

## CHAPTER FOUR

I said, "This is home, at last. It is all over"; and she stood by me on the deck. She pushed the heavy black cloak from over her head, and her white face appeared above the dim black shadow of her mourning. She looked silently round her on the mist, the groups of rough men, the spatterings of light that were like violence, too. She said nothing, but rested her hand on my arm.

She had her immense griefs, and this was the home I offered her. She looked back at the side. I thought she would have liked to be in the boat again. I said:

"The people in this ship are my old friends. You can trust them--and me."

Tomas Castro, clambering leisurely over the side, followed. As soon as his feet touched the deck, he threw the corner of his cloak across his left shoulder, bent down half the rim of his hat, and assumed the appearance of a short, dark conspirator, overtopped by the stalwart sailors, who had abandoned Manuel to crowd, bare-armed, bare-chested, pushing, and craning their necks, round us.

She said, "I can trust you; it is my duty to trust you, and this is now my home."

It was like a definite pronouncement of faith--and of a line of policy. She seemed, for that moment, quite apart from my love, a thing very much above me and mine; closed up in an immense grief, but quite whole-souledly determined to go unflinchingly into a new life, breaking quietly with all her past for the sake of the traditions of all that past.

The sailors fell back to make way for us. It was only by the touch of her hand on my arm that I had any hope that she trusted me, me personally, and apart from the commands of the dead Carlos; the dead father, and the great weight of her dead traditions that could be never anything any more for her--except a memory. Ah, she stood it very well; her head was erect and proud. The cabin door opened, and a rigid female figure with dry outlines, and a smooth head, stood out with severe simplicity against the light of the cabin door. The light falling on Seraphina seemed to show her for the first time. A lamentable voice bellowed:

"Señorita!... Señorita!" and then, in an insinuating, heart-breaking tone, "Señorita!..."

She walked quietly past the figure of the woman, and disappeared in the brilliant light of the cabin. The door closed. I remained standing there. Manuel, at her

disappearance, raised his voice to a tremendous, incessant yell of despair, as if he expected to make her hear.

"Señorita... proteccion del oprimido; oh, hija de piedad... Señorita."

His lamentable noise brought half the ship round us; the sailors fell back before the mate, Sebright, walking at the elbow of a stout man in loose trousers and jacket. They stopped.

"An unexpected meeting, Captain Williams," was all I found to say to him. He had a constrained air, and shook hands in awkward silence.

"How do you do?" he said hurriedly. After a moment he added, with a sort of confused, as if official air, "I hope, Kemp, you'll be able to explain satisfactorily..."

I said, rather off-handedly, "Why, the two men I killed ought to be credentials enough for all immediate purposes!"

"That isn't what I meant," he said. He spoke rather with a mumble, and apologetically. It was difficult to see in him any trace of the roystering Williams who had roared toasts to my health in Jamaica, after the episode at the Ferry Inn with the admiral. It was as if, now, he had a weight on his mind. I was tired. I said:

"Two dead men is more than you or any of your crew can show. And, as far as I can judge, you did no more than hold your own till I came."

He positively stuttered, "Yes, yes. But..."

I got angry with what seemed stupid obstinacy.

"You'd be having a rope twisted tight round your head, or red-hot irons at the soles of your feet, at this very moment, if it had not been for us," I said indignantly.

He wiped his forehead perplexedly. "Phew, how you do talk!" he remonstrated. "What I mean is that my wife..." He stopped again, then went on. "She took it into her head to come with me this voyage. For the first time.... And you two coming alone in an open boat like this! It's what she isn't used to."

I simply couldn't get at what he meant; I couldn't even hear him very well, because Manuel-del-Popolo was still calling out to Seraphina in the cabin. Williams and I looked at each other--he embarrassed, and I utterly confounded.

"Mrs. Williams thinks it's irregular," Sebright broke in, "you and your young lady being alone--in an open boat at night, and that sort of thing. It isn't what they approve of at Bristol."

Manuel suddenly bellowed out, "Señorita--save me from their barbarity. I am a victim. Behold their bloody knives ready--and their eyes which gloat."

He shrank convulsively from the fellow with the bundle of cutlasses under his arm, who innocently pushed his way close to him; he threw himself forward, the two sailors hung back on his arms, nearly sitting on the deck, and he strained dog-like in his intense fear of immediate death. Williams, however, really seemed to want an answer to his absurdity that I could not take very seriously. I said:

"What do you expect us to do? Go back to our boat, or what?"

It seemed to affect him a good deal. "Wait till you are caught by a good woman yourself," he mumbled wretchedly.

Was this the roystering Williams? The jolly good fellow? I wanted to laugh, a little hysterically, because of the worry after great fatigue. Was his wife such a terrifying virago? "A good woman," Williams insisted. I turned my eyes to Sebright, who looked on amusedly.

"It's all right," he answered my questioning look. "She's a good soul, but she doesn't see fellows like us in the congregation she worships with at home." Then he whispered in my ear, "Owner's niece. Older than the skipper. Married him for love. Suspects every woman--every man, too, by George, except me, perhaps. She's learned life in some back chapel in Bristol. What can you expect? You go straight into the cabin," he added.

At that moment the cabin door opened again, and the figure of the woman I had seen before reappeared against the light.

"I was allowed to stand under the gate of the Casa, Excellency, I was in very truth. Oh, turn not the light of your face from me." Manuel, who had been silent for a minute, immediately recommenced his clamour in the hope, I suppose, that it would reach Seraphina's ears, now the door was opened.

"What is to be done, Owen?" the woman asked, with a serenity I thought very merciless.

She had precisely the air of having someone "in the house," someone rather

questionable that you want, at home, to get rid of, as soon as a very small charity permitted.

"Madam," I said rather coldly, "I appeal to your woman's compassion...."

"Even thus the arch-enemy sets his snares," she retorted on me a little tremulously.

"Señorita, I have seen you grow," Manuel called again. "Your father, who is with the saints, gave me alms when I was a boy. Will you let them kill a man to whom your father..."

"Snares. All snares. Can she be blessed in going away from her natural guardians at night, alone, with a young man? How can we, consistently with our duty..."

Her voice was cold and gentle. Even in the imperfect light her appearance suggested something cold and monachal. The thought of what she might have been saying, or, in the subtle way of women, making Seraphina feel, in there, made me violently angry, but lucid, too.

"She comes straight from the fresh grave of her father," I said. "I am her only guardian."

Manuel rose to the height of his appeal. "Señorita, I worshipped your childhood, I threw my hat in the air many times before your coach, when you drove out all in white, smiling, an angel from paradise. Excellency, help me. Excel..."

A hand was clapped on his mouth then, and we heard only a great scuffle going on behind us. The way to the cozy cabin remained barred. My heart was kindled by resentment, but by the power of love my soul was made tranquil, for come what absurdity might, I had Sera-phina safe for the time. The woman in the doorway guarded the respectable ship's cuddy from the un-wedded vagabondage of romance.

"What's to be done, Owen?" she asked again, but this time a little irresolutely, I thought. "You know something of this--but I..."

"My dear, what an idea," began Williams; and I heard his helpless mutters, "Like a hero--one evening--admiral--old Topnambo--nothing of her--on my soul--Lord's son..."

Sebright spoke up from the side. "We could drive them overboard together, certainly, Mrs. Williams, but that wouldn't be quite proper, perhaps. Put them

each in a bag, separately, and drown them one on each side of the ship, decently...."

"You will not put me off with your ungodly levity, Mr. Sebright."

"But I am perfectly serious, Mrs. Williams. It may raise a mutiny amongst these horrid, profane sailors, but I really don't see how we are to get rid of them else. The bo'sun has cut adrift their ramshackle, old sieve of a boat, and she's now a quarter of a mile astern, half-full of water. And we can't give them one of the ship's boats to go and get their throats cut ashore. J. Perkins, Esquire, wouldn't like it. He would swear something awful, if the boat got lost. Now, don't say no, Mrs. Williams. I've heard him myself swear a pound's worth of oaths for a matter of tenpence. You know very well what your uncle is. A perfect Turk in that way."

"Don't be scandalous, Mr. Sebright."

"But I didn't begin, Mrs. Williams. It's you who are raising all this trouble for nothing; because, as a matter of fact, they did not come alone. They had a man with them. An elderly, most respectable man. There he stands yonder, with a feather in his hat. Hey! You! Señor caballero, hidalgo, Pedro--Miguel--José--what's your particular saint? Step this way a bit..."

Manuel managed to jerk a half-choked "Excellency," and Castro, muffled up to the eyes, began to walk slowly aft, pausing after each solemn stride. The dark woman in the doorway was as effectual as an angel with a flaming sword. She paralyzed me completely.

Sebright dropped his voice a little. "I don't see that's much worse than going off at six o'clock in the morning to get married on the quiet; all alone with a man in a hackney coach--you know you did--and being given away by a perfect stranger."

"Mr. Sebright! Be quiet! How dare you?... Owen!"

Williams made a vague, growling noise, but Sebright, after muttering hurriedly, "It's all right, sir," proceeded with the utmost coolness:

"Why, all Bristol knows it! There are those who said that you got out of the scullery window into the back street. I am only telling you..."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to believe such tales," she cried in great agitation. "I walked out at the gate!"

"Yes. And the gardener's wife said you must have sneaked the key off the nail by

the side of the cradle--coming to the lodge the evening before, to see her poor, ailing baby. You ought to know what love brings the best of us to. And your uncle isn't a bloody-handed pirate either. He's only a good-hearted, hard-swearing old heathen. And you, too, are good-hearted. Come, Mrs. Williams. I know you're just longing to tuck this young lady up in bed--poor thing. Think what she has gone through! You ought to be fussing with sherry and biscuits and what not--making that good-for-nothing steward fly round. The beggar is hiding in the lazarette, I bet. Now then--allow me."

I got hold of the matter there again. I said--because I felt that the matter only needed making clear:

"This young lady is the daughter of a great Spanish noble. Her father was killed by these pirates. I am myself of noble family, and I am her appointed guardian, and am trying to save her from a very horrible fate."

She looked at me apprehensively.

"You would be committing a wicked act to try to interfere with this," I said.

I suppose I carried conviction.

"I must believe what you say," she said. She added suddenly, with a sort of tremulous, warm feeling, "There, there. I don't mean to be unkind. I knew nothing, and a married woman can't be too careful. For all I could have told, you might have been a--a libertine; one of the poor lost souls that Satan..."

Manuel, as if struggling with the waves, managed to free his lips.

"Excellency, help!" he spluttered, like a drowning man.

"I will give the young lady every care," Mrs. Williams said, "until light shall be vouchsafed."

She shut the door.

"You will go too far, Sebright," Williams remonstrated; "and I'll have to give you the sack."

"It's all right, captain. I can turn her round my little finger," said the young man cheerily. "Somebody has to do it if you won't--or can't. What shall we do with that yelping Dago? He's a distressful beast to have about the decks."

"Put him in the coal-hole, I suppose, as far as Havana. I won't rest till I see him on his way to the gallows. The Captain-General shall be made sick of this business, or my name isn't Williams. I'll make a breeze over it at home. You shall help in that, Kemp. You ain't afraid of big-wigs. Not you. You ain't afraid of anything...."

"He's a devil of a fellow, and a dead shot," threw in Sebright. "And jolly lucky for us, too, sir. It's simply marvellous that you should turn up like this, Mr. Kemp. We hadn't a grain of powder that wasn't caked solid in the canisters. Nothing'll take it out of my head that somebody had got at the magazine while we lay in Kingston...."

It did not occur to Williams to ask whether I was wounded, or tired, or hungry. And yet all through the West Indies the dinners you got on board the *Lion* were famous in shipping circles. But festive men of his stamp are often like that. They do it more for the glory and romance of the hospitality, and he could not, perhaps, under the circumstances, expect me to intone "for he is a jolly good fellow" over the wine. He was by no means a bad or unfeeling man; only he was not hungry himself, and another's mere necessity of that sort failed to excite his imagination. I know he was no worse than other men, and I have reason to remember him with gratitude; but, at the time, I was surprised and indignant at the extraordinary way he took my presence for granted, as if I had come off casually in a shore boat to idle away an hour or two on board. Since his wife appeared satisfied, he did not seem to desire any explanation. I felt as if I had for him no independent existence. When I had ceased to be a source of domestic difficulty, I became a precious sort of convenience, a most welcome person ("an English gentleman to back me up," he repeated several times), who would help him to make "these old women at the Admiralty sit up!" A burning shame, this! It had gone on long enough, God knows, but if they were to tackle an old trader, like the "*Lion*", now, it was time the whole country should hear of it. His owner, J. Perkins, his wife's uncle, wasn't the man to go to sleep over the job. Parliament should hear of it. Most fortunate I was there to be produced--eye-witness--nobleman's son. He knew I could speak up in a good cause.

"And by the way, Kemp," he said, with sudden annoyance, recollecting himself, as it were, "you never turned up for that dinner--sent no word, nor anything...."

Williams had been talking to me, but it was with Sebright that I felt myself growing intimate. The young mate of the "*Lion*" stood by, very quiet, listening with a capable smile. Now he said, in a tone of dry comment:

"Jolly sight more useful turning up here."

"I was kidnapped away from Ramon's back shop, if that's a sufficient apology. It's rather a long story."

"Well, you can't tell it on deck, that's very clear," Sebright had to shout to me. "Not while this infernal noise--what the deuce's up? It sounds more like a dog-fight than anything else."

As we ran towards the main hatch I recognized the aptness of the comparison. It was that sort of vicious, snarling, yelping clamour which arises all at once and suddenly dies.

"Castro! Thou Castro!"

"Malediction... My eyelids..."

"Thou! Englishman's dog!"

"Ha! Porco."

The voices ceased. Castro ran tiptoeing lightly, mantled in ample folds. He assumed his hat with a brave tap, crouched swiftly inside his cloak. It touched the deck all round in a black cone surmounted by a peering, quivering head. Quick as thought he hopped and sank low again. Everybody watched with wonder this play, as of some large and diabolic toy. For my part, knowing the deadly purpose of these preliminaries, I was struck with horror. Had he chosen to run on him at once, nothing could have saved Manuel. The poor wretch, vigorously held in front of Castro, was far too terrified to make a sound. With an immovable sailor on each side, he scuffled violently, and cowered by starts as if tied up between two stone posts. His dumb, rapid panting was in our ears. I shouted:

"Stop, Castro! Stop!... Stop him, some of you! He means to kill the fellow!"

Nobody heeded my shouting. Castro flung his cloak on the deck, jumped on it, kicked it aside, all in the same moment as it seemed, dodged to the right, to the left, drew himself up, and stepped high, paunchy in his tight smalls and short jacket, making all the time a low, sibilant sound, which was perfectly blood-curdling.

"He has a blade on his forearm!" I yelled. "He's armed, I tell you!"

No one could comprehend my distress. A sailor, raising a lamp, had a broad smile. Somebody laughed outright. Castro planted himself before Manuel, nodded



menacingly, and stooped ready for a spring. I was too late in my grab at his collar, but Manuel's guardians, acting with precision, put out one arm each to meet his rush, and he came flying backwards upon me, as though he had rebounded from a wall.

He had almost knocked me down, and while I staggered to keep my feet the air resounded with urgent calls to shoot, to fire, to bring him down!... "Kill him, Señor!" came in an entreating yell from Castro. And I became aware that Manuel had taken this opportunity to wrench himself free. I heard the hard thud of his leap. Straight from the hatch (as I was told later by the marvelling sailors) he had alighted with both feet on the rail. I only saw him already there, sitting on his heels, jabbering and nodding at us like an enormous baboon. "Shoot, sir! Shoot!" "Kill! Kill, Señor! As you love your life--kill!"

Unwittingly, without volition, as if compelled by the suggestion of the bloodthirsty cries, my hand drew the remaining pistol out of my belt. I raised it, and found myself covering the strange antics of an infuriated ape. He tore at his flanks with both hands in the idea, I suppose, of stripping for a swim. Rags flew from him in all directions; an astounding eruption of rags round a huddled-up figure crouching, wildly active, in front of the muzzle. I had him. I was sure of my shot. He was only an ape. A dead ape. But why? Wherefore? To what end? What could it matter whether he lived or died. He sickened me, and I pitied him, as I should have pitied an ape.

I lowered my arm an almost imperceptible fraction of a second before he sprang up and vanished. The sound of the heavy plunge was followed by a regretful clamour all over the decks, and a general rush to the side. There was nothing to be seen; he had gone through the layer of fog covering the water. No one heard him blow or splutter. It was as if a lump of lead had fallen overboard.

Williams wouldn't have had this happen for a five-pound note. Sebright expressed the hope that he wouldn't cheat the gallows by drowning. The two men who had held him slunk away abashed. To lower a boat for the purpose of catching him in the water would have been useless and imprudent.

"His friends can't be far off yet in the boats," growled the bo'sun; "and if they don't pick him up, they would be more than likely to pick up our chaps."

Somebody expectorated in so marked a manner that I looked behind me. Castro had resumed his cloak, and was draping himself with deliberate dignity. When this undertaking had been accomplished, he came up very close to me, and without a word looked up balefully from the heavy folds thrown across his mouth and chin under the very tip of his hooked nose.

"I could not do it," I said. "I could not. It would have been useless. Too much like murder, Tomas."

"Oh! the inconstancy, the fancifulness of these English," he generalized, with suppressed passion, right into my face. "I don't know what's worse, their fury or their pity. The childishness of it! The childishness.... Do you imagine, Señor, that Manuel or the Juez O'Brien shall some day spare you in their turn? If I didn't know the courage of your nation..."

"I despise the Juez and Manuel alike," I interrupted angrily. I despised Castro, too, at that moment, and he paid me back with interest. There was no mistaking his scathing tone.

"I know you well. You scorn your friends, as well as your foes. I have seen so many of you. The blessed saints guard us from the calamity of your friendship...."

"No friendship could make an assassin of me, Mr. Castro...."

"... Which is only a very little less calamitous than your enmity," he continued, in a cold rage. "A very little less. You let Manuel go.... Manuel!... Because of your mercy.... Mercy! Bah! It is all your pride--your mad pride. You shall rue it, Señor. Heaven is just. You shall rue it, Señor."

He denounced me prophetically, wrapped up with an air of midnight secrecy; but, after all, he had been a friend in the act, if not in the spirit, and I contented myself by asking, with some pity for his imbecile craving after murder:

"Why? What can Manuel do to me? He at least is completely helpless."

"Did the Señor Don Juan ever ask himself what Manuel could do to me--Tomas Castro? To me, who am poor and a vagabond, and a friend of Don Carlos, may his soul rest with God. Are all you English like princes that you should never think of anybody but yourselves?"

He revolted and provoked me, as if his opinion of the English could matter, or his point of view signify anything against the authority of my conscience. And it is our conscience that illumines the romantic side of our life. His point of view was as benighted and primitive as the point of view of hunger; but, in his fidelity to the dead architect of my fortunes, he reflected dimly the light of Carlos' romance, and I had taken advantage of it, not so much for the saving of my life as for the guarding of my love. I had reached that point when love displaces one's personality, when it becomes the only ground under our feet, the only sky over

our head, the only light of vision, the first condition of thought--when we are ready to strive for it, as we fight for the breath of our body. Brusquely I turned my back on him, and heard the repeated clicking of flint against his blade. He lighted a cigarette, and crossed the deck to lean cloaked against the bulwark, smoking moodily under his slouched hat.