaceful and busy days. To see this pair together—Godbolt, heavy of frame but light on foot, rolling along beside the girl—no

one would have taken them for ward and guardian, or guessed that on her account he carried a weapon under his tunic, in the arm-pit. They went away laughing and talking; they returned so. The village—a toy street of tawny basket-woven huts, shining cleanly under slant palms and bowers afire with hibiscus—the village knew a large, merry gentleman who watched the naked children play, and learned their names so quickly, while the Princess of the Island was indoors with some sick woman, telling the neighbors what the best food might be. The go-down saw them inseparable; for white-clouted workmen, trotting under pole and panniers into that cool, shady warehouse, got their tally-splints from the merry gentleman, and timorously watched the Princess enter in her book the tale of cocoanuts poured clumping on the mats. Rumors coursed everywhere, from the village to the farthest western horn of the atoll, and the swineherds' camp by the channel: rumors of war, of a new master coming from Mango Island with ne'er-do-wells, and a change for the worse; rumors that were checked by the sight of Katherine passing with her guard.

And so the week went by: no word from Mace, no stir from Mango Island but a wreath of smoke before meal-time.

Late one afternoon, the go-down doors being shut for the night, Katherine and Godbolt took their walk eastward, some three miles, to the ocean side. A loud surf crashed, as they went threading the hollows and low mounds of an upward-sloping wood; and their first view, when the trees parted on gray coral boulders, was a view of smothering crests, the whole sea outflanking them in a concave series, white wall after white wall that toppled roaring on the reef, to explode and shoot high against the sunlight. Each wave burst afar, but sent hissing layers onward, so that the island's outer curve, a thirty-foot rampart of coral boulders, storm-built and water-carven, hung beetling over sea-foam laced with Tyrian blue. Here was land's end, all broken into blocks and lumps and ruined seats, as of an amphitheatre bent wrong side out.

Godbolt found his own hyperbole for the scene.

"The stern of the Earth," said he, "kicking up her wake behind her!"

They had chosen two blocks of coral, not far apart, where they could sit facing each other. Katherine turned her back to the sea, and with an easel before her, was busily dabbing brush into paint, and paint on canvas. Godbolt, with knife, twine, and glue-bottle, sat woolding a new shaft

for the golf club he had broken. Each worked as if there were no time to lose; yet their work seemed only an excuse for talking.

"The stern o' the Earth, sailing away with us!"

Katherine, behind her canvas, kept up a running fire of glances, preoccupied and furtive glances, now at him, now at the palms behind him, and the long shadow of their frontier.

"Mmmh," she mumbled, a brush between her lips; then, removing it—"Yes. A lonely place. Very lonely, and final, and . . . solemn."

They worked on together, in friendly silence.

"Can't I see what you're painting of it?" the sailor begged. He made as if to rise.

"Don't you dare!" She frowned him down again. "How can I do a port—a landscape, with you jumping back and forth across it?"

He sat quite still, and patiently carried his woolding round and round the shaft.

Regularly, when the sea dealt a louder, heavier shock, they could feel the island quake under them with a deep thrill: fathomless foundations were set vibrating, for only a moment, but for a moment which undid the security of ages, and made earth itself appear hardly more stable than a passing thought.

"Time," said Godbolt, in soliloquy. "Time's a funny thing."

"And what puts that into your head?" inquired Katherine, behind her canvas.

He stretched out his hand for an instant, as if his idea were palpable and all-surrounding.

"Why, there her under-pinning goes it again," said he. "The whole place beats like your pulse, or a time-piece ticking. Not Greenwich time, either, it ain't: a little piece of eternity, might say." He dropped his hand, for the tremor had passed. "And to think of all them little beggars down below, the coral fellows, thingumbobs, polyps, that lived and died so ancient, leaving their bones to build and build. Talk about your Tabernacles o' the Lord? Gorry!—— And I've known you just about a week!"

The girl laughed. It pleased her to see his mind cut a wide circle, then drop.

"Has the week been long?"

But Godbolt was not laughing.

"Yes, if length meant bigness," he replied. "The best portion out o' my life, 'tis, anyhow."

Another mood, another man, would have made this utterance a mere dismal piece of folly. Even now, Katherine's color mounted; but she saw Godbolt's face as she loved to see it, warm and sorrow-

ful and honest, like his words. She remembered also what her grandfather had said about voices; for this man's voice rang true, giving out rudely the meditations of a clean heart.

"I call it a good week," she assented; and because a kind of safety lay in plaguing him—— "Why, Captain!" she went on, severely, "has your life been such a blank as that? A 'disgusting, dreary desert'?"

Godbolt regarded her steadily.

"'Tain't," s' id he, "the wittiest joke in nature, to be a—to be a superfluous man."

Katherine made a funny little face, of surprise and mock reverence.

"Are you the Superfluous Man? You don't in the least resemble any character of Gorky's!"

The sailor was not to be flouted into a better conceit of his position, or baffled by little authors.

"Gawky? Some gawks can be o' service," he retorted. "Not me. Drifting, always. That's my *hookum,* drifting by chance. No sense in it." He fell to work on the broken brassy, now almost as good as new under his neat repairs. "And come old age," he chuckled, "some job like this: to sit on an oakum bale and whittle boats for children, like one o' them pious hoary-whiskered sea-faring frauds in a Sabba'-School book!"

They laughed. Katherine swung into hiding behind her easel, where some problem of art absorbed her—all but one round, young elbow, that wagged continually with the strokes of her brush.

"Is that why you refuse wine?"

The sailor gave a jump. To paint pictures was wonderful enough, but here sat a girl who could do that, busily, and meanwhile send her thoughts winding in through the tangled motives of a man.

"Drink never helped me none," he admitted. "I wouldn't dare try it. Not while you're alone, and a wasted piece in the world."

She faced him again, reproach in her eyes.

"That's my first disappointment. That's not like you. It sounds weak."

He raised his head, proudly.

"Weak?" he cried. "O' course. Any man's weak. Some of us don't ask for Dutch courage, that's all!"

He thought she smiled, but the canvas intervened before he could be certain. She was painting faster than ever. The shadow of the island trees which covered them, now streamed across coral flats and darkened the outer pools. Ashore, evening had arrived; the afternoon glowed only at sea, on the white-fuming waves and the blue plateau of the horizon.

Katherine shut her paint-box, and stood up.

"The Grandpater will be fretting. We should never have stayed so late."

A cocoanut, still in the husk, happened to be lying where it had rolled, among the breakage of the higher beach.

"There!" She turned the thing over with her foot—a white mouse of a foot, as Godbolt saw. "Is it chance, Captain, or design, that cocoanuts are shaped so?"

He had never before considered the form of a cocoanut in the husk. This windfall had three brown surfaces, joining in a raveled point at either end.

"It's like a fat sort o' boat," said he.

"A boat," replied Katherine, looking down. "A boat that falls into the sea, by chance; and floats away, and perhaps comes to nothing, or perhaps comes drifting on a reef, to help make an island like this, where people live for years. So logs have come drifting—by chance—to crumble into earth for it. Sometimes a log brings a passenger, an animal, one or two little creatures that have sailed hungry from who knows where? Corals have grown, and breathed in the spray, and died, as you said, Captain, to leave their bones building underneath and building. Wasted pieces? I've

wondered, too, when I was walking the shore alone; before you came—by chance?"

The argument was light as an arrow, but flew straight. Godbolt acknowledged a hit, not ungracefully, by clapping his big hand on his chest.

"You're right! 'Twas your pigeon led us here. Some sense in our coming!"

Katherine looked up at him, then swiftly down as before.

"Shall I tell you what it meant to me,—your coming?" Her voice was low and hurried, but had a quality like the rise of song. "It was an answer, when you came. We were alone. This man—this Mace . . . We needed help. There was no ship to hope for, any more than now; so that I gave up watching the sea. Do you know that story of a girl chained to the rocks, who could only pray for a knight? Well, I—never mind, it all came true. At our worst need, there you sailed in out of the sunset. That was the wonder. Three men, three good champions ready to stand by us! You broke through the sky, as our brown people say of ships that come. After so much longing, to see my three men at the door, and you their captain——"

She stopped short, alarmed by her confession. When she dared raise her eyes, they found in God-

bolt's a reflection of their panic. He was very pale. There came a long pause, through which the fundamental quaking of the island passed like a bit of their own emotion.

"Home now," said Katherine. "Let's go home."

As they turned from the noise and brightness of the sea, and were about to enter the wood, she pointed suddenly with her left hand.

"That came here by design. The Home Rock. We brought it from England."

A granite boulder loomed where the dusk began, under the palms—a rude monument, fronting the open sea with one gray face on which glimmered several tablets of bronze. The Home Rock, in a land that held no other, it stood among familiar flowers, a mass of blue and white periwinkle covering the place of unforgotten ashes.

"If you are a wasted piece, what were they? My father's name was Francis, like yours."

Godbolt could not answer her, for the waves rolled an everlasting requiem.

The sound of this grew faint and high, as the pair hurried home through twilight woods, down the imperceptible hill that sloped from the sea-rampart to the lagoon. Not till they saw their veranda lights twinkling, did the girl speak again.

"I want you to promise me, Captain Francis."

"Anything!" said he.

The veranda was empty. She paused, half-way up the steps.

"Let me feel proud of you," she begged. "Don't think yourself . . . adrift, any more!"

He looked up slowly, clasping her mended brassy and her painter's kit, as though loth to go empty-handed.

"A new way o' thinking, that is!" he rejoined, hoarsely. "It goes to a man's head."

"But promise. You're not adrift now, or alone?"

He laughed.

"When I'm certain sure—when this old busted cocoanut o' mine comes floating to land solid, and no mistake—why, bless your heart, I'd—I'd fill a glass o' wine to your good fortune!"

They shook hands on the compact. Katherine ran upstairs with her canvas. He failed to see the painted side of that, for she had held it jealously away from him.

It was observed, a few moments later, that Godbolt came singing into the bachelors' house; that his features caught something beyond their share of light; that all his motions were those of a man buoyed up by more than mortal confidence.

CHAPTER XVI

FIRST BLOOD

MACE was not dead, but waiting. Thrice a day his pillar of smoke twined over Mango Island and faded on the sky, like the breath of a puny volcano, half asleep. Bright weather covered the atoll, from sunrise to sunset; night unto night showed knowledge abiding in clear stars; and all things but the sea remained quiet. It was only a truce.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, a scared villager ran panting into the bachelors' house. Godbolt and Wallace happened at that moment to be there.

"People coming!" cried the runner. *"Orang datang!* The people come!"

He was one of those picked men—picked from a poor lot—who had lain camping near the sheep walk; a handsome creature, whose god-like bronze body encased a chicken heart. Distracted between

propriety and fear, he clawed up the white clout slipping round his loins, and babbled. People had stolen in (he tried to say) through the western woods beyond the field.

"Well," Godbolt drawled, "we better go look."

So many vain alarms had come in the same fashion from the same quarter, that now the two white men donned their helmets lazily, and made no great haste about going. They sauntered westward, through a curving avenue of cocoanut and betel spars. Their cowardly vedette followed them skulking a little way, then "took his hook," as Godbolt said, and was seen no more.

They came to his late outpost at the verge of the woods, but found all tranquil. Their picked men were gone. The green pasture glowed; sheep lay in the hollows of it, and strayed nibbling over gentle knolls.

Both men made a careful scrutiny, far and near. All round the field, the serried border of palms quivered and gleamed in a light wind. Sunshine poured free as over a parade ground. There was no sign, even, of Katherine's red flags. Only the sheep occupied this clearing, their dusty coats brightened like so many bits of golden fleece.

"Anybody there?" Wallace nodded at the western shadows, long and dense beneath a lowered sun.

Godbolt shook his head.

"Psalm Twenty-two," he replied. "I can't sight no trouble, these parts. Can you?"

Wallace looked everywhere, with his faithful and heavy scowl.

"No. They've cried wolf on us again. I don't believe Mace would dare. We're too much for him, the three of us."

"Don't you go be sure o' that," chuckled the sailor. "Mace ain't the boy to lack courage. If things was ripe, he'd come along."

After a while he added, seriously:

"Blest if I know Mace's game. Now's his time for jumping us off the board, now or never. Pretty soon her brother'll come sailing back—this boy Walter, nice little easy boy himself, *but* with a vessel *and* a crew, likely. Mace better start now, or he'll overstay his tide. Shakespeare allowed there was one, in the affairs o' men."

Godbolt laughed. He was in high feather nowadays, and on this day above all.

"Whole thing seems to make you happy," grumbled Wallace, and stirred, with the toe of his pump, a little dust out of the grass.

"Happy? Almost!"

A moment later, Wallace raised his head.

"I was afraid so. What's to be the outcome, Sainty? What about her?"

At that question, Godbolt turned as if stung. He spoke, but with sort of violent deliberation.

"I like you, Rob," he said, hoarsely. "I like ye fine, Rob. You got a grand square way o' looking at a man, square, and forehead foremost, and broad betwixt the eyes, like a good old black bull. I like that way; keep it so; while ye talk." The sailor went pale, went red again, then laughed unsteadily. "Whip her out, what you're thinking!" he cried. "You're into the china shop, Robin, old bull! Plump into the china shop. Smash away."

Wallace continued looking at him, front foremost, as he desired.

"I'm thinking this," replied Wallace. "I like her. You like her. That's all right for now."

Godbolt clapped him on the shoulder, and held him at arm's length, crying, in a heat of honest affection.

"Like her? Katherine? O' course we like her! What ails ye for that, Rob my child? Both of us, how could we choose but like her?"

Wallace drew free from Godbolt's hand, and gathered himself forward speaking. It was his turn, now, to be white in the face.

"I'm a stupid kind of chap," he began, obstinately. "I'm not clever, like Arthur Tisdale.

You know me, Sainty. I'm dull as wood. But don't go thinking I'm jealous. No woman ever looks my way twice; or if they do, I can't find a word to say. No, sir, it's not jealousy. I like her, but I like you—better. You're my notion of a man. Sainty——" And here, for once in a rather stolid lifetime, Wallace beat his breast—"Why, Sainty, I'd go through fire for you! And so would any woman. There! The cat's out of the bag!"

He let go a great breath, and stood waiting.

Godbolt stepped in closer.

"What d'ye mean, Rob?" he demanded, sternly.

Wallace held his ground without flinching.

"I mean just this," he retorted. "And you know it—deep down, you know it. I've thought it over nights abed. I've seen it in your face, the way you talk, the way you move, lately. Katherine's coming to think of you, as I say any woman—— Oh, look ahead, Sainty! We're here on our behavior. It's all temporary. Nothing ahead. All bound to come to nothing."

Godbolt knotted up his brows and his fists.

"Do you see past what you're a-hinting, Rob?" His black eyes burned. "For less'n that, I'd—not on my account, on hers——"

Wallace turned away, and stared at the seaward palms.

"It takes a fool," he observed, bitterly, "to speak out as I do."

A dry clashing of palm-blades ran round that sunny hollow square in which he stood; and like another voice or mood of the same breeze, he heard old ocean mourning.

"Rob, it's me played the fool."

Wallace kept his back turned; however dull, he knew better than to watch a friend stammering and choking with useless anger.

"A good mate you are, Rob. I couldn't fight ye, no, not for her sake, even; because you're wrong there, about her. Wrong by a million mile, thank the Lord!"

These last words rang so different, so grateful, that Wallace could face round again. For both men, it was a haggard moment.

"About me, you spoke right," said Godbolt, firmly. "All this must come to naught. Nothing ahead. What way is there out—for me?"

His answer came flying with a little spiteful noise through the air. Not caring what they did, the friends had wandered forth into the pasture, and remained—as chance would place them—two white and shining marks upon a well-cropped knoll. The spiteful noise flew, enveloped them, and died—like the hum of a taut wire struck by

an urchin's pebble. Quicker than thought, it was repeated. Then something snapped confusedly between the two men.

"Shot!" groaned Wallace, and staggered, and fell groveling on the dusty grass. "I'm hit, Sainty, through the arm!"

He heard his own words, marveled at his own cleverness; for all he had felt was one sledge-hammer shock near the elbow, that spun him half round after it, and so felled him. He tried to be game, to rise. A heavy hand knocked him sprawling and dizzy as before.

"Flat! Lay flat!" roared Godbolt, pinning him to earth and setting the example. "Don't ye stand up and give a target—Reckless wasters we was! Lay flat—Aha, I spy! The beggar's hid amongst them trees!"

A blaze of shots followed. The sailor, crossing his wrists on the ground, twice emptied his revolver loudly, carefully, and smokily into the western woods and the sunset. Three or four jets of yellow dust answered him, at first, by spattering up from the knoll; but these quickly ceased, even while sheep after sheep bundled away helter-skelter for the nearest woods.

"Missed him! The beggar's running," grunted Godbolt. "He had smokeless powder, and a si-

lencer on his muzzle, drat him! Hid where we scared that ram, other day. But we gave him enough. He's run clean for Mango Island."

Wallace did his best to feel awake, though sky and treetops reeled.

"Mace, was it?"

Godbolt stowed his weapon under his arm-pit, and jeered—obviously jeered, for the moral effect.

"Mace? No. Some hired man. Ye ain't no more than winged, are ye? Why, there! Mace could a' shot, they tell me. That was only the hired man."

Then, with a strange, uncouth tenderness—

"Rob," he inquired, "ye ain't hurt bad, are ye?"

Wallace grinned foolishly, sat up, displayed a red crease in the elbow of his right sleeve.

"Not badly. My arm's broken. First blood for Mace."

His friend reached over, and fingered his wound considerately.

"Broke, yes. Bullet clear through. Hum: I can set that, Rob. Gun-shot holes are no treat to me; I've seen plenty worse. Come on home till we can jury-rig ye."

They crawled backward out of the sunshine; lay

watching among the palm trunks; and then, with many a backward glance, began to retreat. Peace reclaimed the pasture. From woods to left and right the silly sheep were venturing out, bleating, joining once more their scattered groups. The affair was over; an ambush at long range, not an advance.

The two skirmishers came home silently, Wallace nursing his arm, Godbolt wrapt in thought, with eyes following a sombre day-dream along the path. Though lacking words, they felt no lack; never before had they walked in such near understanding, shoulder to shoulder, spirit and spirit alongside. Wallace always remembered this strange walk together.

So the day failed, and so they came by twilight into their bachelors' house among the plantains. Godbolt struck a match, and set a candle burning.

"Now," he commanded, "hold out your pinion, my duck."

When Wallace lay back in a chair at last, with his arm admirably slung, and the dull stupor of it clearing into pain, he let his mind swim between lethargy and a vague sense of personal escape. He saw Godbolt move the candle to a dressing-table, near by, and stand there cleaning and loading his Webley. Something—the man's downward look,

the careful movement of his hands, or perhaps the little taper shining on a white cloth—transformed his action almost to that of a priest before some lonely altar.

"You're to lay quiet, Rob." The sailor put the pistol under his jacket, and turning, took his patient by the left hand. Not then, but in after days, it appeared that he was bidding farewell. "Mind you lay quiet. You're off duty hencefor'ard, well out of a bad pidgin, boy. I'll send Arthur in, to keep you company for a while."

At the door he paused. There was a kind of longing in his look.

"You spoke out noble this afternoon," he added, cordially. "Noble. Francis Godbolt ain't the sort to go denying it. You cleared the air, all round. Oliver Mace, we know his game now; wanted to pick us off separate, one by one; but we'll stop that, don't ye fret. Ho! ho! We'll h'ist Oliver in a moused hook, send him higher'n Gilderoy's kite!"

He ran down the veranda steps, crying:

"Adios, old Robin!"

After that, it was Tisdale who met him, brushing away banana pennons on the path to Fraye's. He was no more than a shape hurrying through the gloom.

"Rob's waiting for ye, Arthur," he announced gaily, in passing. "You skip along. No, I'm busy. Got a thing to do. Some sense about this!"

The next person who saw him that evening, and the last friend who then heard him speak, was old Thomas Fraye.

It was early starlight on the lagoon mirror, lamplight in the big room.

"Mr. Fraye," said Godbolt, entering bare-headed, cool, and with no sign of hurry, "it's a grand piece o' night outside. Ain't it?"

The old man lay reading in his chair, alone.

"You, Frank?—I mean, you, Captain?" He lowered his book. "Yes, indeed, a very fine night, All well?"

The captain beamed.

"All well, sir. On the point o' being better. Fact is, I'm going for a row, to take the air. Can I borrow Anak? He's moping down round the jetty."

Fraye nodded, and said:

"No wonder I call you Frank. You behave like a son to me, Captain. I—I muddle the pair of you into one, sometimes, thinking, after dark."

Godbolt smiled across the table. There stood between them a tray, with slender glasses round

a yellow decanter. His face brightened, as if at some happy thought.

"The Cape o' Good Hope sherry, sir? Is that it?—Good Hope. Sounds like an omen."

He leaned over and with a steady hand poured a glass of wine, which he then raised. The light set it blinking.

"Tell Katherine—" his voice filled the room, quietly—"tell Katherine I drank this to her, and all she can ever hope for."

He shut his fist over the empty glass, and crumpled it like so much paper; let the splinters trickle and tinkle into the tray; bowed, and stalked out through the main veranda.

Mr. Fraye heard his footsteps going down the garden path, his voice, afterward, hailing Anak on the jetty. Illness confused the old man's wits; for he lay comfortably, book in lap, and listened while a fatal beat of oars passed away toward southwestern stars, over the blue obscurity of the lagoon. Time slid by.

"He seemed so like her father," mused Age.

But Youth appeared at the door, all flushed and eager. Katherine ran in, with Tisdale following.

"Where is he?" they cried. "Sainty! Where's the captain?"

Fraye smiled at them.

"The captain has gone boating," he explained. "My dear, you may feel honored. He drank your health in broken glass, before he went——"

Katherine gave one look at the table, the tray, and the splinters glistening there. She let her arms drop, slowly, as if the weight of that honor bore them down.

"To his death," she whispered, looking strangely about the room, like one who finds herself deserted. "For our sake he has gone to his death. To Mace. We shall never see him again."

CHAPTER XVII

A THING TO DO

KATHERINE was wrong, in part. They were to see Godbolt once more, that very night; to behold him on the summit of his life, topping the last bright hill of a high journey.

What happened in the meantime, Anak told when all was done.

The sailor made for the jetty, first, and called Anak to come help him. Then, from her shelter among ironwood boughs, they dragged the little *Nantwich Number Two* down into the water, shoved her off, and shipped their oars. Godbolt, steering, hummed a funny little air—so droll, in fact, and so light-hearted, that Anak failed to watch their course or guess what terror lay before them.

"The Old Seventy-Six they've sallied forth,
On their crutches they do lean,
With their rifles leveled on us

And their specs they take good aim——
Oh, there's no retreat, my boys, for them
Who'd rather die than run——"

So the steersman chanted, happily, but no more loudly than the dripping oars. The boat stole onward, under a dome fretted with constellations. From the lagoon—heaven's liquid counterpart, night's floor—the rowing dug up shattered stars, and sent them like golden minnows whirling astern, to dart about profoundly, and rejoin, and heal the long scar of the wake.

"Or I fear that they will conquer us——"

There was no fear in the singer's voice. He liked his ballad.

"Or I fear that they will conquer us
As they conquered John Burgoyne
When he got too far from Canada——
Run for life, boys, run!"

Anak would gladly have obeyed this sentiment, when all at once, turning from his work, he saw the grayness of a beach, close ahead, and knew it for the beach at Mango Island. Somebody was

coming down toward them with a lantern. Anak dropped his oars, clattering.

"There, there!" Godbolt, as he climbed ashore, patted the giant's back. "Quiet, my son! Don't ye tremble so. Just ye wait. I got a thing to do; and if I don't bring ye a passenger inside o' twenty minutes, you can row straight home. There! And that case, you can tell 'em all's well anyhow. In twenty minutes, Mace living, I'll fetch him prisoner. You wait, son; your part is easy."

The lantern now lighted them both, the wet nose of their boat, and a circle of yellow-gray strand. A weazened, imp-like figure bore this lantern.

"Hallo, Satrap!" chuckled the sailor. "How are ye? Master at home to-night?"

Satrap wore a blood-red cotton scarf round his throat, to ward off *sakit angin,* the air sickness that travels abroad after dark. He raised one end of the scarf, and rubbed his eyes with it, as though to see more clearly a sight beyond belief.

"You?" he croaked. In the dim light, he seemed to be all cheekbones, ribs, and brown wrinkles. "You, Large Sir, in this place? Go back. You will die. Go back."

Godbolt lowered a benevolent grin, and shook his head.

"I won't go back alone. Tuan Mace up at the house? Good."

The Bugi opened wide his skinny arms, but Godbolt went dodging past into the darkness of the upper beach.

"This man will die," grunted Satrap, staring; then, after visible and painful indecision, he blew out his lantern, and ran to see whether he had spoken true.

Anak could not long endure that dark, lonely beach. He waited, growing more and more terrified, till with a whimper he leaped out of the boat and hurried inland. Ancestral fear of devils pushed him like a silent mob at his back; a great fascination pulled him on; so that between these two forces he found himself panting up the sand-hill, running among trees toward a bright light, and presently kneeling in the dust of Mace's compound, behind a castor-oil bush. Satrap lay there also, and shook as if the hot, still night were freezing him.

Mace's bungalow, before them, blazed with light—the infernal brilliancy of acetylene—which made his big main room a stage, a theatric setting. The whole interior shone ghastly through door and windows, barred here and there by the leaky mesh of wall, as by strips of porous curtain.

Godbolt had just entered the room.

"Good evening," he sang out, on the threshold.

Oliver Mace lay dozing in a chair, directly under the light, beside his favorite table and a quart of brandy. With chin on breast, lank arms and legs awry, he had sunk deeply into such a rumpled condition that his white trousers and white dinner jacket engulfed him with empty folds. At first glance, a stranger would have thought him drunk and torpid; but his long gray head was busy, after some fashion, for he lay smiling, squinting down the edge of his nose.

It was a weasel nap, soon broken; a weasel's pair of eyes he lifted.

"Eh? What?"

The apparition of Godbolt brought him upright.

"You here again? In my house?"

From that instant, neither man let the other evade him with eye, word, or hand.

They watched like rival conjurers. The devilish patent light was capital for this kind of duelling.

"What are you here for?"

"To arrest ye," replied the sailor, calmly.

Mace puckered his thin brows.

"Arrest me?" He lay back at ease, very scornful. "Where's your authority?"

Godbolt came forward, and produced—without moving his eye—a long envelope from his pocket. He backed away again.

"There. Read it. I won't move while you're reading."

It was Fraye's letter of marque. Mace took its contents in with half a glance.

"*Bote Salaam,* my Lord High Commissioner," he drawled. "A most imposing document. There's only one thing lacking, which is my consent. As for Thomas Masterman Fraye, he's more man than master to-night, I fancy."

And Mace tore the letter into bits.

"Where's your commission now?" he inquired, tossing them over the back of his chair.

Godbolt stood unmoved, with arms folded on his breast—where his tunic was unbuttoned.

"I've done my legal duty, Mr. Mace. You took service o' my paper. Tear it up or swallow it down; make a boy's windmill of it if ye so desire; the thing is done. You tried to let us eat a fish, other day. Call that a mistake. You had my friend, Rob Wallace, cowardly shot this afternoon in the sheep field. Ye want the whole island for your own, and—never mind what else ye want. By th' Eternal, ye sha'n't have it. I arrest ye."

Mace cackled.

"You born fool!" he answered, drily. "The boot's on the other foot. You're the man arrested —the man, by Jove, that walked into jail! Of all blind, oafish, lumbering conceit! Why, when you swaggered in just now, did it never cross your mind that I would hardly permit you to go swaggering out again?"

The sailor nodded. A smile played round his lips—a calm, pleasant little smile, that made his rejoinder infinitely grim.

" 'Tain't no great of a mind," he admitted, "but something crossed it, Mr. Mace. As follows: I think unless we both walk out together quiet and peaceable, one of us is going to die right here in this room."

Mace peered up anew, more sharply even than before. When he spoke, his voice was not so harsh, but had a mingled note, as if some old frayed string of kindness were set vibrating.

"I withdraw my expression," he said. "You're no fool, or at least a brave one. Far too brave; far too rash, Mr. Godbolt." He waved his hand slightly toward the table. "Do you see my boatcall there?"

A silver whistle lay shining beside the forgotten brandy.

"Saw that when I first came in." Godbolt's eyes

did not swerve from the face below him. "What of it?"

"How if I should blow for help?" said Mace.

"Don't try," the other counseled, gravely. "Before your old fingers carried that whistle to your mouth, the life would be blasted out o' ye."

Mace nodded his long, gray head, in approval.

"I see," he murmured. "Several things have crossed your mind, after all. My compliments. If you count on stopping me so quickly as you say, I take it you're armed? For a lark, now, let us make the experiment."

With a cool, playful air, the old scapegrace leaned toward the table, and let his right hand fumble near the silver boat-call.

Godbolt laughed, and merely uncrossed his arms. The dark pistol, which Wallace had seen him loading, flew like a bird into his hand and glittered there as by magic.

"Ah, now I follow you." Mace drew back, and lay quite composed. "Under your tunic, was it not? Are you a marksman at all?"

Godbolt re-folded his arms, but with the pistol-barrel pointing over one elbow.

"I do what I can," he jested, "in a humble kind o' way. The only gift I got."

Mace awkwardly stretched out his legs. The

motion brought him somewhat lower in his chair.

"A bold man, a bold plan," said he. "Unless I go with you quietly, as a prisoner, you will exercise your talent, and fire? At Fraye's, you'd put me under guard, wait till that young ass Walter brings the schooner home, and then—deport me? Was that your meaning?"

"To a hair," said Godbolt.

Overhead the patent light burned low for a moment, as some flying insect blundered through the flame. No more than a wink and a sputter, the tiny change made both men jump. Each had used a tone persuasive and bantering; each labored under a deadly strain; but when they felt the room once more surcharged with light and stillness, it was Mace, apparently, who had suffered from that break of tension. He had slipped farther down in his chair, and let both arms dangle over-side. His face was white, sick, and moist.

"You'll fire if I don't go?" he repeated, in a creaking but indomitable voice. "Very well, sir. I won't go. Fire."

Godbolt stared. This man looked up at him as a frightened patient might regard a surgeon, yet with a gleam of purpose, resolution, or mysterious hope.

"Come, fire."

Godbolt freed his right hand slowly, pointing his weapon at the attap roof. He cleared his throat.

"I give you ten," he proclaimed, "to get on your feet."

And he counted the numbers aloud.

"Ten," he called, with a strange rising inflection.

The pair of natives hidden outside, behind the castor-oil bush, afterward said that at this point all the night seemed to be going by at once, and the house to stand still before them with the figures in it, very large and bright but not alive, like a piece of devil-work.

"Well?" broke out Mace. "Why don't you fire? Time—Finish it, man! I won't budge!"

Indeed, Mace lay quite limp in the bottom of his rattan chair, with left arm hanging to the floor, and right arm sunk in a pool of darkness under the edge of the table.

Godbolt suddenly moaned like a woman, and dropped both hands at his sides.

"Ye look old. Ye look sick. You're an old man. And in cold blood—— Oh, what thing was I born for, then?"

Mace drew breath sharply.

"You can't!" he said. "You can't, fellow. You're beaten."

"I'm beaten," groaned the sailor, and hung his head.

"Now go," advised his conqueror. "Go home in peace. I'm an old man, as you say; another evening like this would end me." Mace raised his left hand in token of dismissal. "I'm too weak for any more. Go, in peace."

The hand was trembling inordinately.

"No peace any more." Godbolt shook his head. "I came to do it, and I failed."

He turned heavily toward the door. As he went, there came two sounds at once; a warning shout from the compound, a crackle of rattan behind him. The sailor wheeled, too late by half a second.

Mace had whipped his long right arm from under the table, fetching up out of shadow a carbine. He fired point-blank.

Godbolt's pistol blazed harmless at the roof, even as that rushing wind of death took him full in the breast, and swept him down.

Mace uttered something which might have been a word, but was more like the squeal of a rat. He jumped from his chair, and stood swaying. Silence followed, until the fallen man began to writhe, as if the mat beneath him were a wall and he a climber. Then Mace took aim at the striving

head, and fired again. And then Godbolt lay quiet, his face buried between his arms. The pistol had flown into a far corner.

"It carried!" Mace dropped his carbine into the chair, tottered near the table, seized his brandy, and drank deep. "The bare chance," he said with a shudder, "the bare chance carried through! Hundred to one. Oh, what a battle!"

For a time he stared blindly at the white heap encumbering his floor. When he moved, he gave it a wide berth, and stole to the doorway only by a circuit.

"Who made that noise in the compound?" he called, stridently. "Come, show yourself. I'm here. The fellow got in my way. I did it. I'll answer for it. Come, show yourself!"

The night refused to hear his arguments. Below the castor-oil bush, Anak and Satrap hugged the dust for dear life, and thought their turn was coming. It seemed to them that they had witnessed a wonder, an end-all.

But the real wonder was yet to begin.

"Noise? No," growled Mace. "Imagination. It's over."

Hot with brandy and success, the slayer faced the room again. He did not care, or was not able,

to look before him clearly as he stumbled in. And, therefore, the shock fell heavier on him—heavy and cold as ice.

"Ah!" he recoiled, in vain. "I *saw* you——"

He had left Godbolt dead upon the floor. He met Godbolt living, erect, with wavering arms held forward to grapple and arrest him, in spite of victory. By a miracle of human will, the sailor, shot through the body and through both cheeks, had reared and lurched forward, towering.

"Let go!"

Mace felt his throat collared by desperate fingers.

"Let go!" He tried to shout, but heard only a rasping whisper. No silly kind heart now, no mercy to reckon upon; here was the final combat. "Let me—let me——"

Mace tore himself loose, and fell back, intending to reach the silver whistle, a yard or more away. This—so far as may be known—was the last of many muddled and bad intentions; for at a clap, all the arrears of sottish living descended on him, like a mallet on the skull. It was Oliver Mace, this time, who suddenly encumbered the floor, staring.

He lay there, dead, by a blow which no man might deliver.

When the two natives had convinced each other of this fact, they crept into the room.

"Tobat?" they crooned. *"Butool!*—Can it be possible? It is true."

Godbolt kept his footing, had even a little strength to spare. He put forth his hand, took from Satrap's throat the red cotton scarf, and with an effort, passed it round his own disfigured countenance, like a veil. He made a step toward the door; then, wearily, hung his arm over Anak's shoulder, and let the brown giant take him, half led, half carried.

The bungalow shone bright and vacant behind them. Only Satrap halted to glance back. He spat in that direction.

"Good," he croaked. "Good now, Master."

And like a man unchained from bondage, he ran ahead to find and re-light his lantern.

CHAPTER XVIII

NO MORE SEA

"We shall never set eyes on him again," repeated Katherine. "Never speak to him. Oh, why did he go?"

She waited by a front window, questioning the night, the garden, the calm solitude which covered such doubt and anguish, yet retained a spice of clove gilly-flower and a twinkle of starry water.

Young Tisdale, the ready man, could think of nothing to do or say.

Her grandfather gave a fretful cough. He had gathered the sound of her words, not the import. Extravagant language was a fault in her, to be corrected.

"The captain went boating, I tell you. He drank your health, and broke his glass in the good old fashion. I can't see why, for that reason, you roam about like a tragedy queen."

Katherine turned, imploring, half angry, half in tears.

"Oh, don't speak so now, dear Grandfather!"

Tisdale saw a chance to be useful, and approaching the old man, bent and whispered:

"Let her be, sir. The captain has gone over to Mace, for our benefit."

Thomas Fraye took the book out of his lap, carefully placed it on the table, and as carefully swung his feet clear from his chair. He found it hard to rise, but once risen, stood and moved like a young man. Through the rest of that evening, nobody remembered his illness or his age. There was for him, now danger blew sharp enough upon them, a fire in old ashes.

"Kate," said he, "Kate, sweetheart, the captain will come back to us."

The girl raised her head with a fierce motion, as if to disown such comfort once for all.

"No!" she cried imperiously. "No! He's mine—my captain, my Francis! I won't have him back with blood on his hands."

The two men stared first at her, then at each other, confounded not only by the flashing pride of this avowal, but by her foresight. They had not thought of the one sombre condition upon which the captain might return.

"If I could take his place——" began Tisdale, ardently, then choked and remained silent, in great bitterness of spirit.

Her grandfather said the only possible thing. "Keep a good courage, my dear." The old man joined her at the window, put his arm about her; and though his white head barely reached her shoulder, he spoke and moved so calmly, so promptly, so much according to his own advice, that he left no other course open, but to be brave. "Don't think ill of the future. Or of the captain. He'll do nothing you wouldn't have him do, Kate. He won't stoop."

At this, Katherine clung to him, and so the pair waited, each supporting the other, body and heart. Tisdale drew near. They both glanced up, and nodded, with a look of welcome and gratitude that was very like a smile.

A bush rustled. Somebody came through the garden.

It was only Wallace, with his arm in a sling.

"I couldn't stay alone," he muttered, pausing at the door.

"Of course not." Katherine beckoned. "I'm glad you thought of coming."

They made room for Wallace in their group. Nothing more was said. Silence filled the open parlor, except when the walls, their basket weave contracting in cool night air, made a rasping noise, or ticked like a loud and fitful clock.

"Here they come." It was the girl who spoke.

A new star had blossomed on the lagoon—a big, soft, yellow star, burning steadily at first, then winking in regular time to the hollow stroke of oars. Whom it lighted, and whose boat, were matters of vain guess-work and torture.

The yellow star sank below the beach, rose on the jetty as a common lantern, and came bobbing slowly through the garden. Round its passage there formed and melted a fringe or tunnel of things obscure—the scarlet heap of a rose-bush, green Poinciana leaves, and palm trunks visible as brown columns edged with misty gilding, like the edge of fur. Two large white-clad men labored, arm in arm, down this wavering, traveling vista of the night; a third, bent and dwarf-like, swung the lantern before them, step by careful step.

"He's hurt! Let me go, dear!" Katherine, first of all the watchers, had seen who was coming, and darted out to meet him on the steps. "Oh, Francis, Francis!"

In this wise Godbolt came home, his left arm round Anak's broad shoulders, his right upheld by her for whose sake its power had failed.

"Put him into my chair," old Fraye directed, shortly and sourly.

They carried him thither, placed him there under the lamp-light, beside the table. Like a new kind of Moslem decoration, the blood-red cotton scarf muffled all his face up to the eyes, and hung broadly down over his left breast. He lay full length, a figure of silence and mystery.

"Abis tuntu! Surely it is finished!" cried poor Satrap, and set his lantern in the door, and squatted cowering.

Godbolt's eyes, blacker than charcoal, gazed over the red bandage as from a distance. They moved slowly, greeting each frightened face above them. "I see you plainly," said their look. "I see you all." At last they met Katherine's eyes; and then, as if the spirit returned fiery-swift at a call, they woke, sparkled, were flooded with their old-time lustre. He raised his hands, and made a feeble motion like the motion of writing.

"What do you want, old fellow?" said Tisdale.

But Katherine understood, and quickly crossing the room, brought back a pencil and a sketching tablet.

"Yes, dear." She closed the captain's fingers round the pencil, quietly knelt by the chair, and held her tablet steady. "Now tell us what it was."

The captain tried, and failed; then waited, gripped the pencil more firmly, and tried again. In

big, schoolboy letters, a few words to the page, he wrote:

"All well. Mace dead. I never did it."

Old Fraye read the message aloud. His granddaughter made some inarticulate sound. The tablet shook in her hands. Wallace relieved her of it. Tisdale relieved him, and tore off the written sheet.

"Oh, Francis, I knew!" she moaned. "I felt certain. You never could."

Godbolt's eyes contained a smile, part happiness, part irony.

"Come, my lad," the old man gently counseled, "it's time we saw how much you're hurt."

It seemed evident—from the pallor of Godbolt's forehead, as from that steadfast look of his—he was dying; and for answer, he wrote again:

"No good, sir. They do not hurt a mite. Once in cheeks, once in Plural Cavaty. Can't spell him, but——" He let Wallace tear off another page, and continued: *"but so the Sawbones called him on a man I knew. My time short, don't lose none fretting."*

His eyes closed, as if deliberation weighed them down; then opened, while he painfully inscribed the fourth page of his bulletin.

"Get Arna to tell you."

"Anak?"

They turned on the huge man-servant, who loomed uneasy in the background.

"Anak," said his master, "what has happened?"

Anak louted low, and reared his scrubby head again, six feet and a half toward the roof-tree. Still under the shadow of death, still in a tremor, he obeyed, and began to narrate what he had seen and heard of the night's work on Mango Island. At first, the music of his voice was marred and broken; but as the story caught and carried him, as the spell of that hour and that audience made him forget the castor-oil bush and his ignoble fear behind it, the man's dark face began to work, his eyes rolled white, his limbs were freed in eloquent motion. He became an actor, bringing past fact bodily into the present. His primer English faltered and fell, his rhythm changed, and on the wings of his own language he swept with exaltation into a chant of war. Brave men have lived before Agamemnon, and after; but few since the days of fable have had their doings worthily rehearsed with passion, and sung aloud, as Anak now sang the deed of his terrible captain. The deed was over with; the poem only born. Anak, for years a hulking nondescript, had found the gift

within him, loosed it, and become historian and bard.

"Everywhere," he sang, spreading his arms as he retreated on the close, "now everywhere there shall be peace!"

Thus Godbolt in his life-time heard his own legend, which, by the will of chance or fate, should pass and grow from generation to generation upon the island. Perhaps he guessed a little of the truth, how poetry can seize a deed and change it into something better. At any rate, his forehead flushed, losing its mortal paleness; his eyes, over the red cotton barrier, appeared to be laughing. He reached out weakly for his tablet, and scrawled:

"After all that, to know you failed!"

But Katherine accepted the poet's version.

"There is no failure, dear," she whispered. "You took my quarrel on you, our quarrel. You did your best. If you had done less, I would not . . . be kneeling here."

His head drooped on his shoulder, so that he might see her where she knelt. In silence, on the brink of Time, their eyes exchanged that light and triumph and fulness of understanding, which no man truly knows but once.

Godbolt sighed. His heavy eyelids fluttered

down, as if sleep were coming, and measureless content. He remained breathing.

"You're not in pain, Francis?"

He shook his head, slowly and restfully. A thing was yet to do; for soon he roused, looked on his tablet blindly, and printed a few words.

"All easy now. She floats. Way a cloud sails. High. Plenty sun all round——"

His pencil dropped. The task was growing too hard, the distance too great. "She," the mystic boat carrying a soul, had sailed very high indeed.

Again and again the house, throughout its fabric, strained and chafed like a basket overloaded. Between whiles, there was no more sound of the sea; hardly a sound of breathing.

"Francis, wait for me!" whispered the girl, in sudden terror. "Wait for me!"

He could not possibly have heard, or hearing, understood. So thought all the bystanders. Yet he groped in his lap, until Arthur gave him the pencil and once more held up the tablet.

"I will be round," he wrote, *"somewhere. . . "*

His sunburnt hand, strong even to death, relaxed and fell, but rose, trembled, and growing white and stiff with resolution, made the last mark on the page.

" . . . Always."

The red blood welling within him, under the red scarf which hid his breast, now choked and overflowed some living channel. Godbolt grasped the arms of his chair, essayed to lift his body, suffered apparently the inevitable throe, and lay still. The bright cloud-ship of his fancy had scraped her keel, no more, in gaining the fair-way.

"Leave us alone," said Katherine.

Her grandfather led the young men down into the garden. Anak followed them, joyfully thinking of the poem he had made, and how the village would resound with it before that very midnight.

A lantern glowed beneath a rose-bush, and revealed the skinny form of Satrap crouching there. With a lump of gray coral in either hand, the friendless boatman beat his forehead, stroke on stroke without mercy; for so in ancient days his forefathers had learned to dull their grief.

The girl in the house had no such method.

CHAPTER XIX

THE "ESPERANCE"

SUNRISE, next morning, gilded the gray sails of a schooner that made her way through the channel confidently, like one who knew her soundings and her landmarks. Before she had opened the lagoon full circle, one of her brown look-outs hailed the woods on the port hand, expecting to hear the usual answer, to see the swine-herds burst out from some fernbrake, and run down the beach waving eager arms. So always the swineherds welcomed the family schooner *Esperance*. To-day, however, the lookout called in vain, woods and beach gave back a timorous echo; and the *Esperance,* one hundred and eighty tons, Doctor Corbin commanding, stole halfway across the shallow green light of the lagoon, brought up to an anchor in six fathoms, and evoked no sound but further echo, the flying rumble of her own chains.

"I don't like this," remarked her master, at the

ladder head. He was a round, red, burly little man, with a fair beard close-cropped, and droll blue eyes. His linen clothes were maidenly white, his pumps and helmet crusted with pipe clay—all fresh for shore and lady's company.

"I don't half like this," he repeated. "Not a boat to meet us, Mr. Fraye. Devilish odd. Nobody fishing. And nobody stirring even on the pantalan."

He looked anxiously down the ladder. A clinker-built gig, shining with varnished cedar and brasswork, lay ready to put off. A pair of sea-going islanders in blue-and-white turbans held her at oar's length from the vessel.

"My dear Corbin," laughed a handsome young man, who lolled between the white-bound tiller-ropes. "My dear Corbin, I had really begun to hope that, now your anchor's down, you might discharge your mind of dismal forebodings. The voyage was fairly successful, in spite of them, you must admit?"

Walter Fraye spoke with a gentle, drawling voice, like one who tolerates a rather silly world. A fine, slender, fresh-colored youth with delicate features, and black eyebrows flexible as those of an actor, he had something too much of his sister's beauty. Mouse-gray clothes and a narrow,

mouse-gray helmet made him appear slighter even than he was, and very sleek.

" 'Twould do no harm," pursued the doctor-captain, frowning thoughtfully, "to take a handful of men ashore. In case of trouble, Mr. Fraye——"

The youth was lighting a cigarette. He flipped the match overboard, and observed lazily:

"Thank you, Corbin. I'm quite competent to look after myself, in that case."

Corbin's honest face appeared to bulge and redden.

"Very good, sir!" he replied loudly, and turning, stumped away aft.

"Not coming?" inquired Walter, sweetly. "As you please, Doctor. Shall I send the gig back for you? No? Very well." He shook the canvassed knots of the tiller rope at his boatmen. *"Dayung!* Give way, there!"

"God go with you!" muttered Corbin.

There was little piety about this ejaculation, for it was in a boiling rage that the master of the *Esperance* took refuge under her double awning, ripped off *topi,* tunic, and pumps, and slatted himself into a rawhide chair. So, bare to the waist, with bare feet elevated on the rail, he buried his wrath in a paper novel, and in a mango, of which

the golden pulp outshone his beard as he bit, now and then, slowly and ferociously. Soon afterward he dropped his book, flung overboard the mango stone and rind, and blew off the rest of his mental steam.

"You call yourself her brother!" Corbin glared at his ten toes on the rail. "Her brother! 'Competent to look'—competent, yes, to look after Number One. No fear. Silk-and-satin puppy! Talking so mild, as if your tongue was a wad of salve! Waugh! My word, I kept my temper the whole voyage, anyhow!"

Meanwhile, unaware that any tempers might be ruffled, Walter Fraye had steered his course for the jetty, lounging with a pleasant fragrance of Cavalla tobacco in his nostrils, urbane satisfaction in his heart. The young man took things urbanely always; never more so than on this bright, spring-like morning, as he was rowed home in triumph, a fortnight ahead of the appointed time, with great good news for his family. Let grandfather and Katherine show all the exultation.

"Time they should," he reflected, smiling. "They were quite in the wrong, as I told them when I left. The old governor has some rather peppery words to eat, I fancy."

A glorious bit of weather, he noted: the lagoon

such a vernal green—green as young buds—that color which one sees in a French picture of spring; the shore woods so dark and virile, painted flat; and the sky beyond, glowing without a cloud, so blue.

"A regular 'penitential blue,'" he sighed. "Good phrase, 'penitential.' Wonderful phrase, that of Pater's."

He flung away his cigarette, to swing the boat alongside the jetty ladder.

"Ati ati! Bai!" he told the admiring rowers; then dropped the tiller guides, and climbed the ladder.

The *Esperance* never came home and sent in her boat but half the village thronged this landing stage. To-day not a soul had come there, or to the beach, or to the shadowy depth of the garden.

"It *is* odd!" Walter, sleek and deliberate, sauntered up the narrow platform with a feeling of disappointment. "I do think somebody might have met us. They can't all be asleep."

Entering the grove, he heard a sound which made him pause and listen: a murmur of many voices from somewhere beyond the house—the stir and rustle and subdued buzzing of a multitude, then a great voice uplifted in chanting, like

the voice of a priest or a poet singing his rhapsody.

"Corbin was right," he acknowledged. "It's devilish odd."

Craning his neck, and peering over the shrubbery tops, he saw in a glade to the left of the garden all the villagers standing motionless, close packed in the sunshine, wearing their brightest clothes and holiday garlands. A swarthy giant reared and swayed in their midst, high on a moss-covered mound of brain-coral, as though declaiming from a green velvet stage. It was Anak singing the first canto of his epic.

"That buck nigger? What's he doing?" thought Walter Fraye. "It's not like him to be noisy. Has there been a ship in? Could he have got liquor?"

A few words came through the stillness, a fragment of the chant of Anak:

"What said the Mighty One, what the Deliverer?
Lo, he was dumb, like a sheep at the shearing.
Death mocked Our Captain, fawned on him, leering,
Ready to strike. For us he must die . . . "

Walter turned away in disgust.

"The fool's got religion, and it's gone to his head. Anak used to be quiet enough."

But why did all that concourse remain still, stone still, drinking in the words of a wild singer? Why should the island be empty and silent elsewhere? Fraye shook his head, uneasily; then hurried through alleys of rose bush and honeysuckle, meeting no one, growing more and more dubious, till he ran up the steps of the veranda.

"Oh, here you are, then!" he called, in relief.

Four persons occupied the far end of the veranda, to the right. His grandfather stood talking with two strangers—two sad-faced young men, one of whom carried a broken arm in a sling. Katherine, leaning against a pillar, seemed to watch and hearken after something inside the house. All four turned toward the new-comer in the same listless way, and regarded him with the same listless air, as though he caused some trivial interruption.

"Back, are you?" remarked his grandfather in an undertone, extending a casual hand. "This is Walter, Mr. Tisdale—and Mr. Wallace. You've heard me speak of my grandson."

Walter stared. He could always pass on a snub, however, to men of his own age.

"How are you?" he said, nodding barrenly

as he went by them. "Hello, Kit, old fellow!"

This was a strange and very flat home-coming. Where were the heated questions he had foreseen and prepared cool answers for? Katherine, his own tom-boy sister, instead of crying out and rushing, silently turned, walked toward him with a dream-like dignity, kissed him once on the cheek, and stood back from him. Her pallor, her passive, worn-out expectancy, gave him a shock, which was not lessened when he saw her face change, quicken, flame into a haggard semblance of its old brightness. His return had meant nothing to her, at first; now it meant a great deal, but not what he had the right to expect. Her brown eyes, terribly large, and kindling with wild hope, met and searched him as though he had been a stranger bringing a strange message.

"Where's Corbin?" she asked.

"Aboard schooner, the old misanthrope," he replied. "Why, Kit, have you nothing to say to a chap?"

She cut him short, twining her fingers together at her breast, with a gesture full of pain and hurry.

"The gig, then?" she demanded. "Where's the gig? Rowers? At the jetty?"

Walter gave her stare for stare.

"Of course it's at the jetty," he drawled. "They brought me ashore. Naturally."

Katherine caught from his hand the mouse-gray helmet, and clapping it on her head as she passed him, without a word ran down the steps, down the garden path, toward the lagoon.

Her brother, aggrieved and astonished, watched her disappear among the tall, yellow-spattered croton leaves.

"I hope you've come in time, Walter," said old Fraye. "I hope you're not too late, my boy!"

The youth wheeled angrily.

"Why, sir," he retorted, in his blandest voice, "I thought I'd done more. I thought I was bringing news. It was a rotten stupid voyage with old Corbin, but never mind that. You may care to know that I reached my friend Laurie by the cable. Government House has acted, he tells me, at last. Things are definitely set in motion; so much so that his chief has arranged with the senior naval to send us a gunboat of sorts within the month; the flag is to be raised for you, letters-patent read out, and a grant-in-fee handed you. We so often wished for this very thing, sir, I thought you might be pleased to hear it's almost on the way."

He paused. This neat and debonair report was to be his triumph.

"Ah, very good," sighed his grandfather, vaguely. "Well done, I dare say." The old man cast about, reaching fretfully behind him, for the nearest chair, in which he sat down with great deliberation. "It doesn't much matter, now."

Walter grew righteously indignant.

"Ah, well," said he, thrusting his hands into his pockets, then coldly studying Wallace and Tisdale from top to toe. "If you're busy with your friends, and don't care to hear what's been doing, perhaps I'd better go change into fresh togs."

He turned away toward the house-door.

"Stop. Your room's taken," said old Fraye. "There's a poor chap lying in there who's not long for this world."

Tisdale came forward, with an air of apology.

"We moved your things," he told Walter, "into the bachelors' lines. You'll find the whole lay-out there, ready for you, Mr. Fraye. Pardon me. I must go back on duty. Rob, you'd better make Anak quit singing, or move away farther. We need quiet."

And Tisdale silently dodged into the house. Wallace went lumbering on his errand. They left the veranda free for family talk and privacy.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Walter, watching them go. "What's happened to you, Governor? Taken lodgers?"

The governor tugged his white moustache, and looked steadily, grimly, at his handsome young grandchild.

"Sit down," he ordered. "Many things have happened. Forget yourself a moment. Mace, for one thing, is dead."

Walter was genuinely startled.

"What?" he cried. "Dead? The poor old blighter! Sorry."

Thomas Masterman Fraye made a sour face.

"Our loss," he grunted, "is hell's gain. Sit down, and let me do the talking for once in a way."

Aboard the *Esperance,* Dr. Corbin still kept his bare toes cooling on the taffrail and his cropped yellow beard pointing into the yellow novel. He seemed the picture of a man reading. Yet he had not even turned a page, or understood a word among the printed lines; for he lay thinking, or rather wondering, as any strong but inarticulate man wonders, how curious and deep and confused are those damned things called emotions. Corbin felt moved.

"It's a funny feeling," he told himself. "Old enough to know better."

He was old enough to know that it made no dif-

ference what portion of land or sea his jolly round body happened to cross. He could sit in the Hong Kong club, or the Harmonia, or the Ermita, or the Modderlust, and get up and go out and never be missed. He could sail a ship to beat Vasco de Gama; remember enough schooling to play ship's doctor at a pinch; entertain his passengers, too; keep not only his own temper, but theirs; get along well, bah, even with these Walters; and at the end of any voyage, say the polite thing, shake hands, and be forgotten all round.

"Don't matter where I am," reflected Corbin. "I'm the kind of man, say, at a dinner party, you don't know whether he was there or not. Funny."

Still, for all that, whenever Corbin anchored in the lagoon of Pulo Princess, he felt his surroundings to be tremendously significant. At Pulo Princess he became shy, and with good reason so. The atoll was not like other places. Here he had made an ass of himself, been presumptuous, and must live it down. No mistake about that; he must live it down. Going ashore on Fraye's Atoll and behaving like the quiet old stick people thought him to be, was a task that called forth all his reserves of courage and cheerfulness. Yet no sooner did the *Esperance* anchor in this green lake, and her skipper sit, as now, communing with his

heart, than he grew conscious of profound and undeniable stirrings, a rebellious joy that had no warrant in fact, and a warm, inward persuasion that he was at home and welcome.

"Nonsense," growled Corbin. "You only make her uncomfortable when you go on shore. Stay aboard."

Just as he formed this conclusion, he heard the chock of oars alongside, and the crew of the gig talking. Among their voices he recognized another voice which brought him out of his chair.

"Doctor Corbin!" it hailed.

Corbin pitched away his novel.

"She? No. She out here?" he thought, staring distractedly along the deck. "And me half naked!"

He struggled into his white tunic, buttoned it, and crammed his bare feet into his canvas pumps.

"Doctor Corbin! Doctor! Please come!" cried the voice.

He ran forward to the waist of the ship, and popped his head over the port bulwarks.

"We need you," said Katherine.

Snow-white, except for her brother's gray helmet, she sat below there in the slender gig, holding the rudder-lines, and looking up. The dazzle of varnished cedar, the rowers' colored kilts, the

translucent green background, made her a creature of festival, a holiday shape from some regatta. Corbin lost himself in the delight of seeing her, though it was less like reality than like the dearest and most impossible thought come true. She, of her own accord, to be here visiting the schooner? He marveled, and could not believe. The consolation of his solitude, the figure pervading his regret, sat there and appealed to him with living eyes. It was not right: she should not have come alone . . .

"Please hurry," she said.

Honest Corbin returned to himself, and knew that self for an old fool.

"What's wrong?" he called, quickly. "Your grandfather? Worse?"

Katherine shook her head.

"No. It's Francis. I mean," she added, "the captain. Gunshot wounds. Do come."

"Half a moment," cried the skipper of the *Esperance,* promptly. "My bag's in the medicine chest."

He ran aft as though the ship were on fire, and bounded down into his cabin without touching the companion stairs. Next moment he was at the rail again, carrying a leather satchel, and putting on his helmet as he thundered down the ladder.

"Give way! *Dayung!*" He tumbled into the gig. "Row, boys. *Chupput-chupput!*"

While waiting for him, she had turned the boat's head for shore; now, as the oars caught the water with a racing start, Corbin perceived that the rowers already had their command for speed. The gig leaped and trembled under their stroke. Knee to knee with Katherine, the skipper sat frightened by what he saw. It was not the mortal whiteness of her face, or the blazing brown eyes, so dark and large, that daunted him; it was her look—the look which transformed the quiet and rather timid girl he remembered, into a very lovely but fierce and ambiguous woman. Her beauty went through him like a sword, true steel of the ice-brook's temper, white, flashing, terrible. And yet the look plainly told him, beyond mistake, that of all the world he, Corbin the humble, was now the presence most welcome and necessary to this woman's soul. He could not understand, but he knew it, and was at once alarmed and exalted.

Over the gray helmet the masts of the schooner dwindled in the distance, before she spoke. She held the tiller-ropes as if gripping her courage.

"Doctor," she said, with difficulty, "you once asked me a question."

Corbin's heart thumped faster than the flying oars.

"I know I did," he groaned.

"Don't think I'm cruel," she added, hastily.

He could not bear this at close range, in the pent-up isolation of the boat. He hung his head for a moment, studying the old brown leather bag in his lap.

"Miss Fraye," he began; then managed to laugh, and look up again. "Dear child, you couldn't be if you tried. It's not in you. What's the trouble? Tell me, if I——"

"Because now I understand what it meant to you," she went on. The hardness melted from her face and eyes; that mien of the resolute woman vanished; and here before him sat the young Katherine he worshiped, nearer than she had ever come, and trembling with pity and tenderness. "I couldn't understand," she said. "Not till . . . this came. You were kinder to me, and wiser, than——" She broke off, checked by the futility of words. "My own father and mother could have done no more."

Corbin cleared his throat, and fumbled with the metal clasps of the bag.

"You told me, at the time, that the right man would come," said Katherine. "I never knew what it meant to you. Not till now. He did come."

Corbin looked up quickly. This early morning voyage across the smiling lagoon seemed to have lasted for ages, without beginning or end. He felt a strange fatigue, a conviction that he was no longer young, and that things tired him. The old fool was wiser, but old in earnest. Whirlpools from the rowers' blades went spinning past, round and smooth little pits revolving in the green glass of the water, on which floated oar-drops white and perfect, like scattering pearls. He watched them go for a moment, then remembered his duty.

"I'm glad!" he exclaimed, with all his heart. "I'm very, very glad for you."

They regarded each other steadily.

"He's dying," said Katherine. "In Walter's room. Oh, you mustn't let him die! He can't! You—you?"

Her voice rose in a wail. The hot breath of the island stole across the water and enveloped them, the boat ran smoothly into the glare from the concave beach, and swung alongside the dripping foot of the jetty ladder. Corbin rose. He knew that she was weeping, but did not see her.

"I won't," he promised.

To the core he felt, and acknowledged, his own sickening incompetence. He was only a stray,

a renegade from life, who could neither heal nor comfort. But worst of all, he knew how hard their talk had been for her.

"Up we go," he cried, obstinately. "We won't let him."

CHAPTER XX

TWILIGHT

FOUR days later, at sunset, Arthur Tisdale stood in the big room alone. He was there for a purpose, having slipped away from Wallace and the bachelors' bungalow, and come once more to look at something.

Daylight was already gone from the room, leaving a soft obscurity along the floor and night in the corners. The thing that had drawn him there hung on a plaited wall from which the color of burnt gold was fading.

"She did that well," thought Arthur, as he took his range between the two doorways. "She did it marvelously."

The thing—a portrait—looked out at him from the dusk. Unframed, unfinished, it was the canvas that Katherine had painted by the sea beach, not many evenings ago. She had done well, indeed. From a hazy limbo of green and brown, as from

deep sylvan twilight, Godbolt himself was glancing forth, askance, in his old familiar way. The painting revealed his face, and that only, except where a touch of gray, like the glimmer of a dull breastplate, showed that his body had been large and solid.

"There you are, Sainty, for all time," thought Arthur. "It's good—but not the whole of you."

He stood wondering, a plain man confronted by the greater plainness of art. What was that he missed, while he admired?

A sound of voices broke and dispersed his thought. He was not alone, as he had hoped to be; for someone had spoken, and someone else replied, outside the open windows of the back veranda. He heard the voice of Katherine.

"Waiting?" it said. "But that is so long, Grandfather."

Old Thomas Fraye allowed several moments to pass.

"My child," came his tranquil answer, "I have waited about fifty years, all told."

Another silence followed.

"But that," said the girl's voice, "that is very long."

"Why, no!" replied the elder, bravely. "Not so long. Time flies, and there are many persons

to share it with. We're all waiting, Sweetheart. We do what we can in the meantime. But the truth is, all of us are waiting."

The speakers remained unseen in their quiet corner. Loth to overhear, but very loth to go, Arthur stole one more look at the countenance of his friend. Something, perhaps the gathering darkness, had come to his aid; for now he understood what the portrait lacked. There was the man Godbolt, ready to speak, and yet divested of all speech, of all rough, uncouth, daily imperfection. The dross had gone. Lingering in that twilight, he chose only to unveil his face—his face, kind and proud, sensitive, sad, and loyal.

"The spirit," thought Arthur, "without the body." And of a sudden, the old truth pierced him for the first time. "The spirit is greater."

A footfall sounded in the room. He turned, and saw Walter Fraye approaching.

"Good thing, that," observed the sleek newcomer, with a nod at the portrait. "Don't you find it so? I never knew him, of course, but as a piece of work I think Kit has done herself uncommonly proud."

Tisdale did not reply. For a time the two young men stood side by side.

"Handsome devil," continued Walter, the critic.

"Rather like Bonny Dundee, don't you think? Without the lovelocks, of course."

Tisdale agreed, for courtesy.

"Odd stick he must have been," said Fraye, "by all account. Good chap, but not in any sense a—well, not just one of us, eh? Pity to go get himself killed for nothing."

Twilight now veiled the face from all observers.

"I'm not sure it was a pity," rejoined Arthur, with infinite forbearance. "I'd rather not discuss—— He was my friend. He's dying."

And Arthur left the room. He had some vague intention of going back to join Wallace—good, honest, dull old Rob. In the garden, however, he came to a standstill, and remained there, thinking. Pity? It was no pity. Walter Fraye had set him in a rage, not only on his friend's behalf, but on his own; for in that young urbanity he had discovered himself as in a living mirror, facile, cold-hearted, pleased with his own freedom.

The garden held an old-time spice. He looked on the ground before him, and saw a bed of clustered colors, dim in the evening light.

"Sainty's gilly-flowers," he said aloud. "Still going on, and still so pretty. I must tell Katherine." And to himself: "I wish I could feel sure as Katherine does, about that waiting."

While he stood inhaling a memory, doubting the future, there came as it were news from beyond. Many a time Tisdale had heard the sea, as a weary noise; but now in the garden, in the flowered gloom and sweetness, he was aware of a vast, uncertain thrill, a far cry sounding through the eastern trees. A new voice, yet very old, it called him without haste.

The young man laughed.

"I understand," he said. "We overtake our friends. All right, old fellow, I begin at the starting point."

He was about to turn away, when somebody came slowly toward him from the house. Tisdale glanced thither, and saw a white figure approaching, with such blind steps that it tottered from the path and brushed the bordering leaves. It stopped. Something told him this exhausted one was Doctor Corbin. The long fight had ended.

While the man faltered there, a second white figure came gliding like a strip of mist.

"Wait! Oh, wait!" called a low voice, broken with weeping.

The voice was that of Katherine. She darted closer, and with an inarticulate sound, seemed ready to throw her arms round Corbin. That weary figure shrank backward.

"Not *me,*" said the skipper's voice, harshly. "Not me. I'm tough, but I couldn't bear that. He . . . He's a very fortunate man, and deserves it. Yes, by God, he does deserve it. I beg your pardon, poor child. I'm just a little bit used up. Where's Rob Wallace? Think I need a smoke or something."

Tisdale heard the doctor muttering still as he passed, in the gloom, toward the bachelors' house.

Katherine came straight forward. The young man drew aside, but as their shadows met, she put forth a hand.

"He's going to live," she said.

Arthur could not find a word.

"Yes," said Katherine, as if answering that silence. "He is going to live."

She passed by, and was gone among the other shadows. Arthur lost the white blur of her garments, then saw it again, or thought he saw it. By its motion, she seemed to be kneeling in the path, burying her face among the clove gilly-flowers.

A belated fisherman rowing home across the lagoon, out where distance glimmered, began to halloo and sing the new Song of Anak; but his lonely rejoicing came at intervals, overborne and belittled by the sterner voice of the surf.

THE END

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