

**V**

What struck Mrs. Travers most, directly she set eyes on him, was the other-world aspect of Jorgenson. He had been buried out of sight so long that his tall, gaunt body, his unhurried, mechanical movements, his set face and his eyes with an empty gaze suggested an invincible indifference to all the possible surprises of the earth. That appearance of a resuscitated man who seemed to be commanded by a conjuring spell strolled along the decks of what was even to Mrs. Travers' eyes the mere corpse of a ship and turned on her a pair of deep-sunk, expressionless eyes with an almost unearthly detachment. Mrs. Travers had never been looked at before with that strange and pregnant abstraction. Yet she didn't dislike Jorgenson. In the early morning light, white from head to foot in a perfectly clean suit of clothes which seemed hardly to contain any limbs, freshly shaven (Jorgenson's sunken cheeks with their withered colouring always had a sort of gloss as though he had the habit of shaving every two hours or so), he looked as immaculate as though he had been indeed a pure spirit superior to the soiling contacts of the material earth. He was disturbing but he was not repulsive. He gave no sign of greeting.

Lingard addressed him at once.

"You have had a regular staircase built up the side of the hulk, Jorgenson," he said. "It was very convenient for us to come aboard now, but in case of an attack don't you think . . ."

"I did think." There was nothing so dispassionate in the world as the voice of Captain H. C. Jorgenson, ex Barque Wild Rose, since he had recrossed the Waters of Oblivion to step back into the life of men. "I did think, but since I don't want to make trouble. . . ."

"Oh, you don't want to make trouble," interrupted Lingard.

"No. Don't believe in it. Do you, King Tom?"

"I may have to make trouble."

"So you came up here in this small dinghy of yours like this to start making trouble, did you?"

"What's the matter with you? Don't you know me yet, Jorgenson?"

"I thought I knew you. How could I tell that a man like you would come along for a fight bringing a woman with him?"

"This lady is Mrs. Travers," said Lingard. "The wife of one of the luckless gentlemen Daman got hold of last evening. . . . This is Jorgenson, the friend of whom I have been telling you, Mrs. Travers."

Mrs. Travers smiled faintly. Her eyes roamed far and near and the strangeness of her surroundings, the overpowering curiosity, the conflict of interest and doubt gave her the aspect of one still new to life, presenting an innocent and naive attitude before the surprises of experience. She looked very guileless and youthful between those two men. Lingard gazed at her with that unconscious tenderness mingled with wonder, which some men manifest toward girlhood. There was nothing of a conqueror of kingdoms in his bearing. Jorgenson preserved his amazing abstraction which seemed neither to hear nor see anything. But, evidently, he kept a mysterious grip on events in the world of living men because he asked very naturally:

"How did she get away?"

"The lady wasn't on the sandbank," explained Lingard, curtly.

"What sandbank?" muttered Jorgenson, perfunctorily. . . . "Is the yacht looted, Tom?"

"Nothing of the kind," said Lingard.

"Ah, many dead?" inquired Jorgenson.

"I tell you there was nothing of the kind," said Lingard, impatiently.

"What? No fight!" inquired Jorgenson again without the slightest sign of animation.

"No."

"And you a fighting man."

"Listen to me, Jorgenson. Things turned out so that before the time came for a fight it was already too late." He turned to Mrs. Travers still looking about with anxious eyes and a faint smile on her lips. "While I was talking to you that evening from the boat it was already too late. No. There was never any time for it. I have told you all about myself, Mrs. Travers, and you know that I speak the

truth when I say too late. If you had only been alone in that yacht going about the seas!"

"Yes," she struck in, "but I was not alone."

Lingard dropped his chin on his breast. Already a foretaste of noonday heat staled the sparkling freshness of the morning. The smile had vanished from Edith Travers' lips and her eyes rested on Lingard's bowed head with an expression no longer curious but which might have appeared enigmatic to Jorgenson if he had looked at her. But Jorgenson looked at nothing. He asked from the remoteness of his dead past, "What have you left outside, Tom? What is there now?"

"There's the yacht on the shoals, my brig at anchor, and about a hundred of the worst kind of Illanun vagabonds under three chiefs and with two war-praus moored to the edge of the bank. Maybe Daman is with them, too, out there."

"No," said Jorgenson, positively.

"He has come in," cried Lingard. "He brought his prisoners in himself then."

"Landed by torchlight," uttered precisely the shade of Captain Jorgenson, late of the Barque Wild Rose. He swung his arm pointing across the lagoon and Mrs. Travers turned about in that direction.

All the scene was but a great light and a great solitude. Her gaze travelled over the lustrous, dark sheet of empty water to a shore bordered by a white beach empty, too, and showing no sign of human life. The human habitations were lost in the shade of the fruit trees, masked by the cultivated patches of Indian corn and the banana plantations. Near the shore the rigid lines of two stockaded forts could be distinguished flanking the beach, and between them with a great open space before it, the brown roof slope of an enormous long building that seemed suspended in the air had a great square flag fluttering above it. Something like a small white flame in the sky was the carved white coral finial on the gable of the mosque which had caught full the rays of the sun. A multitude of gay streamers, white and red, flew over the half-concealed roofs, over the brilliant fields and amongst the sombre palm groves. But it might have been a deserted settlement decorated and abandoned by its departed population. Lingard pointed to the stockade on the right.

"That's where your husband is," he said to Mrs. Travers.

"Who is the other?" uttered Jorgenson's voice at their backs. He also was turned that way with his strange sightless gaze fixed beyond them into the void.

"A Spanish gentleman I believe you said, Mrs Travers," observed Lingard.

"It is extremely difficult to believe that there is anybody there," murmured Mrs. Travers.

"Did you see them both, Jorgenson?" asked Lingard.

"Made out nobody. Too far. Too dark."

As a matter of fact Jorgenson had seen nothing, about an hour before daybreak, but the distant glare of torches while the loud shouts of an excited multitude had reached him across the water only like a faint and tempestuous murmur. Presently the lights went away processionally through the groves of trees into the armed stockades. The distant glare vanished in the fading darkness and the murmurs of the invisible crowd ceased suddenly as if carried off by the retreating shadow of the night. Daylight followed swiftly, disclosing to the sleepless Jorgenson the solitude of the shore and the ghostly outlines of the familiar forms of grouped trees and scattered human habitations. He had watched the varied colours come out in the dawn, the wide cultivated Settlement of many shades of green, framed far away by the fine black lines of the forest-edge that was its limit and its protection.

Mrs. Travers stood against the rail as motionless as a statue. Her face had lost all its mobility and her cheeks were dead white as if all the blood in her body had flowed back into her heart and had remained there. Her very lips had lost their colour. Lingard caught hold of her arm roughly.

"Don't, Mrs. Travers. Why are you terrifying yourself like this? If you don't believe what I say listen to me asking Jorgenson. . . ."

"Yes, ask me," mumbled Jorgenson in his white moustache.

"Speak straight, Jorgenson. What do you think? Are the gentlemen alive?"

"Certainly," said Jorgenson in a sort of disappointed tone as though he had expected a much more difficult question.

"Is their life in immediate danger?"

"Of course not," said Jorgenson.

Lingard turned away from the oracle. "You have heard him, Mrs. Travers. You

may believe every word he says. There isn't a thought or a purpose in that Settlement," he continued, pointing at the dumb solitude of the lagoon, "that this man doesn't know as if they were his own."

"I know. Ask me," muttered Jorgenson, mechanically.

Mrs. Travers said nothing but made a slight movement and her whole rigid figure swayed dangerously. Lingard put his arm firmly round her waist and she did not seem aware of it till after she had turned her head and found Lingard's face very near her own. But his eyes full of concern looked so close into hers that she was obliged to shut them like a woman about to faint.

The effect this produced upon Lingard was such that she felt the tightening of his arm and as she opened her eyes again some of the colour returned to her face. She met the deepened expression of his solicitude with a look so steady, with a gaze that in spite of herself was so profoundly vivid that its clearness seemed to Lingard to throw all his past life into shade.--"I don't feel faint. It isn't that at all," she declared in a perfectly calm voice. It seemed to Lingard as cold as ice.

"Very well," he agreed with a resigned smile. "But you just catch hold of that rail, please, before I let you go." She, too, forced a smile on her lips.

"What incredulity," she remarked, and for a time made not the slightest movement. At last, as if making a concession, she rested the tips of her fingers on the rail. Lingard gradually removed his arm. "And pray don't look upon me as a conventional 'weak woman' person, the delicate lady of your own conception," she said, facing Lingard, with her arm extended to the rail. "Make that effort please against your own conception of what a woman like me should be. I am perhaps as strong as you are, Captain Lingard. I mean it literally. In my body."--"Don't you think I have seen that long ago?" she heard his deep voice protesting.--"And as to my courage," Mrs. Travers continued, her expression charmingly undecided between frowns and smiles; "didn't I tell you only a few hours ago, only last evening, that I was not capable of thinking myself into a fright; you remember, when you were begging me to try something of the kind. Don't imagine that I would have been ashamed to try. But I couldn't have done it. No. Not even for the sake of somebody else's kingdom. Do you understand me?"

"God knows," said the attentive Lingard after a time, with an unexpected sigh. "You people seem to be made of another stuff."

"What has put that absurd notion into your head?"

"I didn't mean better or worse. And I wouldn't say it isn't good stuff either. What I

meant to say is that it's different. One feels it. And here we are."

"Yes, here we are," repeated Mrs. Travers. "And as to this moment of emotion, what provoked it is not a concern for anybody or anything outside myself. I felt no terror. I cannot even fix my fears upon any distinct image. You think I am shamelessly heartless in telling you this."

Lingard made no sign. It didn't occur to him to make a sign. He simply hung on Mrs. Travers' words as it were only for the sake of the sound.--"I am simply frank with you," she continued. "What do I know of savagery, violence, murder? I have never seen a dead body in my life. The light, the silence, the mysterious emptiness of this place have suddenly affected my imagination, I suppose. What is the meaning of this wonderful peace in which we stand--you and I alone?"

Lingard shook his head. He saw the narrow gleam of the woman's teeth between the parted lips of her smile, as if all the ardour of her conviction had been dissolved at the end of her speech into wistful recognition of their partnership before things outside their knowledge. And he was warmed by something a little helpless in that smile. Within three feet of them the shade of Jorgenson, very gaunt and neat, stared into space.

"Yes. You are strong," said Lingard. "But a whole long night sitting in a small boat! I wonder you are not too stiff to stand."

"I am not stiff in the least," she interrupted, still smiling. "I am really a very strong woman," she added, earnestly. "Whatever happens you may reckon on that fact."

Lingard gave her an admiring glance. But the shade of Jorgenson, perhaps catching in its remoteness the sound of the word woman, was suddenly moved to begin scolding with all the liberty of a ghost, in a flow of passionless indignation.

"Woman! That's what I say. That's just about the last touch--that you, Tom Lingard, red-eyed Tom, King Tom, and all those fine names, that you should leave your weapons twenty miles behind you, your men, your guns, your brig that is your strength, and come along here with your mouth full of fight, bare-handed and with a woman in tow.--Well--well!"

"Don't forget, Jorgenson, that the lady hears you," remonstrated Lingard in a vexed tone. . . . "He doesn't mean to be rude," he remarked to Mrs. Travers quite loud, as if indeed Jorgenson were but an immaterial and feelingless illusion. "He has forgotten."

"The woman is not in the least offended. I ask for nothing better than to be taken on that footing."

"Forgot nothing!" mumbled Jorgenson with a sort of ghostly assertiveness and as it were for his own satisfaction. "What's the world coming to?"

"It was I who insisted on coming with Captain Lingard," said Mrs. Travers, treating Jorgenson to a fascinating sweetness of tone.

"That's what I say! What is the world coming to? Hasn't King Tom a mind of his own? What has come over him? He's mad! Leaving his brig with a hundred and twenty born and bred pirates of the worst kind in two praus on the other side of a sandbank. Did you insist on that, too? Has he put himself in the hands of a strange woman?"

Jorgenson seemed to be asking those questions of himself. Mrs. Travers observed the empty stare, the self-communing voice, his unearthly lack of animation. Somehow it made it very easy to speak the whole truth to him.

"No," she said, "it is I who am altogether in his hands."

Nobody would have guessed that Jorgenson had heard a single word of that emphatic declaration if he had not addressed himself to Lingard with the question neither more nor less abstracted than all his other speeches.

"Why then did you bring her along?"

"You don't understand. It was only right and proper. One of the gentlemen is the lady's husband."

"Oh, yes," muttered Jorgenson. "Who's the other?"

"You have been told. A friend."

"Poor Mr. d'Alcacer," said Mrs. Travers. "What bad luck for him to have accepted our invitation. But he is really a mere acquaintance."

"I hardly noticed him," observed Lingard, gloomily. "He was talking to you over the back of your chair when I came aboard the yacht as if he had been a very good friend."

"We always understood each other very well," said Mrs. Travers, picking up from the rail the long glass that was lying there. "I always liked him, the frankness of

his mind, and his great loyalty."

"What did he do?" asked Lingard.

"He loved," said Mrs. Travers, lightly. "But that's an old story." She raised the glass to her eyes, one arm extended fully to sustain the long tube, and Lingard forgot d'Alcacer in admiring the firmness of her pose and the absolute steadiness of the heavy glass. She was as firm as a rock after all those emotions and all that fatigue.

Mrs. Travers directed the glass instinctively toward the entrance of the lagoon. The smooth water there shone like a piece of silver in the dark frame of the forest. A black speck swept across the field of her vision. It was some time before she could find it again and then she saw, apparently so near as to be within reach of the voice, a small canoe with two people in it. She saw the wet paddles rising and dipping with a flash in the sunlight. She made out plainly the face of Immada, who seemed to be looking straight into the big end of the telescope. The chief and his sister, after resting under the bank for a couple of hours in the middle of the night, had entered the lagoon and were making straight for the hulk. They were already near enough to be perfectly distinguishable to the naked eye if there had been anybody on board to glance that way. But nobody was even thinking of them. They might not have existed except perhaps in the memory of old Jorgenson. But that was mostly busy with all the mysterious secrets of his late tomb.

Mrs. Travers lowered the glass suddenly. Lingard came out from a sort of trance and said:

"Mr. d'Alcacer. Loved! Why shouldn't he?"

Mrs. Travers looked frankly into Lingard's gloomy eyes. "It isn't that alone, of course," she said. "First of all he knew how to love and then. . . . You don't know how artificial and barren certain kinds of life can be. But Mr. d'Alcacer's life was not that. His devotion was worth having."

"You seem to know a lot about him," said Lingard, enviously. "Why do you smile?" She continued to smile at him for a little while. The long brass tube over her shoulder shone like gold against the pale fairness of her bare head.--"At a thought," she answered, preserving the low tone of the conversation into which they had fallen as if their words could have disturbed the self-absorption of Captain H. C. Jorgenson. "At the thought that for all my long acquaintance with Mr. d'Alcacer I don't know half as much about him as I know about you."



"Ah, that's impossible," contradicted Lingard. "Spaniard or no Spaniard, he is one of your kind."

"Tarred with the same brush," murmured Mrs. Travers, with only a half-amused irony. But Lingard continued:

"He was trying to make it up between me and your husband, wasn't he? I was too angry to pay much attention, but I liked him well enough. What pleased me most was the way in which he gave it up. That was done like a gentleman. Do you understand what I mean, Mrs. Travers?"

"I quite understand."

"Yes, you would," he commented, simply. "But just then I was too angry to talk to anybody. And so I cleared out on board my own ship and stayed there, not knowing what to do and wishing you all at the bottom of the sea. Don't mistake me, Mrs. Travers; it's you, the people aft, that I wished at the bottom of the sea. I had nothing against the poor devils on board, They would have trusted me quick enough. So I fumed there till--till. . . ."

"Till nine o'clock or a little after," suggested Mrs. Travers, impenetrably.

"No. Till I remembered you," said Lingard with the utmost innocence.

"Do you mean to say that you forgot my existence so completely till then? You had spoken to me on board the yacht, you know."

"Did I? I thought I did. What did I say?"

"You told me not to touch a dusky princess," answered Mrs. Travers with a short laugh. Then with a visible change of mood as if she had suddenly out of a light heart been recalled to the sense of the true situation: "But indeed I meant no harm to this figure of your dream. And, look over there. She is pursuing you." Lingard glanced toward the north shore and suppressed an exclamation of remorse. For the second time he discovered that he had forgotten the existence of Hassim and Immada. The canoe was now near enough for its occupants to distinguish plainly the heads of three people above the low bulwark of the Emma. Immada let her paddle trail suddenly in the water, with the exclamation, "I see the white woman there." Her brother looked over his shoulder and the canoe floated, arrested as if by the sudden power of a spell.--"They are no dream to me," muttered Lingard, sturdily. Mrs. Travers turned abruptly away to look at the further shore. It was still and empty to the naked eye and seemed to quiver in the sunshine like an immense painted curtain lowered upon the unknown.

"Here's Rajah Hassim coming, Jorgenson. I had an idea he would perhaps stay outside." Mrs. Travers heard Lingard's voice at her back and the answering grunt of Jorgenson. She raised deliberately the long glass to her eye, pointing it at the shore.

She distinguished plainly now the colours in the flutter of the streamers above the brown roofs of the large Settlement, the stir of palm groves, the black shadows inland and the dazzling white beach of coral sand all ablaze in its formidable mystery. She swept the whole range of the view and was going to lower the glass when from behind the massive angle of the stockade there stepped out into the brilliant immobility of the landscape a man in a long white gown and with an enormous black turban surmounting a dark face. Slow and grave he paced the beach ominously in the sunshine, an enigmatical figure in an Oriental tale with something weird and menacing in its sudden emergence and lonely progress.

With an involuntary gasp Mrs. Travers lowered the glass. All at once behind her back she heard a low musical voice beginning to pour out incomprehensible words in a tone of passionate pleading. Hassim and Immada had come on board and had approached Lingard. Yes! It was intolerable to feel that this flow of soft speech which had no meaning for her could make its way straight into that man's heart.