

V

D'Alcacer sat down on the bench again. "I wonder what she knows," he thought, "and I wonder what I have done." He wondered also how far he had been sincere and how far affected by a very natural aversion from being murdered obscurely by ferocious Moors with all the circumstances of barbarity. It was a very naked death to come upon one suddenly. It was robbed of all helpful illusions, such as the free will of a suicide, the heroism of a warrior, or the exaltation of a martyr. "Hadn't I better make some sort of fight of it?" he debated with himself. He saw himself rushing at the naked spears without any enthusiasm. Or wouldn't it be better to go forth to meet his doom (somewhere outside the stockade on that horrible beach) with calm dignity. "Pah! I shall be probably speared through the back in the beastliest possible fashion," he thought with an inward shudder. It was certainly not a shudder of fear, for Mr. d'Alcacer attached no high value to life. It was a shudder of disgust because Mr. d'Alcacer was a civilized man and though he had no illusions about civilization he could not but admit the superiority of its methods. It offered to one a certain refinement of form, a comeliness of proceedings and definite safeguards against deadly surprises. "How idle all this is," he thought, finally. His next thought was that women were very resourceful. It was true, he went on meditating with unwonted cynicism, that strictly speaking they had only one resource but, generally, it served--it served.

He was surprised by his supremely shameless bitterness at this juncture. It was so uncalled for. This situation was too complicated to be entrusted to a cynical or shameless hope. There was nothing to trust to. At this moment of his meditation he became aware of Lingard's approach. He raised his head eagerly. D'Alcacer was not indifferent to his fate and even to Mr. Travers' fate. He would fain learn. . . . But one look at Lingard's face was enough. "It's no use asking him anything," he said to himself, "for he cares for nothing just now."

Lingard sat down heavily on the other end of the bench, and d'Alcacer, looking at his profile, confessed to himself that this was the most masculinely good-looking face he had ever seen in his life. It was an expressive face, too, but its present expression was also beyond d'Alcacer's past experience. At the same time its quietness set up a barrier against common curiosities and even common fears. No, it was no use asking him anything. Yet something should be said to break the spell, to call down again this man to the earth. But it was Lingard who spoke first. "Where has Mrs. Travers gone?"

"She has gone . . . where naturally she would be anxious to go first of all since she has managed to come to us," answered d'Alcacer, wording his answer with

the utmost regard for the delicacy of the situation.

The stillness of Lingard seemed to have grown even more impressive. He spoke again.

"I wonder what those two can have to say to each other."

He might have been asking that of the whole darkened part of the globe, but it was d'Alcacer who answered in his courteous tones.

"Would it surprise you very much, Captain Lingard, if I were to tell you that those two people are quite fit to understand each other thoroughly? Yes? It surprises you! Well, I assure you that seven thousand miles from here nobody would wonder."

"I think I understand," said Lingard, "but don't you know the man is light-headed? A man like that is as good as mad."

"Yes, he had been slightly delirious since seven o'clock," said d'Alcacer. "But believe me, Captain Lingard," he continued, earnestly, and obeying a perfectly disinterested impulse, "that even in his delirium he is far more understandable to her and better able to understand her than . . . anybody within a hundred miles from here."

"Ah!" said Lingard without any emotion, "so you don't wonder. You don't see any reason for wonder."

"No, for, don't you see, I do know."

"What do you know?"

"Men and women, Captain Lingard, which you. . . ."

"I don't know any woman."

"You have spoken the strictest truth there," said d'Alcacer, and for the first time Lingard turned his head slowly and looked at his neighbour on the bench.

"Do you think she is as good as mad, too?" asked Lingard in a startled voice.

D'Alcacer let escape a low exclamation. No, certainly he did not think so. It was an original notion to suppose that lunatics had a sort of common logic which made them understandable to each other. D'Alcacer tried to make his voice as

gentle as possible while he pursued: "No, Captain Lingard, I believe the woman of whom we speak is and will always remain in the fullest possession of herself."

Lingard, leaning back, clasped his hands round his knees. He seemed not to be listening and d'Alcacer, pulling a cigarette case out of his pocket, looked for a long time at the three cigarettes it contained. It was the last of the provision he had on him when captured. D'Alcacer had put himself on the strictest allowance. A cigarette was only to be lighted on special occasions; and now there were only three left and they had to be made to last till the end of life. They calmed, they soothed, they gave an attitude. And only three left! One had to be kept for the morning, to be lighted before going through the gate of doom--the gate of Belarab's stockade. A cigarette soothed, it gave an attitude. Was this the fitting occasion for one of the remaining two? D'Alcacer, a true Latin, was not afraid of a little introspection. In the pause he descended into the innermost depths of his being, then glanced up at the night sky. Sportsman, traveller, he had often looked up at the stars before to see how time went. It was going very slowly. He took out a cigarette, snapped-to the case, bent down to the embers. Then he sat up and blew out a thin cloud of smoke. The man by his side looked with his bowed head and clasped knee like a masculine rendering of mournful meditation. Such attitudes are met with sometimes on the sculptures of ancient tombs. D'Alcacer began to speak:

"She is a representative woman and yet one of those of whom there are but very few at any time in the world. Not that they are very rare but that there is but little room on top. They are the iridescent gleams on a hard and dark surface. For the world is hard, Captain Lingard, it is hard, both in what it will remember and in what it will forget. It is for such women that people toil on the ground and underground and artists of all sorts invoke their inspiration."

Lingard seemed not to have heard a word. His chin rested on his breast. D'Alcacer appraised the remaining length of his cigarette and went on in an equable tone through which pierced a certain sadness:

"No, there are not many of them. And yet they are all. They decorate our life for us. They are the gracious figures on the drab wall which lies on this side of our common grave. They lead a sort of ritual dance, that most of us have agreed to take seriously. It is a very binding agreement with which sincerity and good faith and honour have nothing to do. Very binding. Woe to him or her who breaks it. Directly they leave the pageant they get lost."

Lingard turned his head sharply and discovered d'Alcacer looking at him with profound attention.

"They get lost in a maze," continued d'Alcacer, quietly. "They wander in it lamenting over themselves. I would shudder at that fate for anything I loved. Do you know, Captain Lingard, how people lost in a maze end?" he went on holding Lingard by a steadfast stare. "No? . . . I will tell you then. They end by hating their very selves, and they die in disillusion and despair."

As if afraid of the force of his words d'Alcacer laid a soothing hand lightly on Lingard's shoulder. But Lingard continued to look into the embers at his feet and remained insensible to the friendly touch. Yet d'Alcacer could not imagine that he had not been heard. He folded his arms on his breast.

"I don't know why I have been telling you all this," he said, apologetically. "I hope I have not been intruding on your thoughts."

"I can think of nothing," Lingard declared, unexpectedly. "I only know that your voice was friendly; and for the rest--"

"One must get through a night like this somehow," said d'Alcacer. "The very stars seem to lag on their way. It's a common belief that a drowning man is irresistibly compelled to review his past experience. Just now I feel quite out of my depth, and whatever I have said has come from my experience. I am sure you will forgive me. All that it amounts to is this: that it is natural for us to cry for the moon but it would be very fatal to have our cries heard. For what could any one of us do with the moon if it were given to him? I am speaking now of us--common mortals."

It was not immediately after d'Alcacer had ceased speaking but only after a moment that Lingard unclasped his fingers, got up, and walked away. D'Alcacer followed with a glance of quiet interest the big, shadowy form till it vanished in the direction of an enormous forest tree left in the middle of the stockade. The deepest shade of the night was spread over the ground of Belarab's fortified courtyard. The very embers of the fires had turned black, showing only here and there a mere spark; and the forms of the prone sleepers could hardly be distinguished from the hard ground on which they rested, with their arms lying beside them on the mats. Presently Mrs. Travers appeared quite close to d'Alcacer, who rose instantly.

"Martin is asleep," said Mrs. Travers in a tone that seemed to have borrowed something of the mystery and quietness of the night.

"All the world's asleep," observed d'Alcacer, so low that Mrs. Travers barely caught the words, "Except you and me, and one other who has left me to wander about in the night."

"Was he with you? Where has he gone?"

"Where it's darkest I should think," answered d'Alcacer, secretly. "It's no use going to look for him; but if you keep perfectly still and hold your breath you may presently hear his footsteps."

"What did he tell you?" breathed out Mrs. Travers.

"I didn't ask him anything. I only know that something has happened which has robbed him of his power of thinking . . . Hadn't I better go to the hut? Don Martin ought to have someone with him when he wakes up." Mrs. Travers remained perfectly still and even now and then held her breath with a vague fear of hearing those footsteps wandering in the dark. D'Alcacer had disappeared. Again Mrs. Travers held her breath. No. Nothing. Not a sound. Only the night to her eyes seemed to have grown darker. Was that a footstep? "Where could I hide myself?" she thought. But she didn't move.

After leaving d'Alcacer, Lingard threading his way between the fires found himself under the big tree, the same tree against which Daman had been leaning on the day of the great talk when the white prisoners had been surrendered to Lingard's keeping on definite conditions. Lingard passed through the deep obscurity made by the outspread boughs of the only witness left there of a past that for endless ages had seen no mankind on this shore defended by the Shallows, around this lagoon overshadowed by the jungle. In the calm night the old giant, without shudders or murmurs in its enormous limbs, saw the restless man drift through the black shade into the starlight.

In that distant part of the courtyard there were only a few sentries who, themselves invisible, saw Lingard's white figure pace to and fro endlessly. They knew well who that was. It was the great white man. A very great man. A very rich man. A possessor of fire-arms, who could dispense valuable gifts and deal deadly blows, the friend of their Ruler, the enemy of his enemies, known to them for years and always mysterious. At their posts, flattened against the stakes near convenient loopholes, they cast backward glances and exchanged faint whispers from time to time.

Lingard might have thought himself alone. He had lost touch with the world. What he had said to d'Alcacer was perfectly true. He had no thought. He was in the state of a man who, having cast his eyes through the open gates of Paradise, is rendered insensible by that moment's vision to all the forms and matters of the earth; and in the extremity of his emotion ceases even to look upon himself but as the subject of a sublime experience which exalts or unfits, sanctifies or

damns--he didn't know which. Every shadowy thought, every passing sensation was like a base intrusion on that supreme memory. He couldn't bear it.

When he had tried to resume his conversation with Belarab after Mrs. Travers' arrival he had discovered himself unable to go on. He had just enough self-control to break off the interview in measured terms. He pointed out the lateness of the hour, a most astonishing excuse to people to whom time is nothing and whose life and activities are not ruled by the clock. Indeed Lingard hardly knew what he was saying or doing when he went out again leaving everybody dumb with astonishment at the change in his aspect and in his behaviour. A suspicious silence reigned for a long time in Belarab's great audience room till the Chief dismissed everybody by two quiet words and a slight gesture.

With her chin in her hand in the pose of a sybil trying to read the future in the glow of dying embers, Mrs. Travers, without holding her breath, heard quite close to her the footsteps which she had been listening for with mingled alarm, remorse, and hope.

She didn't change her attitude. The deep red glow lighted her up dimly, her face, the white hand hanging by her side, her feet in their sandals. The disturbing footsteps stopped close to her.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked, without looking round.

"I don't know," answered Lingard. He was speaking the exact truth. He didn't know. Ever since he had released that woman from his arms everything but the vaguest notions had departed from him. Events, necessities, things--he had lost his grip on them all. And he didn't care. They were futile and impotent; he had no patience with them. The offended and astonished Belarab, d'Alcacer with his kindly touch and friendly voice, the sleeping men, the men awake, the Settlement full of unrestful life and the restless Shallows of the coast, were removed from him into an immensity of pitying contempt. Perhaps they existed. Perhaps all this waited for him. Well, let all this wait; let everything wait, till to-morrow or to the end of time, which could now come at any moment for all he cared--but certainly till to-morrow.

"I only know," he went on with an emphasis that made Mrs. Travers raise her head, "that wherever I go I shall carry you with me--against my breast."

Mrs. Travers' fine ear caught the mingled tones of suppressed exultation and dawning fear, the ardour and the faltering of those words. She was feeling still the physical truth at the root of them so strongly that she couldn't help saying in a dreamy whisper:

"Did you mean to crush the life out of me?"

He answered in the same tone:

"I could not have done it. You are too strong. Was I rough? I didn't mean to be. I have been often told I didn't know my own strength. You did not seem able to get through that opening and so I caught hold of you. You came away in my hands quite easily. Suddenly I thought to myself, 'now I will make sure.'"

He paused as if his breath had failed him. Mrs. Travers dared not make the slightest movement. Still in the pose of one in quest of hidden truth she murmured, "Make sure?"

"Yes. And now I am sure. You are here--here! Before I couldn't tell."

"Oh, you couldn't tell before," she said.

"No."

"So it was reality that you were seeking."

He repeated as if speaking to himself: "And now I am sure."

Her sandalled foot, all rosy in the glow, felt the warmth of the embers. The tepid night had enveloped her body; and still under the impression of his strength she gave herself up to a momentary feeling of quietude that came about her heart as soft as the night air penetrated by the feeble clearness of the stars. "This is a limpid soul," she thought.

"You know I always believed in you," he began again. "You know I did. Well. I never believed in you so much as I do now, as you sit there, just as you are, and with hardly enough light to make you out by."

It occurred to her that she had never heard a voice she liked so well--except one. But that had been a great actor's voice; whereas this man was nothing in the world but his very own self. He persuaded, he moved, he disturbed, he soothed by his inherent truth. He had wanted to make sure and he had made sure apparently; and too weary to resist the waywardness of her thoughts Mrs. Travers reflected with a sort of amusement that apparently he had not been disappointed. She thought, "He believes in me. What amazing words. Of all the people that might have believed in me I had to find this one here. He believes in me more than in himself." A gust of sudden remorse tore her out from her quietness, made

her cry out to him:

"Captain Lingard, we forget how we have met, we forget what is going on. We mustn't. I won't say that you placed your belief wrongly but I have to confess something to you. I must tell you how I came here to-night. Jorgenson . . ."

He interrupted her forcibly but without raising his voice.

"Jorgenson. Who's Jorgenson? You came to me because you couldn't help yourself."

This took her breath away. "But I must tell you. There is something in my coming which is not clear to me."

"You can tell me nothing that I don't know already," he said in a pleading tone. "Say nothing. Sit still. Time enough to-morrow. To-morrow! The night is drawing to an end and I care for nothing in the world but you. Let me be. Give me the rest that is in you."

She had never heard such accents on his lips and she felt for him a great and tender pity. Why not humour this mood in which he wanted to preserve the moments that would never come to him again on this earth? She hesitated in silence. She saw him stir in the darkness as if he could not make up his mind to sit down on the bench. But suddenly he scattered the embers with his foot and sank on the ground against her feet, and she was not startled in the least to feel the weight of his head on her knee. Mrs. Travers was not startled but she felt profoundly moved. Why should she torment him with all those questions of freedom and captivity, of violence and intrigue, of life and death? He was not in a state to be told anything and it seemed to her that she did not want to speak, that in the greatness of her compassion she simply could not speak. All she could do for him was to rest her hand lightly on his head and respond silently to the slight movement she felt, sigh or sob, but a movement which suddenly immobilized her in an anxious emotion.

About the same time on the other side of the lagoon Jorgenson, raising his eyes, noted the stars and said to himself that the night would not last long now. He wished for daylight. He hoped that Lingard had already done something. The blaze in Tengga's compound had been re-lighted. Tom's power was unbounded, practically unbounded. And he was invulnerable.

Jorgenson let his old eyes wander amongst the gleams and shadows of the great sheet of water between him and that hostile shore and fancied he could detect a floating shadow having the characteristic shape of a man in a small canoe.

"O! Ya! Man!" he hailed. "What do you want?" Other eyes, too, had detected that shadow. Low murmurs arose on the deck of the Emma. "If you don't speak at once I shall fire," shouted Jorgenson, fiercely.

"No, white man," returned the floating shape in a solemn drawl. "I am the bearer of friendly words. A chief's words. I come from Tengga."

"There was a bullet that came on board not a long time ago--also from Tengga," said Jorgenson.

"That was an accident," protested the voice from the lagoon. "What else could it be? Is there war between you and Tengga? No, no, O white man! All Tengga desires is a long talk. He has sent me to ask you to come ashore."

At these words Jorgenson's heart sank a little. This invitation meant that Lingard had made no move. Was Tom asleep or altogether mad?

"The talk would be of peace," declared impressively the shadow which had drifted much closer to the hulk now.

"It isn't for me to talk with great chiefs," Jorgenson returned, cautiously.

"But Tengga is a friend," argued the nocturnal messenger. "And by that fire there are other friends--your friends, the Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada, who send you their greetings and who expect their eyes to rest on you before sunrise."

"That's a lie," remarked Jorgenson, perfunctorily, and fell into thought, while the shadowy bearer of words preserved a scandalized silence, though, of course, he had not expected to be believed for a moment. But one could never tell what a white man would believe. He had wanted to produce the impression that Hassim and Immada were the honoured guests of Tengga. It occurred to him suddenly that perhaps Jorgenson didn't know anything of the capture. And he persisted.

"My words are all true, Tuan. The Rajah of Wajo and his sister are with my master. I left them sitting by the fire on Tengga's right hand. Will you come ashore to be welcomed amongst friends?"

Jorgenson had been reflecting profoundly. His object was to gain as much time as possible for Lingard's interference which indeed could not fail to be effective. But he had not the slightest wish to entrust himself to Tengga's friendliness. Not that he minded the risk; but he did not see the use of taking it.

"No!" he said, "I can't go ashore. We white men have ways of our own and I am chief of this hulk. And my chief is the Rajah Laut, a white man like myself. All the words that matter are in him and if Tengga is such a great chief let him ask the Rajah Laut for a talk. Yes, that's the proper thing for Tengga to do if he is such a great chief as he says."

"The Rajah Laut has made his choice. He dwells with Belarab, and with the white people who are huddled together like trapped deer in Belarab's stockade. Why shouldn't you meantime go over where everything is lighted up and open and talk in friendship with Tengga's friends, whose hearts have been made sick by many doubts; Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada and Daman, the chief of the men of the sea, who do not know now whom they can trust unless it be you, Tuan, the keeper of much wealth?"

The diplomatist in the small dugout paused for a moment to give special weight to the final argument:

"Which you have no means to defend. We know how many armed men there are with you."

"They are great fighters," Jorgenson observed, unconcernedly, spreading his elbows on the rail and looking over at the floating black patch of characteristic shape whence proceeded the voice of the wily envoy of Tengga. "Each man of them is worth ten of such as you can find in the Settlement."

"Yes, by Allah. Even worth twenty of these common people. Indeed, you have enough with you to make a great fight but not enough for victory."

"God alone gives victory," said suddenly the voice of Jaffir, who, very still at Jorgenson's elbow, had been listening to the conversation.

"Very true," was the answer in an extremely conventional tone. "Will you come ashore, O white man; and be the leader of chiefs?"

"I have been that before," said Jorgenson, with great dignity, "and now all I want is peace. But I won't come ashore amongst people whose minds are so much troubled, till Rajah Hassim and his sister return on board this ship and tell me the tale of their new friendship with Tengga."

His heart was sinking with every minute, the very air was growing heavier with the sense of oncoming disaster, on that night that was neither war nor peace and whose only voice was the voice of Tengga's envoy, insinuating in tone though menacing in words.

"No, that cannot be," said that voice. "But, Tuan, verily Tengga himself is ready to come on board here to talk with you. He is very ready to come and indeed, Tuan, he means to come on board here before very long."

"Yes, with fifty war-canoes filled with the ferocious rabble of the Shore of Refuge," Jaffir was heard commenting, sarcastically, over the rail; and a sinister muttered "It may be so," ascended alongside from the black water.

Jorgenson kept silent as if waiting for a supreme inspiration and suddenly he spoke in his other-world voice: "Tell Tengga from me that as long as he brings with him Rajah Hassim and the Rajah's sister, he and his chief men will be welcome on deck here, no matter how many boats come along with them. For that I do not care. You may go now."

A profound silence succeeded. It was clear that the envoy was gone, keeping in the shadow of the shore. Jorgenson turned to Jaffir.

"Death amongst friends is but a festival," he quoted, mumbling in his moustache.

"It is, by Allah," assented Jaffir with sombre fervour.

VI

Thirty-six hours later Carter, alone with Lingard in the cabin of the brig, could almost feel during a pause in his talk the oppressive, the breathless peace of the Shallows awaiting another sunset.

"I never expected to see any of you alive," Carter began in his easy tone, but with much less carelessness in his bearing as though his days of responsibility amongst the Shoals of the Shore of Refuge had matured his view of the external world and of his own place therein.

"Of course not," muttered Lingard.

The listlessness of that man whom he had always seen acting under the stress of a secret passion seemed perfectly appalling to Carter's youthful and deliberate energy. Ever since he had found himself again face to face with Lingard he had tried to conceal the shocking impression with a delicacy which owed nothing to training but was as intuitive as a child's.

While justifying to Lingard his manner of dealing with the situation on the Shore of Refuge, he could not for the life of him help asking himself what was this new mystery. He was also young enough to long for a word of commendation.

"Come, Captain," he argued; "how would you have liked to come out and find nothing but two half-burnt wrecks stuck on the sands--perhaps?"

He waited for a moment, then in sheer compassion turned away his eyes from that fixed gaze, from that harassed face with sunk cheeks, from that figure of indomitable strength robbed of its fire. He said to himself: "He doesn't hear me," and raised his voice without altering its self-contained tone:

"I was below yesterday morning when we felt the shock, but the noise came to us only as a deep rumble. I made one jump for the companion but that precious Shaw was before me yelling, 'Earthquake! Earthquake!' and I am hanged if he didn't miss his footing and land down on his head at the bottom of the stairs. I had to stop to pick him up but I got on deck in time to see a mighty black cloud that seemed almost solid pop up from behind the forest like a balloon. It stayed there for quite a long time. Some of our Calashes on deck swore to me that they had seen a red flash above the tree-tops. But that's hard to believe. I guessed at once that something had blown up on shore. My first thought was that I would never see you any more and I made up my mind at once to find out all the truth you have been keeping away from me. No, sir! Don't you make a mistake! I wasn't going to give you up, dead or alive."

He looked hard at Lingard while saying these words and saw the first sign of animation pass over that ravaged face. He saw even its lips move slightly; but there was no sound, and Carter looked away again.

"Perhaps you would have done better by telling me everything; but you left me behind on my own to be your man here. I put my hand to the work I could see before me. I am a sailor. There were two ships to look after. And here they are both for you, fit to go or to stay, to fight or to run, as you choose." He watched with bated breath the effort Lingard had to make to utter the two words of the desired commendation:

"Well done!"

"And I am your man still," Carter added, impulsively, and hastened to look away from Lingard, who had tried to smile at him and had failed. Carter didn't know what to do next, remain in the cabin or leave that unsupported strong man to himself. With a shyness completely foreign to his character and which he could not understand himself, he suggested in an engaging murmur and with an

embarrassed assumption of his right to give advice:

"Why not lie down for a bit, sir? I can attend to anything that may turn up. You seem done up, sir."

He was facing Lingard, who stood on the other side of the table in a leaning forward attitude propped up on rigid arms and stared fixedly at him--perhaps? Carter felt on the verge of despair. This couldn't last. He was relieved to see Lingard shake his head slightly.

"No, Mr. Carter. I think I will go on deck," said the Captain of the famous brig *Lightning*, while his eyes roamed all over the cabin. Carter stood aside at once, but it was some little time before Lingard made a move.

The sun had sunk already, leaving that evening no trace of its glory on a sky clear as crystal and on the waters without a ripple. All colour seemed to have gone out of the world. The oncoming shadow rose as subtle as a perfume from the black coast lying athwart the eastern semicircle; and such was the silence within the horizon that one might have fancied oneself come to the end of time. Black and toylike in the clear depths and the final stillness of the evening the brig and the schooner lay anchored in the middle of the main channel with their heads swung the same way. Lingard, with his chin on his breast and his arms folded, moved slowly here and there about the poop. Close and mute like his shadow, Carter, at his elbow, followed his movements. He felt an anxious solicitude. . . .

It was a sentiment perfectly new to him. He had never before felt this sort of solicitude about himself or any other man. His personality was being developed by new experience, and as he was very simple he received the initiation with shyness and self-mistrust. He had noticed with innocent alarm that Lingard had not looked either at the sky or over the sea, neither at his own ship nor the schooner astern; not along the decks, not aloft, not anywhere. He had looked at nothing! And somehow Carter felt himself more lonely and without support than when he had been left alone by that man in charge of two ships entangled amongst the Shallows and environed by some sinister mystery. Since that man had come back, instead of welcome relief Carter felt his responsibility rest on his young shoulders with tenfold weight. His profound conviction was that Lingard should be roused.

"Captain Lingard," he burst out in desperation; "you can't say I have worried you very much since this morning when I received you at the side, but I must be told something. What is it going to be with us? Fight or run?"

Lingard stopped short and now there was no doubt in Carter's mind that the

Captain was looking at him. There was no room for any doubt before that stern and enquiring gaze. "Aha!" thought Carter. "This has startled him"; and feeling that his shyness had departed he pursued his advantage. "For the fact of the matter is, sir, that, whatever happens, unless I am to be your man you will have no officer. I had better tell you at once that I have bundled that respectable, crazy, fat Shaw out of the ship. He was upsetting all hands. Yesterday I told him to go and get his dunnage together because I was going to send him aboard the yacht. He couldn't have made more uproar about it if I had proposed to chuck him overboard. I warned him that if he didn't go quietly I would have him tied up like a sheep ready for slaughter. However, he went down the ladder on his own feet, shaking his fist at me and promising to have me hanged for a pirate some day. He can do no harm on board the yacht. And now, sir, it's for you to give orders and not for me--thank God!"

Lingard turned away, abruptly. Carter didn't budge. After a moment he heard himself called from the other side of the deck and obeyed with alacrity.

"What's that story of a man you picked up on the coast last evening?" asked Lingard in his gentlest tone. "Didn't you tell me something about it when I came on board?"

"I tried to," said Carter, frankly. "But I soon gave it up. You didn't seem to pay any attention to what I was saying. I thought you wanted to be left alone for a bit. What can I know of your ways, yet, sir? Are you aware, Captain Lingard, that since this morning I have been down five times at the cabin door to look at you? There you sat. . . ."

He paused and Lingard said: "You have been five times down in the cabin?"

"Yes. And the sixth time I made up my mind to make you take some notice of me. I can't be left without orders. There are two ships to look after, a lot of things to be done. . . ."

"There is nothing to be done," Lingard interrupted with a mere murmur but in a tone which made Carter keep silent for a while.

"Even to know that much would have been something to go by," he ventured at last. "I couldn't let you sit there with the sun getting pretty low and a long night before us."

"I feel stunned yet," said Lingard, looking Carter straight in the face, as if to watch the effect of that confession.

"Were you very near that explosion?" asked the young man with sympathetic curiosity and seeking for some sign on Lingard's person. But there was nothing. Not a single hair of the Captain's head seemed to have been singed.

"Near," muttered Lingard. "It might have been my head." He pressed it with both hands, then let them fall. "What about that man?" he asked, brusquely. "Where did he come from? . . . I suppose he is dead now," he added in an envious tone.

"No, sir. He must have as many lives as a cat," answered Carter. "I will tell you how it was. As I said before I wasn't going to give you up, dead or alive, so yesterday when the sun went down a little in the afternoon I had two of our boats manned and pulled in shore, taking soundings to find a passage if there was one. I meant to go back and look for you with the brig or without the brig--but that doesn't matter now. There were three or four floating logs in sight. One of the Calashes in my boat made out something red on one of them. I thought it was worth while to go and see what it was. It was that man's sarong. It had got entangled among the branches and prevented him rolling off into the water. I was never so glad, I assure you, as when we found out that he was still breathing. If we could only nurse him back to life, I thought, he could perhaps tell me a lot of things. The log on which he hung had come out of the mouth of the creek and he couldn't have been more than half a day on it by my calculation. I had him taken down the main hatchway and put into a hammock in the 'tween-decks. He only just breathed then, but some time during the night he came to himself and got out of the hammock to lie down on a mat. I suppose he was more comfortable that way. He recovered his speech only this morning and I went down at once and told you of it, but you took no notice. I told you also who he was but I don't know whether you heard me or not."

"I don't remember," said Lingard under his breath.

"They are wonderful, those Malays. This morning he was only half alive, if that much, and now I understand he has been talking to Wasub for an hour. Will you go down to see him, sir, or shall I send a couple of men to carry him on deck?"

Lingard looked bewildered for a moment.

"Who on earth is he?" he asked.

"Why, it's that fellow whom you sent out, that night I met you, to catch our first gig. What do they call him? Jaffir, I think. Hasn't he been with you ashore, sir? Didn't he find you with the letter I gave him for you? A most determined looking chap. I knew him again the moment we got him off the log."

Lingard seized hold of the royal backstay within reach of his hand. Jaffir! Jaffir! Faithful above all others; the messenger of supreme moments; the reckless and devoted servant! Lingard felt a crushing sense of despair. "No, I can't face this," he whispered to himself, looking at the coast black as ink now before his eyes in the world's shadow that was slowly encompassing the grey clearness of the Shallow Waters. "Send Wasub to me. I am going down into the cabin."

He crossed over to the companion, then checking himself suddenly: "Was there a boat from the yacht during the day?" he asked as if struck by a sudden thought.-- "No, sir," answered Carter. "We had no communication with the yacht to-day."-- "Send Wasub to me," repeated Lingard in a stern voice as he went down the stairs.

The old serang coming in noiselessly saw his Captain as he had seen him many times before, sitting under the gilt thunderbolts, apparently as strong in his body, in his wealth, and in his knowledge of secret words that have a power over men and elements, as ever. The old Malay squatted down within a couple of feet from Lingard, leaned his back against the satinwood panel of the bulkhead, then raising his old eyes with a watchful and benevolent expression to the white man's face, clasped his hands between his knees.

"Wasub, you have learned now everything. Is there no one left alive but Jaffir? Are they all dead?"

"May you live!" answered Wasub; and Lingard whispered an appalled "All dead!" to which Wasub nodded slightly twice. His cracked voice had a lamenting intonation. "It is all true! It is all true! You are left alone, Tuan; you are left alone!"

"It was their destiny," said Lingard at last, with forced calmness. "But has Jaffir told you of the manner of this calamity? How is it that he alone came out alive from it to be found by you?"

"He was told by his lord to depart and he obeyed," began Wasub, fixing his eyes on the deck and speaking just loud enough to be heard by Lingard, who, bending forward in his seat, shrank inwardly from every word and yet would not have missed a single one of them for anything.

For the catastrophe had fallen on his head like a bolt from the blue in the early morning hours of the day before. At the first break of dawn he had been sent for to resume, his talk with Belarab. He had felt suddenly Mrs. Travers remove her hand from his head. Her voice speaking intimately into his ear: "Get up. There are some people coming," had recalled him to himself. He had got up from the ground. The light was dim, the air full of mist; and it was only gradually that he

began to make out forms above his head and about his feet: trees, houses, men sleeping on the ground. He didn't recognize them. It was but a cruel change of dream. Who could tell what was real in this world? He looked about him, dazedly; he was still drunk with the deep draught of oblivion he had conquered for himself. Yes--but it was she who had let him snatch the cup. He looked down at the woman on the bench. She moved not. She had remained like that, still for hours, giving him a waking dream of rest without end, in an infinity of happiness without sound and movement, without thought, without joy; but with an infinite ease of content, like a world-embracing reverie breathing the air of sadness and scented with love. For hours she had not moved.

"You are the most generous of women," he said. He bent over her. Her eyes were wide open. Her lips felt cold. It did not shock him. After he stood up he remained near her. Heat is a consuming thing, but she with her cold lips seemed to him indestructible--and, perhaps, immortal!

Again he stooped, but this time it was only to kiss the fringe of her head scarf. Then he turned away to meet the three men, who, coming round the corner of the hut containing the prisoners, were approaching him with measured steps. They desired his presence in the Council room. Belarab was awake.

They also expressed their satisfaction at finding the white man awake, because Belarab wanted to impart to him information of the greatest importance. It seemed to Lingard that he had been awake ever since he could remember. It was as to being alive that he felt not so sure. He had no doubt of his existence; but was this life--this profound indifference, this strange contempt for what his eyes could see, this distaste for words, this unbelief in the importance of things and men? He tried to regain possession of himself, his old self which had things to do, words to speak as well as to hear. But it was too difficult. He was seduced away by the tense feeling of existence far superior to the mere consciousness of life, and which in its immensity of contradictions, delight, dread, exultation and despair could not be faced and yet was not to be evaded. There was no peace in it. But who wanted peace? Surrender was better, the dreadful ease of slack limbs in the sweep of an enormous tide and in a divine emptiness of mind. If this was existence then he knew that he existed. And he knew that the woman existed, too, in the sweep of the tide, without speech, without movement, without heat! Indestructible--and, perhaps, immortal!