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D'Alcacer, after receiving his warning, stepped back and leaned against the edge of the table. He could not ignore in himself a certain emotion. And indeed, when he had asked Mrs. Travers for a sign he expected to be moved--but he had not expected the sign to come so soon. He expected this night to pass like other nights, in broken slumbers, bodily discomfort, and the unrest of disconnected thinking. At the same time he was surprised at his own emotion. He had flattered himself on the possession of more philosophy. He thought that this famous sense of self-preservation was a queer thing, a purely animal thing. "For, as a thinking man," he reflected, "I really ought not to care." It was probably the unusual that affected him. Clearly. If he had been lying seriously ill in a room in a hotel and had overheard some ominous whispers he would not have cared in the least. Ah, but then he would have been ill--and in illness one grows so indifferent. Illness is a great help to unemotional behaviour, which of course is the correct behaviour for a man of the world. He almost regretted he was not very ill. But, then, Mr. Travers was obviously ill and it did not seem to help him much. D'Alcacer glanced at the bedstead where Mr. Travers preserved an immobility which struck d'Alcacer as obviously affected. He mistrusted it. Generally he mistrusted Mr. Travers. One couldn't tell what he would do next. Not that he could do much one way or another, but that somehow he threatened to rob the situation of whatever dignity it may have had as a stroke of fate, as a call on courage. Mr. d'Alcacer, acutely observant and alert for the slightest hints, preferred to look upon himself as the victim not of a swindle but of a rough man naively engaged in a contest with heaven's injustice. D'Alcacer did not examine his heart, but some lines of a French poet came into his mind, to the effect that in all times those who fought with an unjust heaven had possessed the secret admiration and love of men. He didn't go so far as love but he could not deny to himself that his feeling toward Lingard was secretly friendly and--well, appreciative. Mr. Travers sat up suddenly. What a horrible nuisance, thought d'Alcacer, fixing his eyes on the tips of his shoes with the hope that perhaps the other would lie down again. Mr. Travers spoke.

"Still up, d'Alcacer?"

"I assure you it isn't late. It's dark at six, we dined before seven, that makes the night long and I am not a very good sleeper; that is, I cannot go to sleep till late in the night."

"I envy you," said Mr. Travers, speaking with a sort of drowsy apathy. "I am always dropping off and the awakenings are horrible."

D'Alcacer, raising his eyes, noticed that Mrs. Travers and Lingard had vanished from the light. They had gone to the rail where d'Alcacer could not see them. Some pity mingled with his vexation at Mr. Travers' snatchy wakefulness. There was something weird about the man, he reflected. "Jorgenson," he began aloud.

"What's that?" snapped Mr. Travers.

"It's the name of that lanky old store-keeper who is always about the decks."

"I haven't seen him. I don't see anybody. I don't know anybody. I prefer not to notice."

"I was only going to say that he gave me a pack of cards; would you like a game of piquet?"

"I don't think I could keep my eyes open," said Mr. Travers in an unexpectedly confidential tone. "Isn't it funny, d'Alcacer? And then I wake up. It's too awful."

D'Alcacer made no remark and Mr. Travers seemed not to have expected any.

"When I said my wife was mad," he began, suddenly, causing d'Alcacer to start, "I didn't mean it literally, of course." His tone sounded slightly dogmatic and he didn't seem to be aware of any interval during which he had appeared to sleep. D'Alcacer was convinced more than ever that he had been shamming, and resigned himself wearily to listen, folding his arms across his chest. "What I meant, really," continued Mr. Travers, "was that she is the victim of a craze. Society is subject to crazes, as you know very well. They are not reprehensible in themselves, but the worst of my wife is that her crazes are never like those of the people with whom she naturally associates. They generally run counter to them. This peculiarity has given me some anxiety, you understand, in the position we occupy. People will begin to say that she is eccentric. Do you see her anywhere, d'Alcacer?"

D'Alcacer was thankful to be able to say that he didn't see Mrs. Travers. He didn't even hear any murmurs, though he had no doubt that everybody on board the Emma was wide awake by now. But Mr. Travers inspired him with invincible mistrust and he thought it prudent to add:

"You forget that your wife has a room in the deckhouse."

This was as far as he would go, for he knew very well that she was not in the deckhouse. Mr. Travers, completely convinced by the statement, made no sound.

But neither did he lie down again. D'Alcacer gave himself up to meditation. The night seemed extremely oppressive. At Lingard's shout for Jorgenson, that in the profound silence struck his ears ominously, he raised his eyes and saw Mrs. Travers outside the door of the Cage. He started forward but she was already within. He saw she was moved. She seemed out of breath and as if unable to speak at first.

"Hadn't we better shut the door?" suggested d'Alcacer.

"Captain Lingard's coming in," she whispered to him. "He has made up his mind."

"That's an excellent thing," commented d'Alcacer, quietly. "I conclude from this that we shall hear something."

"You shall hear it all from me," breathed out Mrs. Travers.

"Ah!" exclaimed d'Alcacer very low.

By that time Lingard had entered, too, and the decks of the Emma were all astir with moving figures. Jorgenson's voice was also heard giving directions. For nearly a minute the four persons within the Cage remained motionless. A shadowy Malay in the gangway said suddenly: "Sudah, Tuan," and Lingard murmured, "Ready, Mrs. Travers."

She seized d'Alcacer's arm and led him to the side of the Cage furthest from the corner in which Mr. Travers' bed was placed, while Lingard busied himself in pricking up the wick of the Cage lantern as if it had suddenly occurred to him that this, whatever happened, should not be a deed of darkness. Mr. Travers did nothing but turn his head to look over his shoulder.

"One moment," said d'Alcacer, in a low tone and smiling at Mrs. Travers' agitation. "Before you tell me anything let me ask you: 'Have you made up your mind?'" He saw with much surprise a widening of her eyes. Was it indignation? A pause as of suspicion fell between those two people. Then d'Alcacer said apologetically: "Perhaps I ought not to have asked that question," and Lingard caught Mrs. Travers' words, "Oh, I am not afraid to answer that question."

Then their voices sank. Lingard hung the lamp up again and stood idle in the revived light; but almost immediately he heard d'Alcacer calling him discreetly.

"Captain Lingard!"

He moved toward them at once. At the same instant Mr. Travers' head pivoted

away from the group to its frontal position.

D'Alcacer, very serious, spoke in a familiar undertone.

"Mrs. Travers tells me that we must be delivered up to those Moors on shore."

"Yes, there is nothing else for it," said Lingard.

"I confess I am a bit startled," said d'Alcacer; but except for a slightly hurried utterance nobody could have guessed at anything resembling emotion.

"I have a right to my good name," said Lingard, also very calm, while Mrs. Travers near him, with half-veiled eyes, listened impassive like a presiding genius.

"I wouldn't question that for a moment," conceded d'Alcacer. "A point of honour is not to be discussed. But there is such a thing as humanity, too. To be delivered up helplessly. . . ."

"Perhaps!" interrupted Lingard. "But you needn't feel hopeless. I am not at liberty to give up my life for your own. Mrs. Travers knows why. That, too, is engaged."

"Always on your honour?"

"I don't know. A promise is a promise."

"Nobody can be held to the impossible," remarked d'Alcacer.

"Impossible! What is impossible? I don't know it. I am not a man to talk of the impossible or dodge behind it. I did not bring you here."

D'Alcacer lowered his head for a moment. "I have finished," he said, gravely. "That much I had to say. I hope you don't think I have appeared unduly anxious."

"It's the best policy, too." Mrs. Travers made herself heard suddenly. Nothing of her moved but her lips, she did not even raise her eyes. "It's the only possible policy. You believe me, Mr. d'Alcacer? . . ." He made an almost imperceptible movement of the head. . . . "Well, then, I put all my hope in you, Mr. d'Alcacer, to get this over as easily as possible and save us all from some odious scene. You think perhaps that it is I who ought to. . . ."

"No, no! I don't think so," interrupted d'Alcacer. "It would be impossible."

"I am afraid it would," she admitted, nervously.

D'Alcacer made a gesture as if to beg her to say no more and at once crossed over to Mr. Travers' side of the Cage. He did not want to give himself time to think about his task. Mr. Travers was sitting up on the camp bedstead with a light cotton sheet over his legs. He stared at nothing, and on approaching him d'Alcacer disregarded the slight sinking of his own heart at this aspect which seemed to be that of extreme terror. "This is awful," he thought. The man kept as still as a hare in its form.

The impressed d'Alcacer had to make an effort to bring himself to tap him lightly on the shoulder.

"The moment has come, Travers, to show some fortitude," he said with easy intimacy. Mr. Travers looked up swiftly. "I have just been talking to your wife. She had a communication from Captain Lingard for us both. It remains for us now to preserve as much as possible our dignity. I hope that if necessary we will both know how to die."

In a moment of profound stillness, d'Alcacer had time to wonder whether his face was as stony in expression as the one upturned to him. But suddenly a smile appeared on it, which was certainly the last thing d'Alcacer expected to see. An indubitable smile. A slightly contemptuous smile.

"My wife has been stuffing your head with some more of her nonsense." Mr. Travers spoke in a voice which astonished d'Alcacer as much as the smile, a voice that was not irritable nor peevish, but had a distinct note of indulgence. "My dear d'Alcacer, that craze has got such a hold of her that she would tell you any sort of tale. Social impostors, mediums, fortune-tellers, charlatans of all sorts do obtain a strange influence over women. You have seen that sort of thing yourself. I had a talk with her before dinner. The influence that bandit has got over her is incredible. I really believe the fellow is half crazy himself. They often are, you know. I gave up arguing with her. Now, what is it you have got to tell me? But I warn you that I am not going to take it seriously."

He rejected briskly the cotton sheet, put his feet to the ground and buttoned his jacket. D'Alcacer, as he talked, became aware by the slight noise behind him that Mrs. Travers and Lingard were leaving the Cage, but he went on to the end and then waited anxiously for the answer.

"See! She has followed him out on deck," were Mr. Travers' first words. "I hope you understand that it is a mere craze. You can't help seeing that. Look at her costume. She simply has lost her head. Luckily the world needn't know. But suppose that something similar had happened at home. It would have been

extremely awkward. Oh! yes, I will come. I will go anywhere. I can't stand this hulk, those people, this infernal Cage. I believe I should fall ill if I were to remain here."

The inward detached voice of Jorgenson made itself heard near the gangway saying: "The boat has been waiting for this hour past, King Tom."

"Let us make a virtue of necessity and go with a good grace," said d'Alcacer, ready to take Mr. Travers under the arm persuasively, for he did not know what to make of that gentleman.

But Mr. Travers seemed another man. "I am afraid, d'Alcacer, that you, too, are not very strong-minded. I am going to take a blanket off this bedstead. . . ." He flung it hastily over his arm and followed d'Alcacer closely. "What I suffer mostly from, strange to say, is cold."

Mrs. Travers and Lingard were waiting near the gangway. To everybody's extreme surprise Mr. Travers addressed his wife first.

"You were always laughing at people's crazes," was what he said, "and now you have a craze of your own. But we won't discuss that."

D'Alcacer passed on, raising his cap to Mrs. Travers, and went down the ship's side into the boat. Jorgenson had vanished in his own manner like an exorcised ghost, and Lingard, stepping back, left husband and wife face to face.

"Did you think I was going to make a fuss?" asked Mr. Travers in a very low voice. "I assure you I would rather go than stay here. You didn't think that? You have lost all sense of reality, of probability. I was just thinking this evening that I would rather be anywhere than here looking on at you. At your folly. . . ."

Mrs. Travers' loud, "Martin!" made Lingard wince, caused d'Alcacer to lift his head down there in the boat, and even Jorgenson, forward somewhere out of sight, ceased mumbling in his moustache. The only person who seemed not to have heard that exclamation was Mr. Travers himself, who continued smoothly:

". . . at the aberration of your mind, you who seemed so superior to common credulities. You are not yourself, not at all, and some day you will admit to me that . . . No, the best thing will be to forget it, as you will soon see yourself. We shall never mention that subject in the future. I am certain you will be only too glad to agree with me on that point."

"How far ahead are you looking?" asked Mrs. Travers, finding her voice and even

the very tone in which she would have addressed him had they been about to part in the hall of their town house. She might have been asking him at what time he expected to be home, while a footman held the door open and the brougham waited in the street.

"Not very far. This can't last much longer." Mr. Travers made a movement as if to leave her exactly as though he were rather pressed to keep an appointment. "By the by," he said, checking himself, "I suppose the fellow understands thoroughly that we are wealthy. He could hardly doubt that."

"It's the last thought that would enter his head," said Mrs. Travers.

"Oh, yes, just so," Mr. Travers allowed a little impatience to pierce under his casual manner. "But I don't mind telling you that I have had enough of this. I am prepared to make--ah!--to make concessions. A large pecuniary sacrifice. Only the whole position is so absurd! He might conceivably doubt my good faith. Wouldn't it be just as well if you, with your particular influence, would hint to him that with me he would have nothing to fear? I am a man of my word."

"That is the first thing he would naturally think of any man," said Mrs. Travers.

"Will your eyes never be opened?" Mr. Travers began, irritably, then gave it up. "Well, so much the better then. I give you a free hand."

"What made you change your attitude like this?" asked Mrs. Travers, suspiciously.

"My regard for you," he answered without hesitation.

"I intended to join you in your captivity. I was just trying to persuade him. . . ."

"I forbid you absolutely," whispered Mr. Travers, forcibly. "I am glad to get away. I don't want to see you again till your craze is over."

She was confounded by his secret vehemence. But instantly succeeding his fierce whisper came a short, inane society laugh and a much louder, "Not that I attach any importance . . ."

He sprang away, as it were, from his wife, and as he went over the gangway waved his hand to her amiably.

Lighted dimly by the lantern on the roof of the deckhouse Mrs. Travers remained very still with lowered head and an aspect of profound meditation. It lasted but

an instant before she moved off and brushing against Lingard passed on with downcast eyes to her deck cabin. Lingard heard the door shut. He waited awhile, made a movement toward the gangway but checked himself and followed Mrs. Travers into her cabin.

It was pitch dark in there. He could see absolutely nothing and was oppressed by the profound stillness unstirred even by the sound of breathing.

"I am going on shore," he began, breaking the black and deathlike silence enclosing him and the invisible woman. "I wanted to say good-bye."

"You are going on shore," repeated Mrs. Travers. Her voice was emotionless, blank, unringing.

"Yes, for a few hours, or for life," Lingard said in measured tones. "I may have to die with them or to die maybe for others. For you, if I only knew how to manage it, I would want to live. I am telling you this because it is dark. If there had been a light in here I wouldn't have come in."

"I wish you had not," uttered the same unringing woman's voice. "You are always coming to me with those lives and those deaths in your hand."

"Yes, it's too much for you," was Lingard's undertoned comment. "You could be no other than true. And you are innocent! Don't wish me life, but wish me luck, for you are innocent--and you will have to take your chance."

"All luck to you, King Tom," he heard her say in the darkness in which he seemed now to perceive the gleam of her hair. "I will take my chance. And try not to come near me again for I am weary of you."

"I can well believe it," murmured Lingard, and stepped out of the cabin, shutting the door after him gently. For half a minute, perhaps, the stillness continued, and then suddenly the chair fell over in the darkness. Next moment Mrs. Travers' head appeared in the light of the lamp left on the roof of the deckhouse. Her bare arms grasped the door posts.

"Wait a moment," she said, loudly, into the shadows of the deck. She heard no footsteps, saw nothing moving except the vanishing white shape of the late Captain H. C. Jorgenson, who was indifferent to the life of men. "Wait, King Tom!" she insisted, raising her voice; then, "I didn't mean it. Don't believe me!" she cried, recklessly.

For the second time that night a woman's voice startled the hearts of men on

board the Emma. All except the heart of old Jorgenson. The Malays in the boat looked up from their thwarts. D'Alcacer, sitting in the stern sheets beside Lingard, felt a sinking of his heart.

"What's this?" he exclaimed. "I heard your name on deck. You are wanted, I think."

"Shove off," ordered Lingard, inflexibly, without even looking at d'Alcacer. Mr. Travers was the only one who didn't seem to be aware of anything. A long time after the boat left the Emma's side he leaned toward d'Alcacer.

"I have a most extraordinary feeling," he said in a cautious undertone. "I seem to be in the air--I don't know. Are we on the water, d'Alcacer? Are you quite sure? But of course, we are on the water."

"Yes," said d'Alcacer, in the same tone. "Crossing the Styx--perhaps." He heard Mr. Travers utter an unmoved "Very likely," which he did not expect. Lingard, his hand on the tiller, sat like a man of stone.

"Then your point of view has changed," whispered d'Alcacer.

"I told my wife to make an offer," went on the earnest whisper of the other man. "A sum of money. But to tell you the truth I don't believe very much in its success."

D'Alcacer made no answer and only wondered whether he didn't like better Mr. Travers' other, unreasonable mood. There was no denying the fact that Mr. Travers was a troubling person. Now he suddenly gripped d'Alcacer's fore-arm and added under his breath: "I doubt everything. I doubt whether the offer will ever be made."

All this was not very impressive. There was something pitiful in it: whisper, grip, shudder, as of a child frightened in the dark. But the emotion was deep. Once more that evening, but this time aroused by the husband's distress, d'Alcacer's wonder approached the borders of awe.