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The afternoon dragged itself out in silence. Mrs. Travers sat pensive and idle with her fan on her knees. D'Alcacer, who thought the incident should have been treated in a conciliatory spirit, attempted to communicate his view to his host, but that gentleman, purposely misunderstanding his motive, overwhelmed him with so many apologies and expressions of regret at the irksome and perhaps inconvenient delay "which you suffer from through your good-natured acceptance of our invitation" that the other was obliged to refrain from pursuing the subject further.

"Even my regard for you, my dear d'Alcacer, could not induce me to submit to such a bare-faced attempt at extortion," affirmed Mr. Travers with uncompromising virtue. "The man wanted to force his services upon me, and then put in a heavy claim for salvage. That is the whole secret--you may depend on it. I detected him at once, of course." The eye-glass glittered perspicuously. "He underrated my intelligence; and what a violent scoundrel! The existence of such a man in the time we live in is a scandal."

D'Alcacer retired, and, full of vague forebodings, tried in vain for hours to interest himself in a book. Mr. Travers walked up and down restlessly, trying to persuade himself that his indignation was based on purely moral grounds. The glaring day, like a mass of white-hot iron withdrawn from the fire, was losing gradually its heat and its glare in a richer deepening of tone. At the usual time two seamen, walking noiselessly aft in their yachting shoes, rolled up in silence the quarter-deck screens; and the coast, the shallows, the dark islets and the snowy sandbanks uncovered thus day after day were seen once more in their aspect of dumb watchfulness. The brig, swung end on in the foreground, her squared yards crossing heavily the soaring symmetry of the rigging, resembled a creature instinct with life, with the power of springing into action lurking in the light grace of its repose.

A pair of stewards in white jackets with brass buttons appeared on deck and began to flit about without a sound, laying the table for dinner on the flat top of the cabin skylight. The sun, drifting away toward other lands, toward other seas, toward other men; the sun, all red in a cloudless sky raked the yacht with a parting salvo of crimson rays that shattered themselves into sparks of fire upon the crystal and silver of the dinner-service, put a short flame into the blades of knives, and spread a rosy tint over the white of plates. A trail of purple, like a smear of blood on a blue shield, lay over the sea.

On sitting down Mr. Travers alluded in a vexed tone to the necessity of living on preserves, all the stock of fresh provisions for the passage to Batavia having been already consumed. It was distinctly unpleasant.

"I don't travel for my pleasure, however," he added; "and the belief that the sacrifice of my time and comfort will be productive of some good to the world at large would make up for any amount of privations."

Mrs. Travers and d'Alcacer seemed unable to shake off a strong aversion to talk, and the conversation, like an expiring breeze, kept on dying out repeatedly after each languid gust. The large silence of the horizon, the profound repose of all things visible, enveloping the bodies and penetrating the souls with their quieting influence, stilled thought as well as voice. For a long time no one spoke. Behind the taciturnity of the masters the servants hovered without noise.

Suddenly, Mr. Travers, as if concluding a train of thought, muttered aloud:

"I own with regret I did in a measure lose my temper; but then you will admit that the existence of such a man is a disgrace to civilization."

This remark was not taken up and he returned for a time to the nursing of his indignation, at the bottom of which, like a monster in a fog, crept a bizarre feeling of rancour. He waved away an offered dish.

"This coast," he began again, "has been placed under the sole protection of Holland by the Treaty of 1820. The Treaty of 1820 creates special rights and obligations. . . ."

Both his hearers felt vividly the urgent necessity to hear no more. D'Alcacer, uncomfortable on a campstool, sat stiff and stared at the glass stopper of a carafe. Mrs. Travers turned a little sideways and leaning on her elbow rested her head on the palm of her hand like one thinking about matters of profound import. Mr. Travers talked; he talked inflexibly, in a harsh blank voice, as if reading a proclamation. The other two, as if in a state of incomplete trance, had their ears assailed by fragments of official verbiage.

"An international understanding--the duty to civilize--failed to carry out--compact--Canning--" D'Alcacer became attentive for a moment. "--not that this attempt, almost amusing in its impudence, influences my opinion. I won't admit the possibility of any violence being offered to people of our position. It is the social aspect of such an incident I am desirous of criticising."

Here d'Alcacer lost himself again in the recollection of Mrs. Travers and Immada

looking at each other--the beginning and the end, the flower and the leaf, the phrase and the cry. Mr. Travers' voice went on dogmatic and obstinate for a long time. The end came with a certain vehemence.

"And if the inferior race must perish, it is a gain, a step toward the perfecting of society which is the aim of progress."

He ceased. The sparks of sunset in crystal and silver had gone out, and around the yacht the expanse of coast and Shallows seemed to await, unmoved, the coming of utter darkness. The dinner was over a long time ago and the patient stewards had been waiting, stoical in the downpour of words like sentries under a shower.

Mrs. Travers rose nervously and going aft began to gaze at the coast. Behind her the sun, sunk already, seemed to force through the mass of waters the glow of an unextinguishable fire, and below her feet, on each side of the yacht, the lustrous sea, as if reflecting the colour of her eyes, was tinged a sombre violet hue.

D'Alcacer came up to her with quiet footsteps and for some time they leaned side by side over the rail in silence. Then he said--"How quiet it is!" and she seemed to perceive that the quietness of that evening was more profound and more significant than ever before. Almost without knowing it she murmured--"It's like a dream." Another long silence ensued; the tranquillity of the universe had such an August ampleness that the sounds remained on the lips as if checked by the fear of profanation. The sky was limpid like a diamond, and under the last gleams of sunset the night was spreading its veil over the earth. There was something precious and soothing in the beautifully serene end of that expiring day, of the day vibrating, glittering and ardent, and dying now in infinite peace, without a stir, without a tremor, without a sigh--in the certitude of resurrection.

Then all at once the shadow deepened swiftly, the stars came out in a crowd, scattering a rain of pale sparks upon the blackness of the water, while the coast stretched low down, a dark belt without a gleam. Above it the top-hamper of the brig loomed indistinct and high.

Mrs. Travers spoke first.

"How unnaturally quiet! It is like a desert of land and water without a living soul."

"One man at least dwells in it," said d'Alcacer, lightly, "and if he is to be believed there are other men, full of evil intentions."

"Do you think it is true?" Mrs. Travers asked.

Before answering d'Alcacer tried to see the expression of her face but the obscurity was too profound already.

"How can one see a dark truth on such a dark night?" he said, evasively. "But it is easy to believe in evil, here or anywhere else."

She seemed to be lost in thought for a while.

"And that man himself?" she asked.

After some time d'Alcacer began to speak slowly. "Rough, uncommon, decidedly uncommon of his kind. Not at all what Don Martin thinks him to be. For the rest--mysterious to me. He is your countryman after all--"

She seemed quite surprised by that view.

"Yes," she said, slowly. "But you know, I can not--what shall I say?--imagine him at all. He has nothing in common with the mankind I know. There is nothing to begin upon. How does such a man live? What are his thoughts? His actions? His affections? His--"

"His conventions," suggested d'Alcacer. "That would include everything."

Mr. Travers appeared suddenly behind them with a glowing cigar in his teeth. He took it between his fingers to declare with persistent acrimony that no amount of "scoundrelly intimidation" would prevent him from having his usual walk. There was about three hundred yards to the southward of the yacht a sandbank nearly a mile long, gleaming a silvery white in the darkness, plummeted in the centre with a thicket of dry bushes that rustled very loud in the slightest stir of the heavy night air. The day after the stranding they had landed on it "to stretch their legs a bit," as the sailing-master defined it, and every evening since, as if exercising a privilege or performing a duty, the three paced there for an hour backward and forward lost in dusky immensity, threading at the edge of water the belt of damp sand, smooth, level, elastic to the touch like living flesh and sweating a little under the pressure of their feet.

This time d'Alcacer alone followed Mr. Travers. Mrs. Travers heard them get into the yacht's smallest boat, and the night-watchman, tugging at a pair of sculls, pulled them off to the nearest point. Then the man returned. He came up the ladder and she heard him say to someone on deck:

"Orders to go back in an hour."

His footsteps died out forward, and a somnolent, unbreathing repose took possession of the stranded yacht.