

IV

Lingard repeated it all to Mrs. Travers. Her courage, her intelligence, the quickness of her apprehension, the colour of her eyes and the intrepidity of her glance evoked in him an admiring enthusiasm. She stood by his side! Every moment that fatal illusion clung closer to his soul--like a garment of light--like an armour of fire.

He was unwilling to face the facts. All his life--till that day--had been a wrestle with events in the daylight of this world, but now he could not bring his mind to the consideration of his position. It was Mrs. Travers who, after waiting awhile, forced on him the pain of thought by wanting to know what bearing Hassim's news had upon the situation.

Lingard had not the slightest doubt Daman wanted him to know what had been done with the prisoners. That is why Daman had welcomed Hassim, and let him hear the decision and had allowed him to leave the camp on the sandbank. There could be only one object in this; to let him, Lingard, know that the prisoners had been put out of his reach as long as he remained in his brig. Now this brig was his strength. To make him leave his brig was like removing his hand from his sword.

"Do you understand what I mean, Mrs. Travers?" he asked. "They are afraid of me because I know how to fight this brig. They fear the brig because when I am on board her, the brig and I are one. An armed man--don't you see? Without the brig I am disarmed, without me she can't strike. So Daman thinks. He does not know everything but he is not far off the truth. He says to himself that if I man the boats to go after these whites into the lagoon then his Illanuns will get the yacht for sure--and perhaps the brig as well. If I stop here with my brig he holds the two white men and can talk as big as he pleases. Belarab believes in me no doubt, but Daman trusts no man on earth. He simply does not know how to trust any one, because he is always plotting himself. He came to help me and as soon as he found I was not there he began to plot with Tengga. Now he has made a move--a clever move; a cleverer move than he thinks. Why? I'll tell you why. Because I, Tom Lingard, haven't a single white man aboard this brig I can trust. Not one. I only just discovered my mate's got the notion I am some kind of pirate. And all your yacht people think the same. It is as though you had brought a curse on me in your yacht. Nobody believes me. Good God! What have I come to! Even those two--look at them--I say look at them! By all the stars they doubt me! Me! . . ."

He pointed at Hassim and Immada. The girl seemed frightened. Hassim looked on

calm and intelligent with inexhaustible patience. Lingard's voice fell suddenly.

"And by heavens they may be right. Who knows? You? Do you know? They have waited for years. Look. They are waiting with heavy hearts. Do you think that I don't care? Ought I to have kept it all in--told no one--no one--not even you? Are they waiting for what will never come now?"

Mrs. Travers rose and moved quickly round the table. "Can we give anything to this--this Daman or these other men? We could give them more than they could think of asking. I--my husband. . . ."

"Don't talk to me of your husband," he said, roughly. "You don't know what you are doing." She confronted the sombre anger of his eyes--"But I must," she asserted with heat.--"Must," he mused, noticing that she was only half a head less tall than himself. "Must! Oh, yes. Of course, you must. Must! Yes. But I don't want to hear. Give! What can you give? You may have all the treasures of the world for all I know. No! You can't give anything. . . ."

"I was thinking of your difficulty when I spoke," she interrupted. His eyes wandered downward following the line of her shoulder.--"Of me--of me!" he repeated.

All this was said almost in whispers. The sound of slow footsteps was heard on deck above their heads. Lingard turned his face to the open skylight.

"On deck there! Any wind?"

All was still for a moment. Somebody above answered in a leisurely tone:

"A steady little draught from the northward."

Then after a pause added in a mutter:

"Pitch dark."

"Aye, dark enough," murmured Lingard. He must do something. Now. At once. The world was waiting. The world full of hopes and fear. What should he do? Instead of answering that question he traced the ungleaming coils of her twisted hair and became fascinated by a stray lock at her neck. What should he do? No one to leave his brig to. The voice that had answered his question was Carter's voice. "He is hanging about keeping his eye on me," he said to Mrs. Travers. She shook her head and tried to smile. The man above coughed discreetly. "No," said Lingard, "you must understand that you have nothing to give."

The man on deck who seemed to have lingered by the skylight was heard saying quietly, "I am at hand if you want me, Mrs. Travers." Hassim and Immada looked up. "You see," exclaimed Lingard. "What did I tell you? He's keeping his eye on me! On board my own ship. Am I dreaming? Am I in a fever? Tell him to come down," he said after a pause. Mrs. Travers did so and Lingard thought her voice very commanding and very sweet. "There's nothing in the world I love so much as this brig," he went on. "Nothing in the world. If I lost her I would have no standing room on the earth for my feet. You don't understand this. You can't."

Carter came in and shut the cabin door carefully. He looked with serenity at everyone in turn.

"All quiet?" asked Lingard.

"Quiet enough if you like to call it so," he answered. "But if you only put your head outside the door you'll hear them all on the quarter-deck snoring against each other, as if there were no wives at home and no pirates at sea."

"Look here," said Lingard. "I found out that I can't trust my mate."

"Can't you?" drawled Carter. "I am not exactly surprised. I must say he does not snore but I believe it is because he is too crazy to sleep. He waylaid me on the poop just now and said something about evil communications corrupting good manners. Seems to me I've heard that before. Queer thing to say. He tried to make it out somehow that if he wasn't corrupt it wasn't your fault. As if this was any concern of mine. He's as mad as he's fat--or else he puts it on." Carter laughed a little and leaned his shoulders against a bulkhead.

Lingard gazed at the woman who expected so much from him and in the light she seemed to shed he saw himself leading a column of armed boats to the attack of the Settlement. He could burn the whole place to the ground and drive every soul of them into the bush. He could! And there was a surprise, a shock, a vague horror at the thought of the destructive power of his will. He could give her ever so many lives. He had seen her yesterday, and it seemed to him he had been all his life waiting for her to make a sign. She was very still. He pondered a plan of attack. He saw smoke and flame--and next moment he saw himself alone amongst shapeless ruins with the whispers, with the sigh and moan of the Shallows in his ears. He shuddered, and shaking his hand:

"No! I cannot give you all those lives!" he cried.

Then, before Mrs. Travers could guess the meaning of this outburst, he declared

that as the two captives must be saved he would go alone into the lagoon. He could not think of using force. "You understand why," he said to Mrs. Travers and she whispered a faint "Yes." He would run the risk alone. His hope was in Belarab being able to see where his true interest lay. "If I can only get at him I would soon make him see," he mused aloud. "Haven't I kept his power up for these two years past? And he knows it, too. He feels it." Whether he would be allowed to reach Belarab was another matter. Lingard lost himself in deep thought. "He would not dare," he burst out. Mrs. Travers listened with parted lips. Carter did not move a muscle of his youthful and self-possessed face; only when Lingard, turning suddenly, came up close to him and asked with a red flash of eyes and in a lowered voice, "Could you fight this brig?" something like a smile made a stir amongst the hairs of his little fair moustache.

"Could I?" he said. "I could try, anyhow." He paused, and added hardly above his breath, "For the lady--of course."

Lingard seemed staggered as though he had been hit in the chest. "I was thinking of the brig," he said, gently.

"Mrs. Travers would be on board," retorted Carter.

"What! on board. Ah yes; on board. Where else?" stammered Lingard.

Carter looked at him in amazement. "Fight! You ask!" he said, slowly. "You just try me."

"I shall," ejaculated Lingard. He left the cabin calling out "serang!" A thin cracked voice was heard immediately answering, "Tuan!" and the door slammed to.

"You trust him, Mrs. Travers?" asked Carter, rapidly.

"You do not--why?" she answered.

"I can't make him out. If he was another kind of man I would say he was drunk," said Carter. "Why is he here at all--he, and this brig of his? Excuse my boldness--but have you promised him anything?"

"I--I promised!" exclaimed Mrs. Travers in a bitter tone which silenced Carter for a moment.

"So much the better," he said at last. "Let him show what he can do first and . . ."

"Here! Take this," said Lingard, who re-entered the cabin fumbling about his

neck. Carter mechanically extended his hand.

"What's this for?" he asked, looking at a small brass key attached to a thin chain.

"Powder magazine. Trap door under the table. The man who has this key commands the brig while I am away. The serang understands. You have her very life in your hand there."

Carter looked at the small key lying in his half-open palm.

"I was just telling Mrs. Travers I didn't trust you--not altogether. . . ."

"I know all about it," interrupted Lingard, contemptuously. "You carry a blamed pistol in your pocket to blow my brains out--don't you? What's that to me? I am thinking of the brig. I think I know your sort. You will do."

"Well, perhaps I might," mumbled Carter, modestly.

"Don't be rash," said Lingard, anxiously. "If you've got to fight use your head as well as your hands. If there's a breeze fight under way. If they should try to board in a calm, trust to the small arms to hold them off. Keep your head and--" He looked intensely into Carter's eyes; his lips worked without a sound as though he had been suddenly struck dumb. "Don't think about me. What's that to you who I am? Think of the ship," he burst out. "Don't let her go!--Don't let her go!" The passion in his voice impressed his hearers who for a time preserved a profound silence.

"All right," said Carter at last. "I will stick to your brig as though she were my own; but I would like to see clear through all this. Look here--you are going off somewhere? Alone, you said?"

"Yes. Alone."

"Very well. Mind, then, that you don't come back with a crowd of those brown friends of yours--or by the Heavens above us I won't let you come within hail of your own ship. Am I to keep this key?"

"Captain Lingard," said Mrs. Travers suddenly. "Would it not be better to tell him everything?"

"Tell him everything?" repeated Lingard. "Everything! Yesterday it might have been done. Only yesterday! Yesterday, did I say? Only six hours ago--only six hours ago I had something to tell. You heard it. And now it's gone. Tell him!

There's nothing to tell any more." He remained for a time with bowed head, while before him Mrs. Travers, who had begun a gesture of protest, dropped her arms suddenly. In a moment he looked up again.

"Keep the key," he said, calmly, "and when the time comes step forward and take charge. I am satisfied."

"I would like to see clear through all this though," muttered Carter again. "And for how long are you leaving us, Captain?" Lingard made no answer. Carter waited awhile. "Come, sir," he urged. "I ought to have some notion. What is it? Two, three days?" Lingard started.

"Days," he repeated. "Ah, days. What is it you want to know? Two . . . three--what did the old fellow say--perhaps for life." This was spoken so low that no one but Carter heard the last words.--"Do you mean it?" he murmured. Lingard nodded.--"Wait as long as you can--then go," he said in the same hardly audible voice. "Go where?"--"Where you like, nearest port, any port."--"Very good. That's something plain at any rate," commented the young man with imperturbable good humour.

"I go, O Hassim!" began Lingard and the Malay made a slow inclination of the head which he did not raise again till Lingard had ceased speaking. He betrayed neither surprise nor any other emotion while Lingard in a few concise and sharp sentences made him acquainted with his purpose to bring about singlehanded the release of the prisoners. When Lingard had ended with the words: "And you must find a way to help me in the time of trouble, O Rajah Hassim," he looked up and said:

"Good. You never asked me for anything before."

He smiled at his white friend. There was something subtle in the smile and afterward an added firmness in the repose of the lips. Immada moved a step forward. She looked at Lingard with terror in her black and dilated eyes. She exclaimed in a voice whose vibration startled the hearts of all the hearers with an indefinable sense of alarm, "He will perish, Hassim! He will perish alone!"

"No," said Hassim. "Thy fear is as vain to-night as it was at sunrise. He shall not perish alone."

Her eyelids dropped slowly. From her veiled eyes the tears fell, vanishing in the silence. Lingard's forehead became furrowed by folds that seemed to contain an infinity of sombre thoughts. "Remember, O Hassim, that when I promised you to take you back to your country you promised me to be a friend to all white men. A friend to all whites who are of my people, forever."

"My memory is good, O Tuan," said Hassim; "I am not yet back in my country, but is not everyone the ruler of his own heart? Promises made by a man of noble birth live as long as the speaker endures."

"Good-bye," said Lingard to Mrs. Travers. "You will be safe here." He looked all around the cabin. "I leave you," he began again and stopped short. Mrs. Travers' hand, resting lightly on the edge of the table, began to tremble. "It's for you . . . Yes. For you alone . . . and it seems it can't be. . . ."

It seemed to him that he was saying good-bye to all the world, that he was taking a last leave of his own self. Mrs. Travers did not say a word, but Immada threw herself between them and cried:

"You are a cruel woman! You are driving him away from where his strength is. You put madness into his heart, O! Blind--without pity--without shame! . . ."

"Immada," said Hassim's calm voice. Nobody moved.

"What did she say to me?" faltered Mrs. Travers and again repeated in a voice that sounded hard, "What did she say?"

"Forgive her," said Lingard. "Her fears are for me . . ."--"It's about your going?" Mrs. Travers interrupted, swiftly.

"Yes, it is--and you must forgive her." He had turned away his eyes with something that resembled embarrassment but suddenly he was assailed by an irresistible longing to look again at that woman. At the moment of parting he clung to her with his glance as a man holds with his hands a priceless and disputed possession. The faint blush that overspread gradually Mrs. Travers' features gave her face an air of extraordinary and startling animation.

"The danger you run?" she asked, eagerly. He repelled the suggestion by a slighting gesture of the hand.--"Nothing worth looking at twice. Don't give it a thought," he said. "I've been in tighter places." He clapped his hands and waited till he heard the cabin door open behind his back. "Steward, my pistols." The mulatto in slippers, aproned to the chin, glided through the cabin with unseeing eyes as though for him no one there had existed. . . .--"Is it my heart that aches so?" Mrs. Travers asked herself, contemplating Lingard's motionless figure. "How long will this sensation of dull pain last? Will it last forever. . . ."--"How many changes of clothes shall I put up, sir?" asked the steward, while Lingard took the pistols from him and eased the hammers after putting on fresh caps.--"I will take nothing this time, steward." He received in turn from the mulatto's hands a red

silk handkerchief, a pocket book, a cigar-case. He knotted the handkerchief loosely round his throat; it was evident he was going through the routine of every departure for the shore; he even opened the cigar-case to see whether it had been filled.--"Hat, sir," murmured the half-caste. Lingard flung it on his head.--"Take your orders from this lady, steward--till I come back. The cabin is hers--do you hear?" He sighed ready to go and seemed unable to lift a foot.--"I am coming with you," declared Mrs. Travers suddenly in a tone of unalterable decision. He did not look at her; he did not even look up; he said nothing, till after Carter had cried: "You can't, Mrs. Travers!"--when without budging he whispered to himself:--"Of course." Mrs. Travers had pulled already the hood of her cloak over her head and her face within the dark cloth had turned an intense and unearthly white, in which the violet of her eyes appeared unfathomably mysterious. Carter started forward.--"You don't know this man," he almost shouted.

"I do know him," she said, and before the reproachfully unbelieving attitude of the other she added, speaking slowly and with emphasis: "There is not, I verily believe, a single thought or act of his life that I don't know."--"It's true--it's true," muttered Lingard to himself. Carter threw up his arms with a groan. "Stand back," said a voice that sounded to him like a growl of thunder, and he felt a grip on his hand which seemed to crush every bone. He jerked it away.--"Mrs. Travers! stay," he cried. They had vanished through the open door and the sound of their footsteps had already died away. Carter turned about bewildered as if looking for help.--"Who is he, steward? Who in the name of all the mad devils is he?" he asked, wildly. He was confounded by the cold and philosophical tone of the answer:--"Tain't my place to trouble about that, sir--nor yours I guess."--"Isn't it!" shouted Carter. "Why, he has carried the lady off." The steward was looking critically at the lamp and after a while screwed the light down.--"That's better," he mumbled.--"Good God! What is a fellow to do?" continued Carter, looking at Hassim and Immada who were whispering together and gave him only an absent glance. He rushed on deck and was struck blind instantly by the night that seemed to have been lying in wait for him; he stumbled over something soft, kicked something hard, flung himself on the rail. "Come back," he cried. "Come back. Captain! Mrs. Travers!--or let me come, too."

He listened. The breeze blew cool against his cheek. A black bandage seemed to lie over his eyes. "Gone," he groaned, utterly crushed. And suddenly he heard Mrs. Travers' voice remote in the depths of the night.--"Defend the brig," it said, and these words, pronouncing themselves in the immensity of a lightless universe, thrilled every fibre of his body by the commanding sadness of their tone. "Defend, defend the brig." . . . "I am damned if I do," shouted Carter in despair. "Unless you come back! . . . Mrs. Travers!"

". . . as though--I were--on board--myself," went on the rising cadence of the

voice, more distant now, a marvel of faint and imperious clearness.

Carter shouted no more; he tried to make out the boat for a time, and when, giving it up, he leaped down from the rail, the heavy obscurity of the brig's main deck was agitated like a sombre pool by his jump, swayed, eddied, seemed to break up. Blotches of darkness recoiled, drifted away, bare feet shuffled hastily, confused murmurs died out. "Lascars," he muttered, "The crew is all agog." Afterward he listened for a moment to the faintly tumultuous snores of the white men sleeping in rows, with their heads under the break of the poop. Somewhere about his feet, the yacht's black dog, invisible, and chained to a deck-ringbolt, whined, rattled the thin links, pattered with his claws in his distress at the unfamiliar surroundings, begging for the charity of human notice. Carter stooped impulsively, and was met by a startling lick in the face.--"Hallo, boy!" He thumped the thick curly sides, stroked the smooth head--"Good boy, Rover. Down. Lie down, dog. You don't know what to make of it--do you, boy?" The dog became still as death. "Well, neither do I," muttered Carter. But such natures are helped by a cheerful contempt for the intricate and endless suggestions of thought. He told himself that he would soon see what was to come of it, and dismissed all speculation. Had he been a little older he would have felt that the situation was beyond his grasp; but he was too young to see it whole and in a manner detached from himself. All these inexplicable events filled him with deep concern--but then on the other hand he had the key of the magazine and he could not find it in his heart to dislike Lingard. He was positive about this at last, and to know that much after the discomfort of an inward conflict went a long way toward a solution. When he followed Shaw into the cabin he could not repress a sense of enjoyment or hide a faint and malicious smile.

"Gone away--did you say? And carried off the lady with him?" discoursed Shaw very loud in the doorway. "Did he? Well, I am not surprised. What can you expect from a man like that, who leaves his ship in an open roadstead without--I won't say orders--but without as much as a single word to his next in command? And at night at that! That just shows you the kind of man. Is this the way to treat a chief mate? I apprehend he was riled at the little al-ter-cation we had just before you came on board. I told him a truth or two--but--never mind. There's the law and that's enough for me. I am captain as long as he is out of the ship, and if his address before very long is not in one of Her Majesty's jails or other I au-tho-rize you to call me a Dutchman. You mark my words."

He walked in masterfully, sat down and surveyed the cabin in a leisurely and autocratic manner; but suddenly his eyes became stony with amazement and indignation; he pointed a fat and trembling forefinger.

"Niggers," he said, huskily. "In the cuddy! In the cuddy!" He appeared bereft of

speech for a time.

Since he entered the cabin Hassim had been watching him in thoughtful and expectant silence. "I can't have it," he continued with genuine feeling in his voice. "Damme! I've too much respect for myself." He rose with heavy deliberation; his eyes bulged out in a severe and dignified stare. "Out you go!" he bellowed; suddenly, making a step forward.--"Great Scott! What are you up to, mister?" asked in a tone of dispassionate surprise the steward whose head appeared in the doorway. "These are the Captain's friends." "Show me a man's friends and . . ." began Shaw, dogmatically, but abruptly passed into the tone of admonition. "You take your mug out of the way, bottle-washer. They ain't friends of mine. I ain't a vagabond. I know what's due to myself. Quit!" he hissed, fiercely. Hassim, with an alert movement, grasped the handle of his kris. Shaw puffed out his cheeks and frowned.--"Look out! He will stick you like a prize pig," murmured Carter without moving a muscle. Shaw looked round helplessly.--"And you would enjoy the fun--wouldn't you?" he said with slow bitterness. Carter's distant non-committal smile quite overwhelmed him by its horrid frigidity. Extreme despondency replaced the proper feeling of racial pride in the primitive soul of the mate. "My God! What luck! What have I done to fall amongst that lot?" he groaned, sat down, and took his big grey head in his hands. Carter drew aside to make room for Immada, who, in obedience to a whisper from her brother, sought to leave the cabin. She passed out after an instant of hesitation, during which she looked up at Carter once. Her brother, motionless in a defensive attitude, protected her retreat. She disappeared; Hassim's grip on his weapon relaxed; he looked in turn at every object in the cabin as if to fix its position in his mind forever, and following his sister, walked out with noiseless footfalls.

They entered the same darkness which had received, enveloped, and hidden the troubled souls of Lingard and Edith, but to these two the light from which they had felt themselves driven away was now like the light of forbidden hopes; it had the awful and tranquil brightness that a light burning on the shore has for an exhausted swimmer about to give himself up to the fateful sea. They looked back; it had disappeared; Carter had shut the cabin door behind them to have it out with Shaw. He wanted to arrive at some kind of working compromise with the nominal commander, but the mate was so demoralized by the novelty of the assaults made upon his respectability that the young defender of the brig could get nothing from him except lamentations mingled with mild blasphemies. The brig slept, and along her quiet deck the voices raised in her cabin--Shaw's appeals and reproaches directed vociferously to heaven, together with Carter's inflexible drawl mingled into one deadened, modulated, and continuous murmur. The lockouts in the waist, motionless and peering into obscurity, one ear turned to the sea, were aware of that strange resonance like the ghost of a quarrel that seemed to hover at their backs. Wasub, after seeing Hassim and Immada into

their canoe, prowled to and fro the whole length of the vessel vigilantly. There was not a star in the sky and no gleam on the water; there was no horizon, no outline, no shape for the eye to rest upon, nothing for the hand to grasp. An obscurity that seemed without limit in space and time had submerged the universe like a destroying flood.

A lull of the breeze kept for a time the small boat in the neighbourhood of the brig. The hoisted sail, invisible, fluttered faintly, mysteriously, and the boat rising and falling bodily to the passage of each invisible undulation of the waters seemed to repose upon a living breast. Lingard, his hand on the tiller, sat up erect, expectant and silent. Mrs. Travers had drawn her cloak close around her body. Their glances plunged infinitely deep into a lightless void, and yet they were still so near the brig that the piteous whine of the dog, mingled with the angry rattling of the chain, reached their ears faintly, evoking obscure images of distress and fury. A sharp bark ending in a plaintive howl that seemed raised by the passage of phantoms invisible to men, rent the black stillness, as though the instinct of the brute inspired by the soul of night had voiced in a lamentable plaint the fear of the future, the anguish of lurking death, the terror of shadows. Not far from the brig's boat Hassim and Immada in their canoe, letting their paddles trail in the water, sat in a silent and invincible torpor as if the fitful puffs of wind had carried to their hearts the breath of a subtle poison that, very soon, would make them die.--"Have you seen the white woman's eyes?" cried the girl. She struck her palms together loudly and remained with her arms extended, with her hands clasped. "O Hassim! Have you seen her eyes shining under her eyebrows like rays of light darting under the arched boughs in a forest? They pierced me. I shuddered at the sound of her voice! I saw her walk behind him--and it seems to me that she does not live on earth--that all this is witchcraft."

She lamented in the night. Hassim kept silent. He had no illusions and in any other man but Lingard he would have thought the proceeding no better than suicidal folly. For him Travers and d'Alcacer were two powerful Rajahs--probably relatives of the Ruler of the land of the English whom he knew to be a woman; but why they should come and interfere with the recovery of his own kingdom was an obscure problem. He was concerned for Lingard's safety. That the risk was incurred mostly for his sake--so that the prospects of the great enterprise should not be ruined by a quarrel over the lives of these whites--did not strike him so much as may be imagined. There was that in him which made such an action on Lingard's part appear all but unavoidable. Was he not Rajah Hassim and was not the other a man of strong heart, of strong arm, of proud courage, a man great enough to protect highborn princes--a friend? Immada's words called out a smile which, like the words, was lost in the darkness. "Forget your weariness," he said, gently, "lest, O Sister, we should arrive too late." The coming day would throw its light on some decisive event. Hassim thought of his own men

who guarded the Emma and he wished to be where they could hear his voice. He regretted Jaffir was not there. Hassim was saddened by the absence from his side of that man who once had carried what he thought would be his last message to his friend. It had not been the last. He had lived to cherish new hopes and to face new troubles and, perchance, to frame another message yet, while death knocked with the hands of armed enemies at the gate. The breeze steadied; the succeeding swells swung the canoe smoothly up the unbroken ridges of water travelling apace along the land. They progressed slowly; but Immada's heart was more weary than her arms, and Hassim, dipping the blade of his paddle without a splash, peered right and left, trying to make out the shadowy forms of islets. A long way ahead of the canoe and holding the same course, the brig's dinghy ran with broad lug extended, making for that narrow and winding passage between the coast and the southern shoals, which led to the mouth of the creek connecting the lagoon with the sea.

Thus on that starless night the Shallows were peopled by uneasy souls. The thick veil of clouds stretched over them, cut them off from the rest of the universe. At times Mrs. Travers had in the darkness the impression of dizzy speed, and again it seemed to her that the boat was standing still, that everything in the world was standing still and only her fancy roamed free from all trammels. Lingard, perfectly motionless by her side, steered, shaping his course by the feel of the wind. Presently he perceived ahead a ghostly flicker of faint, livid light which the earth seemed to throw up against the uniform blackness of the sky. The dinghy was approaching the expanse of the Shallows. The confused clamour of broken water deepened its note.

"How long are we going to sail like this?" asked Mrs. Travers, gently. She did not recognize the voice that pronounced the word "Always" in answer to her question. It had the impersonal ring of a voice without a master. Her heart beat fast.

"Captain Lingard!" she cried.

"Yes. What?" he said, nervously, as if startled out of a dream.

"I asked you how long we were going to sail like this," she repeated, distinctly.

"If the breeze holds we shall be in the lagoon soon after daybreak. That will be the right time, too. I shall leave you on board the hulk with Jorgenson."

"And you? What will you do?" she asked. She had to wait for a while.

"I will do what I can," she heard him say at last. There was another pause. "All I can," he added.

The breeze dropped, the sail fluttered.

"I have perfect confidence in you," she said. "But are you certain of success?"

"No."

The futility of her question came home to Mrs. Travers. In a few hours of life she had been torn away from all her certitudes, flung into a world of improbabilities. This thought instead of augmenting her distress seemed to soothe her. What she experienced was not doubt and it was not fear. It was something else. It might have been only a great fatigue.

She heard a dull detonation as if in the depth of the sea. It was hardly more than a shock and a vibration. A roller had broken amongst the shoals; the livid clearness Lingard had seen ahead flashed and flickered in expanded white sheets much nearer to the boat now. And all this--the wan burst of light, the faint shock as of something remote and immense falling into ruins, was taking place outside the limits of her life which remained encircled by an impenetrable darkness and by an impenetrable silence. Puffs of wind blew about her head and expired; the sail collapsed, shivered audibly, stood full and still in turn; and again the sensation of vertiginous speed and of absolute immobility succeeding each other with increasing swiftness merged at last into a bizarre state of headlong motion and profound peace. The darkness enfolded her like the enervating caress of a sombre universe. It was gentle and destructive. Its languor seduced her soul into surrender. Nothing existed and even all her memories vanished into space. She was content that nothing should exist.

Lingard, aware all the time of their contact in the narrow stern sheets of the boat, was startled by the pressure of the woman's head drooping on his shoulder. He stiffened himself still more as though he had tried on the approach of a danger to conceal his life in the breathless rigidity of his body. The boat soared and descended slowly; a region of foam and reefs stretched across her course hissing like a gigantic cauldron; a strong gust of wind drove her straight at it for a moment then passed on and abandoned her to the regular balancing of the swell. The struggle of the rocks forever overwhelmed and emerging, with the sea forever victorious and repulsed, fascinated the man. He watched it as he would have watched something going on within himself while Mrs. Travers slept sustained by his arm, pressed to his side, abandoned to his support. The shoals guarding the Shore of Refuge had given him his first glimpse of success--the solid support he needed for his action. The Shallows were the shelter of his dreams; their voice had the power to soothe and exalt his thoughts with the promise of freedom for his hopes. Never had there been such a generous friendship. . . . A mass of white

foam whirling about a centre of intense blackness spun silently past the side of the boat. . . . That woman he held like a captive on his arm had also been given to him by the Shallows.

Suddenly his eyes caught on a distant sandbank the red gleam of Daman's camp fire instantly eclipsed like the wink of a signalling lantern along the level of the waters. It brought to his mind the existence of the two men--those other captives. If the war canoe transporting them into the lagoon had left the sands shortly after Hassim's retreat from Daman's camp, Travers and d'Alcacer were by this time far away up the creek. Every thought of action had become odious to Lingard since all he could do in the world now was to hasten the moment of his separation from that woman to whom he had confessed the whole secret of his life.

And she slept. She could sleep! He looked down at her as he would have looked at the slumbering ignorance of a child, but the life within him had the fierce beat of supreme moments. Near by, the eddies sighed along the reefs, the water souged amongst the stones, clung round the rocks with tragic murmurs that resembled promises, good-byes, or prayers. From the unfathomable distances of the night came the booming of the swell assaulting the seaward face of the Shallows. He felt the woman's nearness with such intensity that he heard nothing. . . . Then suddenly he thought of death.

"Wake up!" he shouted in her ear, swinging round in his seat. Mrs. Travers gasped; a splash of water flicked her over the eyes and she felt the separate drops run down her cheeks, she tasted them on her lips, tepid and bitter like tears. A swishing undulation tossed the boat on high followed by another and still another; and then the boat with the breeze abeam glided through still water, laying over at a steady angle.

"Clear of the reef now," remarked Lingard in a tone of relief.

"Were we in any danger?" asked Mrs. Travers in a whisper.

"Well, the breeze dropped and we drifted in very close to the rocks," he answered. "I had to rouse you. It wouldn't have done for you to wake up suddenly struggling in the water."

So she had slept! It seemed to her incredible that she should have closed her eyes in this small boat, with the knowledge of their desperate errand, on so disturbed a sea. The man by her side leaned forward, extended his arm, and the boat going off before the wind went on faster on an even keel. A motionless black bank resting on the sea stretched infinitely right in their way in ominous stillness. She called Lingard's attention to it. "Look at this awful cloud."

"This cloud is the coast and in a moment we shall be entering the creek," he said, quietly. Mrs. Travers stared at it. Was it land--land! It seemed to her even less palpable than a cloud, a mere sinister immobility above the unrest of the sea, nursing in its depth the unrest of men who, to her mind, were no more real than fantastic shadows.