IV

Jorgenson, after seeing the canoe leave the ship's side, ceased to live intellectually. There was no need for more thinking, for any display of mental ingenuity. He had done with it all. All his notions were perfectly fixed and he could go over them in the same ghostly way in which he haunted the deck of the Emma. At the sight of the ring Lingard would return to Hassim and Immada, now captives, too, though Jorgenson certainly did not think them in any serious danger. What had happened really was that Tengga was now holding hostages, and those Jorgenson looked upon as Lingard's own people. They were his. He had gone in with them deep, very deep. They had a hold and a claim on King Tom just as many years ago people of that very race had had a hold and a claim on him, Jorgenson. Only Tom was a much bigger man. A very big man. Nevertheless, Jorgenson didn't see why he should escape his own fate--Jorgenson's fate--to be absorbed, captured, made their own either in failure or in success. It was an unavoidable fatality and Jorgenson felt certain that the ring would compel Lingard to face it without flinching. What he really wanted Lingard to do was to cease to take the slightest interest in those whites--who were the sort of people that left no footprints.

Perhaps at first sight, sending that woman to Lingard was not the best way toward that end. Jorgenson, however, had a distinct impression in which his morning talk with Mrs. Travers had only confirmed him, that those two had quarrelled for good. As, indeed, was unavoidable. What did Tom Lingard want with any woman? The only woman in Jorgenson's life had come in by way of exchange for a lot of cotton stuffs and several brass guns. This fact could not but affect Jorgenson's judgment since obviously in this case such a transaction was impossible. Therefore the case was not serious. It didn't exist. What did exist was Lingard's relation to the Wajo exiles, a great and warlike adventure such as no rover in those seas had ever attempted.

That Tengga was much more ready to negotiate than to fight, the old adventurer had not the slightest doubt. How Lingard would deal with him was not a concern of Jorgenson's. That would be easy enough. Nothing prevented Lingard from going to see Tengga and talking to him with authority. All that ambitious person really wanted was to have a share in Lingard's wealth, in Lingard's power, in Lingard's friendship. A year before Tengga had once insinuated to Jorgenson, "In what way am I less worthy of being a friend than Belarab?"

It was a distinct overture, a disclosure of the man's innermost mind. Jorgenson, of course, had met it with a profound silence. His task was not diplomacy but the

care of stores.

After the effort of connected mental processes in order to bring about Mrs. Travers' departure he was anxious to dismiss the whole matter from his mind. The last thought he gave to it was severely practical. It occurred to him that it would be advisable to attract in some way or other Lingard's attention to the lagoon. In the language of the sea a single rocket is properly a signal of distress, but, in the circumstances, a group of three sent up simultaneously would convey a warning. He gave his orders and watched the rockets go up finely with a trail of red sparks, a bursting of white stars high up in the air, and three loud reports in quick succession. Then he resumed his pacing of the whole length of the hulk, confident that after this Tom would guess that something was up and set a close watch over the lagoon. No doubt these mysterious rockets would have a disturbing effect on Tengga and his friends and cause a great excitement in the Settlement; but for that Jorgenson did not care. The Settlement was already in such a turmoil that a little more excitement did not matter. What Jorgenson did not expect, however, was the sound of a musket-shot fired from the jungle facing the bows of the Emma. It caused him to stop dead short. He had heard distinctly the bullet strike the curve of the bow forward. "Some hot-headed ass fired that," he said to himself, contemptuously. It simply disclosed to him the fact that he was already besieged on the shore side and set at rest his doubts as to the length Tengga was prepared to go. Any length! Of course there was still time for Tom to put everything right with six words, unless . . . Jorgenson smiled, grimly, in the dark and resumed his tireless pacing.

What amused him was to observe the fire which had been burning night and day before Tengga's residence suddenly extinguished. He pictured to himself the wild rush with bamboo buckets to the lagoon shore, the confusion, the hurry and jostling in a great hissing of water midst clouds of steam. The image of the fat Tengga's consternation appealed to Jorgenson's sense of humour for about five seconds. Then he took up the binoculars from the roof of the deckhouse.

The bursting of the three white stars over the lagoon had given him a momentary glimpse of the black speck of the canoe taking over Mrs. Travers. He couldn't find it again with the glass, it was too dark; but the part of the shore for which it was steered would be somewhere near the angle of Belarab's stockade nearest to the beach. This Jorgenson could make out in the faint rosy glare of fires burning inside. Jorgenson was certain that Lingard was looking toward the Emma through the most convenient loophole he could find.

As obviously Mrs. Travers could not have paddled herself across, two men were taking her over; and for the steersman she had Jaffir. Though he had assented to Jorgenson's plan Jaffir was anxious to accompany the ring as near as possible to

its destination. Nothing but dire necessity had induced him to part with the talisman. Crouching in the stern and flourishing his paddle from side to side he glared at the back of the canvas deck-chair which had been placed in the middle for Mrs. Travers. Wrapped up in the darkness she reclined in it with her eyes closed, faintly aware of the ring hung low on her breast. As the canoe was rather large it was moving very slowly. The two men dipped their paddles without a splash: and surrendering herself passively, in a temporary relaxation of all her limbs, to this adventure Mrs. Travers had no sense of motion at all. She, too, like Jorgenson, was tired of thinking. She abandoned herself to the silence of that night full of roused passions and deadly purposes. She abandoned herself to an illusory feeling; to the impression that she was really resting. For the first time in many days she could taste the relief of being alone. The men with her were less than nothing. She could not speak to them; she could not understand them; the canoe might have been moving by enchantment--if it did move at all. Like a half-conscious sleeper she was on the verge of saying to herself, "What a strange dream I am having."

The low tones of Jaffir's voice stole into it quietly telling the men to cease paddling, and the long canoe came to a rest slowly, no more than ten yards from the beach. The party had been provided with a torch which was to be lighted before the canoe touched the shore, thus giving a character of openness to this desperate expedition. "And if it draws fire on us," Jaffir had commented to Jorgenson, "well, then, we shall see whose fate it is to die on this night."

"Yes," had muttered Jorgenson. "We shall see."

Jorgenson saw at last the small light of the torch against the blackness of the stockade. He strained his hearing for a possible volley of musketry fire but no sound came to him over the broad surface of the lagoon. Over there the man with the torch, the other paddler, and Jaffir himself impelling with a gentle motion of his paddle the canoe toward the shore, had the glistening eyeballs and the tense faces of silent excitement. The ruddy glare smote Mrs. Travers' closed eyelids but she didn't open her eyes till she felt the canoe touch the strand. The two men leaped instantly out of it. Mrs. Travers rose, abruptly. Nobody made a sound. She stumbled out of the canoe on to the beach and almost before she had recovered her balance the torch was thrust into her hand. The heat, the nearness of the blaze confused and blinded her till, instinctively, she raised the torch high above her head. For a moment she stood still, holding aloft the fierce flame from which a few sparks were falling slowly.

A naked bronze arm lighted from above pointed out the direction and Mrs. Travers began to walk toward the featureless black mass of the stockade. When after a few steps she looked back over her shoulder, the lagoon, the beach, the

canoe, the men she had just left had become already invisible. She was alone bearing up a blazing torch on an earth that was a dumb shadow shifting under her feet. At last she reached firmer ground and the dark length of the palisade untouched as yet by the light of the torch seemed to her immense, intimidating. She felt ready to drop from sheer emotion. But she moved on.

"A little more to the left," shouted a strong voice.

It vibrated through all her fibres, rousing like the call of a trumpet, went far beyond her, filled all the space. Mrs. Travers stood still for a moment, then casting far away from her the burning torch ran forward blindly with her hands extended toward the great sound of Lingard's voice, leaving behind her the light flaring and spluttering on the ground. She stumbled and was only saved from a fall by her hands coming in contact with the rough stakes. The stockade rose high above her head and she clung to it with widely open arms, pressing her whole body against the rugged surface of that enormous and unscalable palisade. She heard through it low voices inside, heavy thuds; and felt at every blow a slight vibration of the ground under her feet. She glanced fearfully over her shoulder and saw nothing in the darkness but the expiring glow of the torch she had thrown away and the sombre shimmer of the lagoon bordering the opaque darkness of the shore. Her strained eyeballs seemed to detect mysterious movements in the darkness and she gave way to irresistible terror, to a shrinking agony of apprehension. Was she to be transfixed by a broad blade, to the high, immovable wall of wood against which she was flattening herself desperately, as though she could hope to penetrate it by the mere force of her fear? She had no idea where she was, but as a matter of fact she was a little to the left of the principal gate and almost exactly under one of the loopholes of the stockade. Her excessive anguish passed into insensibility. She ceased to hear, to see, and even to feel the contact of the surface to which she clung. Lingard's voice somewhere from the sky above her head was directing her, distinct, very close, full of concern.

"You must stoop low. Lower yet."

The stagnant blood of her body began to pulsate languidly. She stooped low--lower yet--so low that she had to sink on her knees, and then became aware of a faint smell of wood smoke mingled with the confused murmur of agitated voices. This came to her through an opening no higher than her head in her kneeling posture, and no wider than the breadth of two stakes. Lingard was saying in a tone of distress:

"I couldn't get any of them to unbar the gate."

She was unable to make a sound.--"Are you there?" Lingard asked, anxiously, so close to her now that she seemed to feel the very breath of his words on her face. It revived her completely; she understood what she had to do. She put her head and shoulders through the opening, was at once seized under the arms by an eager grip and felt herself pulled through with an irresistible force and with such haste that her scarf was dragged off her head, its fringes having caught in the rough timber. The same eager grip lifted her up, stood her on her feet without her having to make any exertion toward that end. She became aware that Lingard was trying to say something, but she heard only a confused stammering expressive of wonder and delight in which she caught the words "You . . . you . . ." deliriously repeated. He didn't release his hold of her; his helpful and irresistible grip had changed into a close clasp, a crushing embrace, the violent taking possession by an embodied force that had broken loose and was not to be controlled any longer. As his great voice had done a moment before, his great strength, too, seemed able to fill all space in its enveloping and undeniable authority. Every time she tried instinctively to stiffen herself against its might, it reacted, affirming its fierce will, its uplifting power. Several times she lost the feeling of the ground and had a sensation of helplessness without fear, of triumph without exultation. The inevitable had come to pass. She had foreseen it--and all the time in that dark place and against the red glow of camp fires within the stockade the man in whose arms she struggled remained shadowy to her eyes--to her half-closed eyes. She thought suddenly, "He will crush me to death without knowing it."

He was like a blind force. She closed her eyes altogether. Her head fell back a little. Not instinctively but with wilful resignation and as it were from a sense of justice she abandoned herself to his arms. The effect was as though she had suddenly stabbed him to the heart. He let her go so suddenly and completely that she would have fallen down in a heap if she had not managed to catch hold of his forearm. He seemed prepared for it and for a moment all her weight hung on it without moving its rigidity by a hair's breadth. Behind her Mrs. Travers heard the heavy thud of blows on wood, the confused murmurs and movements of men.

A voice said suddenly, "It's done," with such emphasis that though, of course, she didn't understand the words it helped her to regain possession of herself; and when Lingard asked her very little above a whisper: "Why don't you say something?" she answered readily, "Let me get my breath first."

Round them all sounds had ceased. The men had secured again the opening through which those arms had snatched her into a moment of self-forgetfulness which had left her out of breath but uncrushed. As if something imperative had been satisfied she had a moment of inward serenity, a period of peace without thought while, holding to that arm that trembled no more than an arm of iron,

she felt stealthily over the ground for one of the sandals which she had lost. Oh, yes, there was no doubt of it, she had been carried off the earth, without shame, without regret. But she would not have let him know of that dropped sandal for anything in the world. That lost sandal was as symbolic as a dropped veil. But he did not know of it. He must never know. Where was that thing? She felt sure that they had not moved an inch from that spot. Presently her foot found it and still gripping Lingard's forearm she stooped to secure it properly. When she stood up, still holding his arm, they confronted each other, he rigid in an effort of self-command but feeling as if the surges of the heaviest sea that he could remember in his life were running through his heart; and the woman as if emptied of all feeling by her experience, without thought yet, but beginning to regain her sense of the situation and the memory of the immediate past.

"I have been watching at that loophole for an hour, ever since they came running to me with that story of the rockets," said Lingard. "I was shut up with Belarab then. I was looking out when the torch blazed and you stepped ashore. I thought I was dreaming. But what could I do? I felt I must rush to you but I dared not. That clump of palms is full of men. So are the houses you saw that time you came ashore with me. Full of men. Armed men. A trigger is soon pulled and when once shooting begins. . . . And you walking in the open with that light above your head! I didn't dare. You were safer alone. I had the strength to hold myself in and watch you come up from the shore. No! No man that ever lived had seen such a sight. What did you come for?"

"Didn't you expect somebody? I don't mean me, I mean a messenger?"

"No!" said Lingard, wondering at his own self-control. "Why did he let you come?"

"You mean Captain Jorgenson? Oh, he refused at first. He said that he had your orders."

"How on earth did you manage to get round him?" said Lingard in his softest tones.

"I did not try," she began and checked herself. Lingard's question, though he really didn't seem to care much about an answer, had aroused afresh her suspicion of Jorgenson's change of front. "I didn't have to say very much at the last," she continued, gasping yet a little and feeling her personality, crushed to nothing in the hug of those arms, expand again to its full significance before the attentive immobility of that man. "Captain Jorgenson has always looked upon me as a nuisance. Perhaps he had made up his mind to get rid of me even against your orders. Is he quite sane?"

She released her firm hold of that iron forearm which fell slowly by Lingard's side. She had regained fully the possession of her personality. There remained only a fading, slightly breathless impression of a short flight above that earth on which her feet were firmly planted now. "And is that all?" she asked herself, not bitterly, but with a sort of tender contempt.

"He is so sane," sounded Lingard's voice, gloomily, "that if I had listened to him you would not have found me here."

"What do you mean by here? In this stockade?"

"Anywhere," he said.

"And what would have happened then?"

"God knows," he answered. "What would have happened if the world had not been made in seven days? I have known you for just about that time. It began by me coming to you at night--like a thief in the night. Where the devil did I hear that? And that man you are married to thinks I am no better than a thief."

"It ought to be enough for you that I never made a mistake as to what you are, that I come to you in less than twenty-four hours after you left me contemptuously to my distress. Don't pretend you didn't hear me call after you. Oh, yes, you heard. The whole ship heard me for I had no shame."

"Yes, you came," said Lingard, violently. "But have you really come? I can't believe my eyes! Are you really here?"

"This is a dark spot, luckily," said Mrs. Travers. "But can you really have any doubt?" she added, significantly.

He made a sudden movement toward her, betraying so much passion that Mrs. Travers thought, "I shan't come out alive this time," and yet he was there, motionless before her, as though he had never stirred. It was more as though the earth had made a sudden movement under his feet without being able to destroy his balance. But the earth under Mrs. Travers' feet had made no movement and for a second she was overwhelmed by wonder not at this proof of her own self-possession but at the man's immense power over himself. If it had not been for her strange inward exhaustion she would perhaps have surrendered to that power. But it seemed to her that she had nothing in her worth surrendering, and it was in a perfectly even tone that she said, "Give me your arm, Captain Lingard. We can't stay all night on this spot."

As they moved on she thought, "There is real greatness in that man." He was great even in his behaviour. No apologies, no explanations, no abasement, no violence, and not even the slightest tremor of the frame holding that bold and perplexed soul. She knew that for certain because her fingers were resting lightly on Lingard's arm while she walked slowly by his side as though he were taking her down to dinner. And yet she couldn't suppose for a moment, that, like herself, he was emptied of all emotion. She never before was so aware of him as a dangerous force. "He is really ruthless," she thought. They had just left the shadow of the inner defences about the gate when a slightly hoarse, apologetic voice was heard behind them repeating insistently, what even Mrs. Travers' ear detected to be a sort of formula. The words were: "There is this thing--there is this thing--there is this thing." They turned round.

"Oh, my scarf," said Mrs. Travers.

A short, squat, broad-faced young fellow having for all costume a pair of white drawers was offering the scarf thrown over both his arms, as if they had been sticks, and holding it respectfully as far as possible from his person. Lingard took it from him and Mrs. Travers claimed it at once. "Don't forget the proprieties," she said. "This is also my face veil."

She was arranging it about her head when Lingard said, "There is no need. I am taking you to those gentlemen."--"I will use it all the same," said Mrs. Travers. "This thing works both ways, as a matter of propriety or as a matter of precaution. Till I have an opportunity of looking into a mirror nothing will persuade me that there isn't some change in my face." Lingard swung half round and gazed down at her. Veiled now she confronted him boldly. "Tell me, Captain Lingard, how many eyes were looking at us a little while ago?"

"Do you care?" he asked.

"Not in the least," she said. "A million stars were looking on, too, and what did it matter? They were not of the world I know. And it's just the same with the eyes. They are not of the world I live in."

Lingard thought: "Nobody is." Never before had she seemed to him more unapproachable, more different and more remote. The glow of a number of small fires lighted the ground only, and brought out the black bulk of men lying down in the thin drift of smoke. Only one of these fires, rather apart and burning in front of the house which was the quarter of the prisoners, might have been called a blaze and even that was not a great one. It didn't penetrate the dark space between the piles and the depth of the verandah above where only a couple of heads and the glint of a spearhead could be seen dimly in the play of the light.

But down on the ground outside, the black shape of a man seated on a bench had an intense relief. Another intensely black shadow threw a handful of brushwood on the fire and went away. The man on the bench got up. It was d'Alcacer. He let Lingard and Mrs. Travers come quite close up to him. Extreme surprise seemed to have made him dumb.

"You didn't expect . . ." began Mrs. Travers with some embarrassment before that mute attitude.

"I doubted my eyes," struck in d'Alcacer, who seemed embarrassed, too. Next moment he recovered his tone and confessed simply: "At the moment I wasn't thinking of you, Mrs. Travers." He passed his hand over his forehead. "I hardly know what I was thinking of."

In the light of the shooting-up flame Mrs. Travers could see d'Alcacer's face. There was no smile on it. She could not remember ever seeing him so grave and, as it were, so distant. She abandoned Lingard's arm and moved closer to the fire.

"I fancy you were very far away, Mr. d'Alcacer," she said.

"This is the sort of freedom of which nothing can deprive us," he observed, looking hard at the manner in which the scarf was drawn across Mrs. Travers' face. "It's possible I was far away," he went on, "but I can assure you that I don't know where I was. Less than an hour ago we had a great excitement here about some rockets, but I didn't share in it. There was no one I could ask a question of. The captain here was, I understood, engaged in a most momentous conversation with the king or the governor of this place."

He addressed Lingard, directly. "May I ask whether you have reached any conclusion as yet? That Moor is a very dilatory person, I believe."

"Any direct attack he would, of course, resist," said Lingard. "And, so far, you are protected. But I must admit that he is rather angry with me. He's tired of the whole business. He loves peace above anything in the world. But I haven't finished with him yet."

"As far as I understood from what you told me before," said Mr. d'Alcacer, with a quick side glance at Mrs. Travers' uncovered and attentive eyes, "as far as I can see he may get all the peace he wants at once by driving us two, I mean Mr. Travers and myself, out of the gate on to the spears of those other enraged barbarians. And there are some of his counsellors who advise him to do that very thing no later than the break of day I understand."

Lingard stood for a moment perfectly motionless.

"That's about it," he said in an unemotional tone, and went away with a heavy step without giving another look at d'Alcacer and Mrs. Travers, who after a moment faced each other.

"You have heard?" said d'Alcacer. "Of course that doesn't affect your fate in any way, and as to him he is much too prestigious to be killed light-heartedly. When all this is over you will walk triumphantly on his arm out of this stockade; for there is nothing in all this to affect his greatness, his absolute value in the eyes of those people--and indeed in any other eyes." D'Alcacer kept his glance averted from Mrs. Travers and as soon as he had finished speaking busied himself in dragging the bench a little way further from the fire. When they sat down on it he kept his distance from Mrs. Travers. She made no sign of unveiling herself and her eyes without a face seemed to him strangely unknown and disquieting.

"The situation in a nutshell," she said. "You have arranged it all beautifully, even to my triumphal exit. Well, and what then? No, you needn't answer, it has no interest. I assure you I came here not with any notion of marching out in triumph, as you call it. I came here, to speak in the most vulgar way, to save your skin--and mine."

Her voice came muffled to d'Alcacer's ears with a changed character, even to the very intonation. Above the white and embroidered scarf her eyes in the firelight transfixed him, black and so steady that even the red sparks of the reflected glare did not move in them. He concealed the strong impression she made. He bowed his head a little.

"I believe you know perfectly well what you are doing."

"No! I don't know," she said, more quickly than he had ever heard her speak before. "First of all, I don't think he is so safe as you imagine. Oh, yes, he has prestige enough, I don't question that. But you are apportioning life and death with too much assurance. . . ."

"I know my portion," murmured d'Alcacer, gently. A moment of silence fell in which Mrs. Travers' eyes ended by intimidating d'Alcacer, who looked away. The flame of the fire had sunk low. In the dark agglomeration of buildings, which might have been called Belarab's palace, there was a certain animation, a flitting of people, voices calling and answering, the passing to and fro of lights that would illuminate suddenly a heavy pile, the corner of a house, the eaves of a low-pitched roof, while in the open parts of the stockade the armed men slept by the expiring fires.

Mrs. Travers said, suddenly, "That Jorgenson is not friendly to us."

"Possibly."

With clasped hands and leaning over his knees d'Alcacer had assented in a very low tone. Mrs. Travers, unobserved, pressed her hands to her breast and felt the shape of the ring, thick, heavy, set with a big stone. It was there, secret, hung against her heart, and enigmatic. What did it mean? What could it mean? What was the feeling it could arouse or the action it could provoke? And she thought with compunction that she ought to have given it to Lingard at once, without thinking, without hesitating. "There! This is what I came for. To give you this." Yes, but there had come an interval when she had been able to think of nothing, and since then she had had the time to reflect--unfortunately. To remember Jorgenson's hostile, contemptuous glance enveloping her from head to foot at the break of a day after a night of lonely anguish. And now while she sat there veiled from his keen sight there was that other man, that d'Alcacer, prophesying. O yes, triumphant. She knew already what that was. Mrs. Travers became afraid of the ring. She felt ready to pluck it from her neck and cast it away.

"I mistrust him," she said.--"You do!" exclaimed d'Alcacer, very low.--"I mean that Jorgenson. He seems a merciless sort of creature."--"He is indifferent to everything," said d'Alcacer.--"It may be a mask."--"Have you some evidence, Mrs. Travers?"

"No," said Mrs. Travers without hesitation. "I have my instinct."

D'Alcacer remained silent for a while as though he were pursuing another train of thought altogether, then in a gentle, almost playful tone: "If I were a woman," he said, turning to Mrs. Travers, "I would always trust my intuition."--"If you were a woman, Mr. d'Alcacer, I would not be speaking to you in this way because then I would be suspect to you."

The thought that before long perhaps he would be neither man nor woman but a lump of cold clay, crossed d'Alcacer's mind, which was living, alert, and unsubdued by the danger. He had welcomed the arrival of Mrs. Travers simply because he had been very lonely in that stockade, Mr. Travers having fallen into a phase of sulks complicated with shivering fits. Of Lingard d'Alcacer had seen almost nothing since they had landed, for the Man of Fate was extremely busy negotiating in the recesses of Belarab's main hut; and the thought that his life was being a matter of arduous bargaining was not agreeable to Mr. d'Alcacer. The Chief's dependents and the armed men garrisoning the stockade paid very little attention to him apparently, and this gave him the feeling of his captivity being

very perfect and hopeless. During the afternoon, while pacing to and fro in the bit of shade thrown by the glorified sort of hut inside which Mr. Travers shivered and sulked misanthropically, he had been aware of the more distant verandahs becoming filled now and then by the muffled forms of women of Belarab's household taking a distant and curious view of the white man. All this was irksome. He found his menaced life extremely difficult to get through. Yes, he welcomed the arrival of Mrs. Travers who brought with her a tragic note into the empty gloom.

"Suspicion is not in my nature, Mrs. Travers, I assure you, and I hope that you on your side will never suspect either my reserve or my frankness. I respect the mysterious nature of your conviction but hasn't Jorgenson given you some occasion to. . ."

"He hates me," said Mrs. Travers, and frowned at d'Alcacer's incipient smile. "It isn't a delusion on my part. The worst is that he hates me not for myself. I believe he is completely indifferent to my existence. Jorgenson hates me because as it were I represent you two who are in danger, because it is you two that are the trouble and I . . . Well!"

"Yes, yes, that's certain," said d'Alcacer, hastily. "But Jorgenson is wrong in making you the scapegoat. For if you were not here cool reason would step in and would make Lingard pause in his passion to make a king out of an exile. If we were murdered it would certainly make some stir in the world in time and he would fall under the suspicion of complicity with those wild and inhuman Moors. Who would regard the greatness of his day-dreams, his engaged honour, his chivalrous feelings? Nothing could save him from that suspicion. And being what he is, you understand me, Mrs. Travers (but you know him much better than I do), it would morally kill him."

"Heavens!" whispered Mrs. Travers. "This has never occurred to me." Those words seemed to lose themselves in the folds of the scarf without reaching d'Alcacer, who continued in his gentle tone:

'"However, as it is, he will be safe enough whatever happens. He will have your testimony to clear him."

Mrs. Travers stood up, suddenly, but still careful to keep her face covered, she threw the end of the scarf over her shoulder.

"I fear that Jorgenson," she cried with suppressed passion. "One can't understand what that man means to do. I think him so dangerous that if I were, for instance, entrusted with a message bearing on the situation, I would . . . suppress it."

D'Alcacer was looking up from the seat, full of wonder. Mrs. Travers appealed to him in a calm voice through the folds of the scarf:

"Tell me, Mr. d'Alcacer, you who can look on it calmly, wouldn't I be right?"

"Why, has Jorgenson told you anything?"

"Directly--nothing, except a phrase or two which really I could not understand. They seemed to have a hidden sense and he appeared to attach some mysterious importance to them that he dared not explain to me."

"That was a risk on his part," exclaimed d'Alcacer. "And he trusted you. Why you, I wonder!"

"Who can tell what notions he has in his head? Mr. d'Alcacer, I believe his only object is to call Captain Lingard away from us. I understood it only a few minutes ago. It has dawned upon me. All he wants is to call him off."

"Call him off," repeated d'Alcacer, a little bewildered by the aroused fire of her conviction. "I am sure I don't want him called off any more than you do; and, frankly, I don't believe Jorgenson has any such power. But upon the whole, and if you feel that Jorgenson has the power, I would--yes, if I were in your place I think I would suppress anything I could not understand."

Mrs. Travers listened to the very end. Her eyes--they appeared incredibly sombre to d'Alcacer--seemed to watch the fall of every deliberate word and after he had ceased they remained still for an appreciable time. Then she turned away with a gesture that seemed to say: "So be it."

D'Alcacer raised his voice suddenly after her. "Stay! Don't forget that not only your husband's but my head, too, is being played at that game. My judgment is not . . ."

She stopped for a moment and freed her lips. In the profound stillness of the courtyard her clear voice made the shadows at the nearest fires stir a little with low murmurs of surprise.

"Oh, yes, I remember whose heads I have to save," she cried. "But in all the world who is there to save that man from himself?"