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The very day that Travers and d'Alcacer had come on board the Emma Hassim and Immada had departed on their mission; for Lingard, of course, could not think of leaving the white people alone with Jorgenson. Jorgenson was all right, but his ineradicable habit of muttering in his moustache about "throwing a lighted match amongst the powder barrels" had inspired Lingard with a certain amount of mistrust. And, moreover, he did not want to go away from Mrs. Travers.

It was the only correct inspiration on Carter's part to send Jaffir with his report to Lingard. That stout-hearted fighter, swimmer, and devoted follower of the princely misfortunes of Hassim and Immada, had looked upon his mission to catch the chief officer of the yacht (which he had received from Lingard in Carimata) as a trifling job. It took him a little longer than he expected but he had got back to the brig just in time to be sent on to Lingard with Carter's letter after a couple of hours' rest. He had the story of all the happenings from Wasub before he left and though his face preserved its grave impassivity, in his heart he did not like it at all.

Fearless and wily, Jaffir was the man for difficult missions and a born messenger--as he expressed it himself--"to bear weighty words between great men." With his unfailing memory he was able to reproduce them exactly, whether soft or hard, in council or in private; for he knew no fear. With him there was no need for writing which might fall into the hands of the enemy. If he died on the way the message would die with him. He had also the gift of getting at the sense of any situation and an observant eye. He was distinctly one of those men from whom trustworthy information can be obtained by the leaders of great enterprises. Lingard did put several questions to him, but in this instance, of course, Jaffir could have only very little to say. Of Carter, whom he called the "young one," he said that he looked as white men look when they are pleased with themselves; then added without waiting for a definite question--"The ships out there are now safe enough, O, Rajah Laut!" There was no elation in his tone.

Lingard looked at him blankly. When the Greatest of White Men remarked that there was yet a price to be paid for that safety, Jaffir assented by a "Yes, by Allah!" without losing for a moment his grim composure. When told that he would be required to go and find his master and the lady Immada who were somewhere in the back country, in Belarab's travelling camp, he declared himself ready to proceed at once. He had eaten his fill and had slept three hours on board the brig and he was not tired. When he was young he used to get tired sometimes; but for

many years now he had known no such weakness. He did not require the boat with paddlers in which he had come up into the lagoon. He would go alone in a small canoe. This was no time, he remarked, for publicity and ostentation. His pent-up anxiety burst through his lips. "It is in my mind, Tuan, that death has not been so near them since that night when you came sailing in a black cloud and took us all out of the stockade."

Lingard said nothing but there was in Jaffir a faith in that white man which was not easily shaken.

"How are you going to save them this time, O Rajah Laut?" he asked, simply.

"Belarab is my friend," murmured Lingard.

In his anxiety Jaffir was very outspoken. "A man of peace!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "Who could be safe with a man like that?" he asked, contemptuously.

"There is no war," said Lingard

"There is suspicion, dread, and revenge, and the anger of armed men," retorted Jaffir. "You have taken the white prisoners out of their hands by the force of your words alone. Is that so, Tuan?"

"Yes," said Lingard.

"And you have them on board here?" asked Jaffir, with a glance over his shoulder at the white and misty structure within which by the light of a small oil flame d'Alcacer and Mrs. Travers were just then conversing.

"Yes, I have them here."

"Then, Rajah Laut," whispered Jaffir, "you can make all safe by giving them back."

"Can I do that?" were the words breathed out through Lingard's lips to the faithful follower of Hassim and Immada.

"Can you do anything else?" was the whispered retort of Jaffir the messenger accustomed to speak frankly to the great of the earth. "You are a white man and you can have only one word. And now I go."

A small, rough dug-out belonging to the Emma had been brought round to the ladder. A shadowy calash hovering respectfully in the darkness of the deck had

already cleared his throat twice in a warning manner.

"Yes, Jaffir, go," said Lingard, "and be my friend."

"I am the friend of a great prince," said the other, sturdily. "But you, Rajah Laut, were even greater. And great you will remain while you are with us, people of this sea and of this land. But what becomes of the strength of your arms before your own white people? Where does it go to, I say? Well, then, we must trust in the strength of your heart."

"I hope that will never fail," said Lingard, and Jaffir emitted a grunt of satisfaction. "But God alone sees into men's hearts."

"Yes. Our refuge is with Allah," assented Jaffir, who had acquired the habit of pious turns of speech in the frequentation of professedly religious men, of whom there were many in Belarab's stockade. As a matter of fact, he reposed all his trust in Lingard who had with him the prestige of a providential man sent at the hour of need by heaven itself. He waited a while, then: "What is the message I am to take?" he asked.

"Tell the whole tale to the Rajah Hassim," said Lingard. "And tell him to make his way here with the lady his sister secretly and with speed. The time of great trouble has come. Let us, at least, be together."

"Right! Right!" Jaffir approved, heartily. "To die alone under the weight of one's enemies is a dreadful fate."

He stepped back out of the sheen of the lamp by which they had been talking and making his way down into the small canoe he took up a paddle and without a splash vanished on the dark lagoon.

It was then that Mrs. Travers and d'Alcacer heard Lingard call aloud for Jorgenson. Instantly the familiar shadow stood at Lingard's elbow and listened in detached silence. Only at the end of the tale it marvelled audibly: "Here's a mess for you if you like." But really nothing in the world could astonish or startle old Jorgenson. He turned away muttering in his moustache. Lingard remained with his chin in his hand and Jaffir's last words took gradual possession of his mind. Then brusquely he picked up the lamp and went to seek Mrs. Travers. He went to seek her because he actually needed her bodily presence, the sound of her voice, the dark, clear glance of her eyes. She could do nothing for him. On his way he became aware that Jorgenson had turned out the few Malays on board the Emma and was disposing them about the decks to watch the lagoon in all directions. On calling Mrs. Travers out of the Cage Lingard was, in the midst of his mental

struggle, conscious of a certain satisfaction in taking her away from d'Alcacer. He couldn't spare any of her attention to any other man, not the least crumb of her time, not the least particle of her thought! He needed it all. To see it withdrawn from him for the merest instant was irritating--seemed a disaster.

D'Alcacer, left alone, wondered at the imperious tone of Lingard's call. To this observer of shades the fact seemed considerable. "Sheer nerves," he concluded, to himself. "The man is overstrung. He must have had some sort of shock." But what could it be--he wondered to himself. In the tense stagnation of those days of waiting the slightest tremor had an enormous importance. D'Alcacer did not seek his camp bedstead. He didn't even sit down. With the palms of his hands against the edge of the table he leaned back against it. In that negligent attitude he preserved an alert mind which for a moment wondered whether Mrs. Travers had not spoiled Lingard a little. Yet in the suddenness of the forced association, where, too, d'Alcacer was sure there was some moral problem in the background, he recognized the extreme difficulty of weighing accurately the imperious demands against the necessary reservations, the exact proportions of boldness and caution. And d'Alcacer admired upon the whole Mrs. Travers' cleverness.

There could be no doubt that she had the situation in her hands. That, of course, did not mean safety. She had it in her hands as one may hold some highly explosive and uncertain compound. D'Alcacer thought of her with profound sympathy and with a quite unselfish interest. Sometimes in a street we cross the path of personalities compelling sympathy and wonder but for all that we don't follow them home. D'Alcacer refrained from following Mrs. Travers any further. He had become suddenly aware that Mr. Travers was sitting up on his camp bedstead. He must have done it very suddenly. Only a moment before he had appeared plunged in the deepest slumber, and the stillness for a long time now had been perfectly unbroken. D'Alcacer was startled enough for an exclamation and Mr. Travers turned his head slowly in his direction. D'Alcacer approached the bedstead with a certain reluctance.

"Awake?" he said.

"A sudden chill," said Mr. Travers. "But I don't feel cold now. Strange! I had the impression of an icy blast."

"Ah!" said d'Alcacer.

"Impossible, of course!" went on Mr. Travers. "This stagnating air never moves. It clings odiously to one. What time is it?"

"Really, I don't know."

"The glass of my watch was smashed on that night when we were so treacherously assailed by the savages on the sandbank," grumbled Mr. Travers.

"I must say I was never so surprised in my life," confessed d'Alcacer. "We had stopped and I was lighting a cigar, you may remember."

"No," said Mr. Travers. "I had just then pulled out my watch. Of course it flew out of my hand but it hung by the chain. Somebody trampled on it. The hands are broken off short. It keeps on ticking but I can't tell the time. It's absurd. Most provoking."

"Do you mean to say," asked d'Alcacer, "that you have been winding it up every evening?"

Mr. Travers looked up from his bedstead and he also seemed surprised. "Why! I suppose I have." He kept silent for a while. "It isn't so much blind habit as you may think. My habits are the outcome of strict method. I had to order my life methodically. You know very well, my dear d'Alcacer, that without strict method I would not have been able to get through my work and would have had no time at all for social duties, which, of course, are of very great importance. I may say that, materially, method has been the foundation of my success in public life. There were never any empty moments in my day. And now this! . . ." He looked all round the Cage. . . . "Where's my wife?" he asked.

"I was talking to her only a moment ago," answered d'Alcacer. "I don't know the time. My watch is on board the yacht; but it isn't late, you know."

Mr. Travers flung off with unwonted briskness the light cotton sheet which covered him. He buttoned hastily the tunic which he had unfastened before lying down, and just as d'Alcacer was expecting him to swing his feet to the deck impetuously, he lay down again on the pillow and remained perfectly still.

D'Alcacer waited awhile and then began to pace the Cage. After a couple of turns he stopped and said, gently:

"I am afraid, Travers, you are not very well."

"I don't know what illness is," answered the voice from the pillow to the great relief of d'Alcacer who really had not expected an answer. "Good health is a great asset in public life. Illness may make you miss a unique opportunity. I was never ill."

All this came out deadened in tone, as if the speaker's face had been buried in the pillow. D'Alcacer resumed his pacing.

"I think I asked you where my wife was," said the muffled voice.

With great presence of mind d'Alcacer kept on pacing the Cage as if he had not heard.--"You know, I think she is mad," went on the muffled voice. "Unless I am."

Again d'Alcacer managed not to interrupt his regular pacing. "Do you know what I think?" he said, abruptly. "I think, Travers, that you don't want to talk about her. I think that you don't want to talk about anything. And to tell you the truth I don't want to, either."

D'Alcacer caught a faint sigh from the pillow and at the same time saw a small, dim flame appear outside the Cage. And still he kept on his pacing. Mrs. Travers and Lingard coming out of the deckhouse stopped just outside the door and Lingard stood the deck-lamp on its roof. They were too far from d'Alcacer to be heard, but he could make them out: Mrs. Travers, as straight as an arrow, and the heavy bulk of the man who faced her with a lowered head. He saw it in profile against the light and as if deferential in its slight droop. They were looking straight at each other. Neither of them made the slightest gesture.

"There is that in me," Lingard murmured, deeply, "which would set my heart harder than a stone. I am King Tom, Rajah Laut, and fit to look any man hereabouts in the face. I have my name to take care of. Everything rests on that."

"Mr. d'Alcacer would express this by saying that everything rested on honour," commented Mrs. Travers with lips that did not tremble, though from time to time she could feel the accelerated beating of her heart.

"Call it what you like. It's something that a man needs to draw a free breath. And look!--as you see me standing before you here I care for it no longer."

"But I do care for it," retorted Mrs. Travers. "As you see me standing here--I do care. This is something that is your very own. You have a right to it. And I repeat I do care for it."

"Care for something of my own," murmured Lingard, very close to her face. "Why should you care for my rights?"

"Because," she said, holding her ground though their foreheads were nearly touching, "because if I ever get back to my life I don't want to make it more absurd by real remorse."

Her tone was soft and Lingard received the breath of those words like a caress on his face. D'Alcacer, in the Cage, made still another effort to keep up his pacing. He didn't want to give Mr. Travers the slightest excuse for sitting up again and looking round.

"That I should live to hear anybody say they cared anything for what was mine!" whispered Lingard. "And that it should be you--you, who have taken all hardness out of me."

"I don't want your heart to be made hard. I want it to be made firm."

"You couldn't have said anything better than what you have said just now to make it steady," flowed the murmur of Lingard's voice with something tender in its depth. "Has anybody ever had a friend like this?" he exclaimed, raising his head as if taking the starry night to witness.

"And I ask myself is it possible that there should be another man on earth that I could trust as I trust you. I say to you: Yes! Go and save what you have a right to and don't forget to be merciful. I will not remind you of our perfect innocence. The earth must be small indeed that we should have blundered like this into your life. It's enough to make one believe in fatality. But I can't find it in me to behave like a fatalist, to sit down with folded hands. Had you been another kind of man I might have been too hopeless or too disdainful. Do you know what Mr. d'Alcacer calls you?"

Inside the Cage d'Alcacer, casting curious glances in their direction, saw Lingard shake his head and thought with slight uneasiness: "He is refusing her something."

"Mr. d'Alcacer's name for you is the 'Man of Fate'," said Mrs. Travers, a little breathlessly.

"A mouthful. Never mind, he is a gentleman. It's what you. . . ."

"I call you all but by your Christian name," said Mrs. Travers, hastily. "Believe me, Mr. d'Alcacer understands you."

"He is all right," interjected Lingard.

"And he is innocent. I remember what you have said--that the innocent must take their chance. Well, then, do what is right."

"You think it would be right? You believe it? You feel it?"

"At this time, in this place, from a man like you--Yes, it is right."

Lingard thought that woman wonderfully true to him and wonderfully fearless with herself. The necessity to take back the two captives to the stockade was so clear and unavoidable now, that he believed nothing on earth could have stopped him from doing so, but where was there another woman in the world who would have taken it like this? And he reflected that in truth and courage there is found wisdom. It seemed to him that till Mrs. Travers came to stand by his side he had never known what truth and courage and wisdom were. With his eyes on her face and having been told that in her eyes he appeared worthy of being both commanded and entreated, he felt an instant of complete content, a moment of, as it were, perfect emotional repose.

During the silence Mrs. Travers with a quick side-glance noticed d'Alcacer as one sees a man in a mist, his mere dark shape arrested close to the muslin screen. She had no doubt that he was looking in their direction and that he could see them much more plainly than she could see him. Mrs. Travers thought suddenly how anxious he must be; and she remembered that he had begged her for some sign, for some warning, beforehand, at the moment of crisis. She had understood very well his hinted request for time to get prepared. If he was to get more than a few minutes, this was the moment to make him a sign--the sign he had suggested himself. Mrs. Travers moved back the least bit so as to let the light fall in front of her and with a slow, distinct movement she put her left hand to her forehead.

"Well, then," she heard Lingard's forcible murmur, "well, then, Mrs. Travers, it must be done to-night."

One may be true, fearless, and wise, and yet catch one's breath before the simple finality of action. Mrs. Travers caught her breath: "To-night! To-night!" she whispered. D'Alcacer's dark and misty silhouette became more blurred. He had seen her sign and had retreated deeper within the Cage.

"Yes, to-night," affirmed Lingard. "Now, at once, within the hour, this moment," he murmured, fiercely, following Mrs. Travers in her recoiling movement. She felt her arm being seized swiftly. "Don't you see that if it is to do any good, that if they are not to be delivered to mere slaughter, it must be done while all is dark ashore, before an armed mob in boats comes clamouring alongside? Yes. Before the night is an hour older, so that I may be hammering at Belarab's gate while all the Settlement is still asleep."

Mrs. Travers didn't dream of protesting. For the moment she was unable to

speaking. This man was very fierce and just as suddenly as it had been gripped (making her think incongruously in the midst of her agitation that there would be certainly a bruise there in the morning) she felt her arm released and a penitential tone come into Lingard's murmuring voice.

"And even now it's nearly too late! The road was plain, but I saw you on it and my heart failed me. I was there like an empty man and I dared not face you. You must forgive me. No, I had no right to doubt you for a moment. I feel as if I ought to go on my knees and beg your pardon for forgetting what you are, for daring to forget."

"Why, King Tom, what is it?"

"It seems as if I had sinned," she heard him say. He seized her by the shoulders, turned her about, moved her forward a step or two. His hands were heavy, his force irresistible, though he himself imagined he was handling her gently. "Look straight before you," he growled into her ear. "Do you see anything?" Mrs. Travers, passive between the rigid arms, could see nothing but, far off, the massed, featureless shadows of the shore.

"No, I see nothing," she said.

"You can't be looking the right way," she heard him behind her. And now she felt her head between Lingard's hands. He moved it the least bit to the right. "There! See it?"

"No. What am I to look for?"

"A gleam of light," said Lingard, taking away his hands suddenly. "A gleam that will grow into a blaze before our boat can get half way across the lagoon."

Even as Lingard spoke Mrs. Travers caught sight of a red spark far away. She had looked often enough at the Settlement, as on the face of a painting on a curtain, to have its configuration fixed in her mind, to know that it was on the beach at its end furthest from Belarab's stockade.

"The brushwood is catching," murmured Lingard in her ear. "If they had some dry grass the whole pile would be blazing by now."

"And this means. . . ."

"It means that the news has spread. And it is before Tengga's enclosure on his end of the beach. That's where all the brains of the Settlement are. It means talk

and excitement and plenty of crafty words. Tengga's fire! I tell you, Mrs. Travers, that before half an hour has passed Daman will be there to make friends with the fat Tengga, who is ready to say to him, 'I told you so'."

"I see," murmured Mrs. Travers. Lingard drew her gently to the rail.

"And now look over there at the other end of the beach where the shadows are heaviest. That is Belarab's fort, his houses, his treasure, his dependents. That's where the strength of the Settlement is. I kept it up. I made it last. But what is it now? It's like a weapon in the hand of a dead man. And yet it's all we have to look to, if indeed there is still time. I swear to you I wouldn't dare land them in daylight for fear they should be slaughtered on the beach."

"There is no time to lose," whispered Mrs. Travers, and Lingard, too, spoke very low.

"No, not if I, too, am to keep what is my right. It's you who have said it."

"Yes, I have said it," she whispered, without lifting her head. Lingard made a brusque movement at her elbow and bent his head close to her shoulder.

"And I who mistrusted you! Like Arabs do to their great men, I ought to kiss the hem of your robe in repentance for having doubted the greatness of your heart."

"Oh! my heart!" said Mrs. Travers, lightly, still gazing at the fire, which had suddenly shot up to a tall blaze. "I can assure you it has been of very little account in the world." She paused for a moment to steady her voice, then said, firmly, "Let's get this over."

"To tell you the truth the boat has been ready for some time."

"Well, then. . . ."

"Mrs. Travers," said Lingard with an effort, "they are people of your own kind." And suddenly he burst out: "I cannot take them ashore bound hand and foot."

"Mr. d'Alcacer knows. You will find him ready. Ever since the beginning he has been prepared for whatever might happen."

"He is a man," said Lingard with conviction. "But it's of the other that I am thinking."

"Ah, the other," she repeated. "Then, what about my thoughts? Luckily we have

Mr. d'Alcacer. I shall speak to him first."

She turned away from the rail and moved toward the Cage.

"Jorgenson," the voice of Lingard resounded all along the deck, "get a light on the gangway." Then he followed Mrs. Travers slowly.