

### III

Lingard's gaze, detaching itself from the silent sea, travelled slowly over the silent figures clustering forward, over the faces of the seamen attentive and surprised, over the faces never seen before yet suggesting old days--his youth--other seas--the distant shores of early memories. Mr. Travers gave a start also, and the hand which had been busy with his left whisker went into the pocket of his jacket, as though he had plucked out something worth keeping. He made a quick step toward Lingard.

"I don't see my way to utilize your services," he said, with cold finality.

Lingard, grasping his beard, looked down at him thoughtfully for a short time.

"Perhaps it's just as well," he said, very slowly, "because I did not offer my services. I've offered to take you on board my brig for a few days, as your only chance of safety. And you asked me what were my motives. My motives! If you don't see them they are not for you to know."

And these men who, two hours before had never seen each other, stood for a moment close together, antagonistic, as if they had been life-long enemies, one short, dapper and glaring upward, the other towering heavily, and looking down in contempt and anger.

Mr. d'Alcacer, without taking his eyes off them, bent low over the deck chair.

"Have you ever seen a man dashing himself at a stone wall?" he asked, confidentially.

"No," said Mrs. Travers, gazing straight before her above the slow flutter of the fan. "No, I did not know it was ever done; men burrow under or slip round quietly while they look the other way."

"Ah! you define diplomacy," murmured d'Alcacer. "A little of it here would do no harm. But our picturesque visitor has none of it. I've a great liking for him."

"Already!" breathed out Mrs. Travers, with a smile that touched her lips with its bright wing and was flown almost before it could be seen.

"There is liking at first sight," affirmed d'Alcacer, "as well as love at first sight--the coup de foudre--you know."

She looked up for a moment, and he went on, gravely: "I think it is the truest, the most profound of sentiments. You do not love because of what is in the other. You love because of something that is in you--something alive--in yourself." He struck his breast lightly with the tip of one finger. "A capacity in you. And not everyone may have it--not everyone deserves to be touched by fire from heaven."

"And die," she said.

He made a slight movement.

"Who can tell? That is as it may be. But it is always a privilege, even if one must live a little after being burnt."

Through the silence between them, Mr. Travers' voice came plainly, saying with irritation:

"I've told you already that I do not want you. I've sent a messenger to the governor of the Straits. Don't be importunate."

Then Lingard, standing with his back to them, growled out something which must have exasperated Mr. Travers, because his voice was pitched higher:

"You are playing a dangerous game, I warn you. Sir John, as it happens, is a personal friend of mine. He will send a cruiser--" and Lingard interrupted recklessly loud:

"As long as she does not get here for the next ten days, I don't care. Cruisers are scarce just now in the Straits; and to turn my back on you is no hanging matter anyhow. I would risk that, and more! Do you hear? And more!"

He stamped his foot heavily, Mr. Travers stepped back.

"You will gain nothing by trying to frighten me," he said. "I don't know who you are."

Every eye in the yacht was wide open. The men, crowded upon each other, stared stupidly like a flock of sheep. Mr. Travers pulled out a handkerchief and passed it over his forehead. The face of the sailing-master who leaned against the main mast--as near as he dared to approach the gentry--was shining and crimson between white whiskers, like a glowing coal between two patches of snow.

D'Alcacer whispered:

"It is a quarrel, and the picturesque man is angry. He is hurt."

Mrs. Travers' fan rested on her knees, and she sat still as if waiting to hear more.

"Do you think I ought to make an effort for peace?" asked d'Alcacer.

She did not answer, and after waiting a little, he insisted:

"What is your opinion? Shall I try to mediate--as a neutral, as a benevolent neutral? I like that man with the beard."

The interchange of angry phrases went on aloud, amidst general consternation.

"I would turn my back on you only I am thinking of these poor devils here," growled Lingard, furiously. "Did you ask them how they feel about it?"

"I ask no one," spluttered Mr. Travers. "Everybody here depends on my judgment."

"I am sorry for them then," pronounced Lingard with sudden deliberation, and leaning forward with his arms crossed on his breast.

At this Mr. Travers positively jumped, and forgot himself so far as to shout:

"You are an impudent fellow. I have nothing more to say to you."

D'Alcacer, after muttering to himself, "This is getting serious," made a movement, and could not believe his ears when he heard Mrs. Travers say rapidly with a kind of fervour:

"Don't go, pray; don't stop them. Oh! This is truth--this is anger--something real at last."

D'Alcacer leaned back at once against the rail.

Then Mr. Travers, with one arm extended, repeated very loudly:

"Nothing more to say. Leave my ship at once!"

And directly the black dog, stretched at his wife's feet, muzzle on paws and blinking yellow eyes, growled discontentedly at the noise. Mrs. Travers laughed a faint, bright laugh, that seemed to escape, to glide, to dart between her white

teeth. D'Alcacer, concealing his amazement, was looking down at her gravely: and after a slight gasp, she said with little bursts of merriment between every few words:

"No, but this is--such--such a fresh experience for me to hear--to see something--genuine and human. Ah! ah! one would think they had waited all their lives for this opportunity--ah! ah! ah! All their lives--for this! ah! ah! ah!"

These strange words struck d'Alcacer as perfectly just, as throwing an unexpected light. But after a smile, he said, seriously:

"This reality may go too far. A man who looks so picturesque is capable of anything. Allow me--" And he left her side, moving toward Lingard, loose-limbed and gaunt, yet having in his whole bearing, in his walk, in every leisurely movement, an air of distinction and ceremony.

Lingard spun round with aggressive mien to the light touch on his shoulder, but as soon as he took his eyes off Mr. Travers, his anger fell, seemed to sink without a sound at his feet like a rejected garment.

"Pardon me," said d'Alcacer, composedly. The slight wave of his hand was hardly more than an indication, the beginning of a conciliating gesture. "Pardon me; but this is a matter requiring perfect confidence on both sides. Don Martin, here, who is a person of importance. . . ."

"I've spoken my mind plainly. I have said as much as I dare. On my word I have," declared Lingard with an air of good temper.

"Ah!" said d'Alcacer, reflectively, "then your reserve is a matter of pledged faith--of--of honour?"

Lingard also appeared thoughtful for a moment.

"You may put it that way. And I owe nothing to a man who couldn't see my hand when I put it out to him as I came aboard."

"You have so much the advantage of us here," replied d'Alcacer, "that you may well be generous and forget that oversight; and then just a little more confidence. . . ."

"My dear d'Alcacer, you are absurd," broke in Mr. Travers, in a calm voice but with white lips. "I did not come out all this way to shake hands promiscuously and receive confidences from the first adventurer that comes along."

D'Alcacer stepped back with an almost imperceptible inclination of the head at Lingard, who stood for a moment with twitching face.

"I am an adventurer," he burst out, "and if I hadn't been an adventurer, I would have had to starve or work at home for such people as you. If I weren't an adventurer, you would be most likely lying dead on this deck with your cut throat gaping at the sky."

Mr. Travers waved this speech away. But others also had heard. Carter listened watchfully and something, some alarming notion seemed to dawn all at once upon the thick little sailing-master, who rushed on his short legs, and tugging at Carter's sleeve, stammered desperately:

"What's he saying? Who's he? What's up? Are the natives unfriendly? My book says--'Natives friendly all along this coast!' My book says--"

Carter, who had glanced over the side, jerked his arm free.

"You go down into the pantry, where you belong, Skipper, and read that bit about the natives over again," he said to his superior officer, with savage contempt. "I'll be hanged if some of them ain't coming aboard now to eat you--book and all. Get out of the way, and let the gentlemen have the first chance of a row."

Then addressing Lingard, he drawled in his old way:

"That crazy mate of yours has sent your boat back, with a couple of visitors in her, too."

Before he apprehended plainly the meaning of these words, Lingard caught sight of two heads rising above the rail, the head of Hassim and the head of Immada. Then their bodies ascended into view as though these two beings had gradually emerged from the Shallows. They stood for a moment on the platform looking down on the deck as if about to step into the unknown, then descended and walking aft entered the half-light under the awning shading the luxurious surroundings, the complicated emotions of the, to them, inconceivable existences.

Lingard without waiting a moment cried:

"What news, O Rajah?"

Hassim's eyes made the round of the schooner's decks. He had left his gun in the boat and advanced empty handed, with a tranquil assurance as if bearing a

welcome offering in the faint smile of his lips. Immada, half hidden behind his shoulder, followed lightly, her elbows pressed close to her side. The thick fringe of her eyelashes was dropped like a veil; she looked youthful and brooding; she had an aspect of shy resolution.

They stopped within arm's length of the whites, and for some time nobody said a word. Then Hassim gave Lingard a significant glance, and uttered rapidly with a slight toss of the head that indicated in a manner the whole of the yacht:

"I see no guns!"

"N--no!" said Lingard, looking suddenly confused. It had occurred to him that for the first time in two years or more he had forgotten, utterly forgotten, these people's existence.

Immada stood slight and rigid with downcast eyes. Hassim, at his ease, scrutinized the faces, as if searching for elusive points of similitude or for subtle shades of difference.

"What is this new intrusion?" asked Mr. Travers, angrily.

"These are the fisher-folk, sir," broke in the sailing-master, "we've observed these three days past flitting about in a canoe; but they never had the sense to answer our hail; and yet a bit of fish for your breakfast--" He smiled obsequiously, and all at once, without provocation, began to bellow:

"Hey! Johnnie! Hab got fish? Fish! One peecee fish! Eh? Savee? Fish! Fish--" He gave it up suddenly to say in a deferential tone--"Can't make them savages understand anything, sir," and withdrew as if after a clever feat.

Hassim looked at Lingard.

"Why did the little white man make that outcry?" he asked, anxiously.

"Their desire is to eat fish," said Lingard in an enraged tone.

Then before the air of extreme surprise which incontinently appeared on the other's face, he could not restrain a short and hopeless laugh.

"Eat fish," repeated Hassim, staring. "O you white people! O you white people! Eat fish! Good! But why make that noise? And why did you send them here without guns?" After a significant glance down upon the slope of the deck caused by the vessel being on the ground, he added with a slight nod at Lingard--"And without

knowledge?"

"You should not have come here, O Hassim," said Lingard, testily. "Here no one understands. They take a rajah for a fisherman--"

"Ya-wa! A great mistake, for, truly, the chief of ten fugitives without a country is much less than the headman of a fishing village," observed Hassim, composedly. Immada sighed. "But you, Tuan, at least know the truth," he went on with quiet irony; then after a pause--"We came here because you had forgotten to look toward us, who had waited, sleeping little at night, and in the day watching with hot eyes the empty water at the foot of the sky for you."

Immada murmured, without lifting her head:

"You never looked for us. Never, never once."

"There was too much trouble in my eyes," explained Lingard with that patient gentleness of tone and face which, every time he spoke to the young girl, seemed to disengage itself from his whole person, enveloping his fierceness, softening his aspect, such as the dreamy mist that in the early radiance of the morning weaves a veil of tender charm about a rugged rock in mid-ocean. "I must look now to the right and to the left as in a time of sudden danger," he added after a moment and she whispered an appalled "Why?" so low that its pain floated away in the silence of attentive men, without response, unheard, ignored, like the pain of an impalpable thought.