

## CHAPTER FIVE

Manuel's escape was the last event of that memorable night. Nothing more happened, and nothing more could be done; but there remained much talk and wonderment to get through. I did all the talking, of course, under the cuddy lamps. Williams, red and stout, sat staring at me across the table. His round eyes were perfectly motionless with astonishment--the story of what had happened in the Casa Riego was not what he had expected of the small, badly reputed Cuban town.

Sebright, who had all the duties of the soiled ship and chipped men to attend to, came in from the deck several times, and would stand listening for minutes with his fingers playing thoughtfully about his slight moustache. The dawn was not very far when he led me into his own cabin. I was half dead with fatigue, and troubled by an inward restlessness.

"Turn in into my berth," said Sebright.

I protested with a stiff tongue, but he gave me a friendly push, and I tumbled like a log on to the bedclothes. As soon as my head felt the pillow the fresh colouring of his face appeared blurred, and an arm, mistily large, was extended to put out the light of the lamp screwed to the bulkhead.

"I suppose you know there are warrants out in Jamaica against you--for that row with the admiral," he said.

An irresistible and unexpected drowsiness had relaxed all my limbs.

"Hang Jamaica!" I said, with difficult animation. "We are going home."

"Hang Jamaica!" he agreed. Then, in the dark, as if coming after me across the obscure threshold of sleep, his voice meditated, "I am sorry, though, we are bound for Havana. Pity. Great pity! Has it occurred to you, Mr. Kemp, that..."

It is very possible that he did not finish his sentence; no more penetrated, at least, into my drowsy ear. I awoke slowly from a trance-like sleep, with a confused notion of having to pick up the thread of a dropped hint. I went up on deck.

The sun shone, a faint breeze blew, the sea sparkled freshly, and the wet decks glistened. I stood still, touched by the new glory of light falling on me; it was a

new world--new and familiar, yet disturbingly beautiful. I seemed to discover all sorts of secret charms that I had never seen in things I had seen a hundred times. The watch on deck were busy with brooms and buckets; a sailor, coiling a rope over a pin, paused in his work to point over the port-quarter, with a massive fore-arm like a billet of red mahogany.

I looked about, rubbing my eyes. The "Lion", close hauled, was heading straight away from the coast, which stood out, not very far yet, outlined heavily and flooded with light. Astern, and to leeward of us, against a headland of black and indigo, a dazzling white speck resembled a snowflake fallen upon the blue of the sea.

"That's a schooner," said the seaman.

They were the first words I heard that morning, and their friendly hoarseness brushed away whatever of doubt might seem to mar the inexplicability of my new glow of my happiness. It was because we were safe--she and I--and because my undisturbed love let my heart open to the beauty of the young day and the joyousness of a splendid sea. I took deep breaths, and my eyes went all over the ship, embracing, like an affectionate contact, her elongated shape, the flashing brasses, the tall masts, the gentle curves of her sails soothed into perfect stillness by the wind. I felt that she was a shrine, for was not Seraphina sleeping in her, as safe as a child in its cradle? And presently the beauty, the serenity, the purity, and the splendour of the world would be reflected in her clear eyes, and made over to me by her glance.

There are times when an austere and just Providence, in its march along the inscrutable way, brings our hearts to the test of their own unreason. Which of us has not been tried by irrational awe, fear, pride, abasement, exultation? And such moments remain marked by indelible physical impressions, standing out of the ghostly level of memory like rocks out of the sea, like towers on a plain. I had many of these unforgettable emotions--the profound horror of Don Balthasar's death; the first floating of the boat, like the opening of wings in space; the first fluttering of the flames in the fog--many others afterwards, more cruel, more terrible, with a terror worse than death, in which the very suffering was lost; and also this--this moment of elation in the clear morning, as if the universe had shed its glory upon my feelings as the sunshine glorifies the sea. I laughed in very lightness of heart, in a profound sense of success; I laughed, irresponsible and oblivious, as one laughs in the thrilling delight of a dream.

"Do I look so confoundedly silly?" asked Sebright, speaking as though he had a heavy cold. "I am stupid--tired. I've been on my feet this twenty-four hours--about the liveliest in my life, too. You haven't slept very long either--none of us have. I'm

sure I hope your young lady has rested."

He put his hands in his pockets. He might have been very tired, but I had never seen a boy fresh out of bed with a rosier face. The black pin-points of his pupils seemed to bore through distance, exploring the horizon beyond my shoulder. The man called Mike, the one I had had the tussle with overnight, came up behind the indefatigable mate, and shyly offered me my pistol. His head was bound over the top, and under the chin, as if for toothache, and his bronzed, rough-hewn face looked out astonishingly through the snowy whiteness of the linen. Only a few hours before, we had been doing our best to kill each other. In my cordial glow, I bantered him light-heartedly about his ferocity and his strength.

He stood before me, patiently rubbing the brown instep of one thick foot with the horny sole of the other.

"You paid me off for that bit, sir," he said bashfully. "It was in the way of duty."

"I'm uncommon glad you didn't squeeze the ghost out of me," I said; "a morning like this is enough to make you glad you can breathe."

To this day I remember the beauty of that rugged, grizzled, hairy seaman's eyelashes. They were long and thick, shadowing the eyes softly like the lashes of a young girl.

"I'm sure, sir, we wish you luck--to you and the young lady--all of us," he said shamefacedly; and his bass, half-concealed mutter was quite as sweet to my ears as a celestial melody; it was, after all, the sanction of simple earnestness to my desires and hopes--a witness that he and his like were on my side in the world of romance.

"Well, go forward now, Mike," Sebright said, as I took the pistol.

"It's a blessing to talk to one's own people," I said, expansively, to him. "He's a fine fellow." I stuck the pistol in my belt. "I trust I shall never need to use barrel or butt again, as long as I live."

"A very sensible wish," Sebright answered, with a sort of reserve of meaning in his tone; "especially as on board here we couldn't find you a single pinch of powder for a priming. Do you notice the consort we have this morning?"

"What do I want with powder?" I asked. "Do you mean that?" I pointed to the white sail of the schooner. Sebright, looking hard at me, nodded several times.

"We sighted her as soon as day broke. D'you know what she means?"

I said I supposed she was a coaster.

"It means, most likely, that the fellow with the curls that made me think of my maiden aunt, has managed to keep his horse-face above water." He meant Manuel-del-Popolo. "What mischief he may do yet before he runs his head into a noose, it's hard to say. The old Spaniard you brought with you thinks he has already been busy--for no good, you may be sure."

"You mean that's one of the Rio schooners?" I asked quickly.

That, with all its consequent troubles forme, was what he did mean. He said I might take his word for it that, with the winds we had had, no craft working along the coast could be just there now unless she came out of Rio Medio. There was a calm almost up to sunrise, and it looked as if they had towed her out with boats before daylight.... "Seems a rather unlikely bit of exertion for the lazy brutes; but if they are as much afraid of that confounded Irishman as you say they are, that would account for their energy."

They would steal and do murder simply for the love of God, but it would take the fear of a devil to make them do a bit of honest work--and pulling an oar was honest work, no matter why it was done. This was the combined wisdom of Sebright and of Tomas Castro, with whom he had been in consultation. As to the fear of the devil, O'Brien was very much like a devil, an efficient substitute. And there was certainly somebody or something to make them bestir themselves like this....

Before my mind arose a scene: Manuel, the night before, pulled out of the water into a boat--raging, half-drowned, eloquent, inspired. The contemptible beast was inspired, as a politician is, a demagogue. He could sway his fellows, as I had heard enough to know. And I felt a slight chill on the warmth of my hope, because that bright sail, brilliantly and furtively dodging along in our wake, must be the product of Manuel's inspiration, urged to perseverance by the fear of O'Brien. The mate continued, staring knowingly at it:

"You know I am putting two and two together, like the old maids that come to see my aunt when they want to take away a woman's character. The Dagos are out and no mistake. The question is, Why? You must know whether those schooners can sail anything; but don't forget the old Lion is pretty smart. Is it likely they'll attempt the ship again?"

I negatived that at once. I explained to Sebright that the store of ammunition in

Rio Medio would not run to it; that the Lugareños were cowardly, divided by faction, incapable, by themselves, of combining for any length of time, and still less of following a plan requiring perseverance and hardihood.

"They can't mean anything in the nature of open attack," I affirmed. "They may have attempted something of the sort in Nichols' time, but it isn't in their nature."

Sebright said that was practically Castro's opinion, too--except that Castro had emphasized his remarks by spitting all the time, "like an old tomcat. He seems a very spiteful man, with no great love for you, Mr. Kemp. Do you think it safe to have him about you? What are all these grievances of his?"

Castro seemed to have spouted his bile like a volcano, and had rather confused Sebright. He had said much about being a friend of the Spanish lord--Carlos; and that now he had no place on earth to hide his head.

"As far as I could make out, he's wanted in England," said Sebright, "for some matter of a stolen watch, years ago in Liverpool, I think. And your cousin, the grandee, was mixed up in that, too. That sounds funny; you didn't tell us about that. Damme if he didn't seem to imply that you, too... But you have never been in Liverpool. Of course not...."

But that had not been precisely Castro's point. He had affirmed he had enemies in Spain; he shuddered at the idea of going to France, and now my English fancifulness had made it impossible for him to live in Rio Medio, where he had had the care of a good pad-rona.

"I suppose he means a landlady," Sebright chuckled. "Old but good, he says. He expected to die there in peace, a good Christian. And what's that about the priests getting hold of his very last bit of silver? I must say that sounded truest of all his rigmarole. For the salvation of his soul, I suppose?"

"No, my cousin's soul," I said gloomily.

"Humbugs. I only understood one word in three."

Just then Tomas himself stalked into sight among the men forward. Coming round the corner of the deck-house, he stopped at the galley door like a crow outside a hut, waiting. We watched him getting a light for his cigarette at the galley door with much dignified pantomime. The negro cook of the Lion, holding out to him in the doorway a live coal in a pair of tongs, turned his Ethiopian face and white ivories towards a group of sailors lost in the contemplation of the proceedings. And, when Castro had passed them, spurting jets of smoke, they

swung about to look after his short figure, upon whose draped blackness the sunlight brought out reddish streaks as if bucketfuls of rusty water had been thrown over him from hat to toe. The end of his broken plume hung forward aggressively.

"Look how the fellow struts! Night and thunder! Hey, Don Tenebroso! Would your worship hasten hither...." Sebright hailed jocularly.

Castro, without altering his pace, came up to us.

"What do you think of her now?" asked Sebright, pointing to the strange sail. "She's grown a bit plainer, now she is out of the glare."

Castro, wrapping his chin, stood still, face to the sea. After a long while:

"Malediction," he pronounced slowly, and without moving his head shot a sidelong glance at me.

"It's clear enough how he feels about our friends over there. Malediction. Just so. Very proper. But it seems as though he had a bone to pick with all the world," drawled Sebright, a little sleepily. Then, resuming his briskness, he bantered, "So you don't want to go to England, Mr. Castro? No friends there? Sus. per col., and that sort of thing?"

Castro, contemptuous, staring straight away, nodded impatiently.

"But this gentleman you are so devoted to is going to England--to his friends."

Castro's arms shook under the mantle falling all round him straight from the neck. His whole body seemed convulsed. From his puckered dark lips issued a fiendish and derisive squeal.

"Let his friends beware, then. Por Dios! Let them beware. Let them pray and fast, and beg the intercession of the saints. Ha! ha! ha!..."

Nothing could have been more unlike his saturnine self-centred truculence of restraint. He impressed me; and even Sebright's steady, cool eyes grew perceptibly larger before this sarcastic fury. Castro choked; the rusty, black folds encircling him shook and heaved. Unexpectedly he thrust out in front of the cloak one yellow, dirty little hand, side by side with the bright end of his fixed blade.

"What do I hear? To England! Going to England! Ha! Then let him hasten there straight! Let him go straight there, I say--I, Tomas Castro!"

He lowered his tone to impress us more, and the point of the knife, as it were an emphatic forefinger, tapped the open palm forcibly. Did we think that a man was not already riding along the coast to Havana on a fast mule?--the very best mule from the stables of Don Balthasar himself--that murdered saint. The Captain-General had no such mules. His late excellency owned a sugar estate halfway between Rio Medio and Havana, and a relay of riding mules was kept there for quickness when His Excellency of holy memory found occasion to write his commands to the capital. The news of our escape would reach the Juez next day at the latest. Manuel would take care of that--unless he were drowned. But he could swim like a fish. Malediction!

"I cried out to you to kill!" he addressed me directly; "with all my soul I cried. And why? Because he had seen you and the senorita, too, alas! He should have been made dumb--made dumb with your pistol, Señor, since those two stupid English mariners were too much for an old man like me. Manuel should have been made dumb--dumb forever, I say. What mattered he--that gutter-born offspring of an evil Gitana, whom I have seen, Señor! I, myself, have seen her in the days of my adversity in Madrid, Señor--a red flower behind the ear, clad in rags that did not cover all her naked skin, looking on while they fought for her with knives in a wine-shop full of beggars and thieves. Si, senor. That's his mother. Improvisador-politico--capataz. Ha.... Dirt!"

He made a gesture of immense contempt.

"What mattered he? The coach would have returned from the cathedral, and the Casa Riego could have been held for days--and who could have known you were not inside. I had conversed earnestly with Cesar the major-domo--an African, it is true, but a man of much character and excellent sagacity. Ah, Manuel! Manuel! If I-----But the devil himself fathers the children of such mothers. I am no longer in possession of my first vigour, and you, Señor, have all the folly of your nation...."

He bared his grizzled head to me loftily.

"... And the courage! Doubtless, that is certain. It is well. You may want it all before long, Señor... And the courage!"

The broken plume swept the deck. For a time he blinked his creased, brown eyelids in the sun, then pulled his hat low down over his brows, and, wrapping himself up closely, turned away from me to look at the sail to leeward.

"What an old, old, wrinkled, little, puffy beggar he is!" observed Sebright, in an undertone...

"Well, and what is your worship's opinion as to the purpose of that schooner?"

Castro shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows?"... He released the gathered folds of his cloak, and moved off without a look at either of us.

"There he struts, with his wings drooping like a turkey-cock gone into deep mourning," said Sebright. "Who knows? Ah, well, there's no hurry to know for a day or two. I don't think that craft could overhaul the Lion, if they tried ever so. They may manage to keep us in sight perhaps."

He yawned, and left me standing motionless, thinking of Seraphina. I longed to see her--to make sure, as if my belief in the possession of her had been inexplicably weakened. I was going to look at the door of her cabin. But when I got as far as the companion I had to stand aside for Mrs. Williams, who was coming up the winding stairs.

From above I saw the gray woollen shawl thrown over her narrow shoulders. Her parting made a broad line on her brown head. She mounted busily, holding up a little the front of her black, plain skirt. Her glance met mine with a pale, searching candour from below.

Overnight she had heard all my story. She had come out to the saloon whilst I had been giving it to Williams, and after saying reassuringly, "The young lady, I am thankful, is asleep," she had sat with her eyes fixed upon my lips. I had been aware of her anxious face, and of the slight, nervous movements of her hands at certain portions of my narrative under the blazing lamps. We met now, for the first time, in the daylight.

Hastily, as if barring my road to Seraphina's cabin, "Miss Riego, I would have you know," she said, "is in good bodily health. I have this moment looked upon her again. The poor, superstitious young lady is on her knees, crossing herself."

Mrs. Williams shuddered slightly. It was plain that the sight of that popish practice had given her a shock--almost a scare, as if she had seen a secret and nefarious rite. I explained that Seraphina, being a Catholic, worshipped as her lights enjoined, as we did after ours. Mrs. Williams only sighed at this, and, making an effort, proposed that I should walk with her a little. We began to pace the poop, she gliding with short steps at my side, and drawing close the skimpy shawl about her. The smooth bands of her hair put a shadow into the slight hollows of her temples. No nun, in the chilly meekness of the habit, had ever given me such a strong impression of poverty and renunciation.



But there was in that faded woman a warmth of sentiment. She flushed delicately whenever caught (and one could not help catching her continually) following her husband with eyes that had an expression of maternal uneasiness and the captivated attention of a bride. And after she had got over the idea that I, as a member of the male British aristocracy, was dissolute--it was an article of faith with her--that warmth of sentiment would bring a faint, sympathetic rosiness to her sunken cheeks.

She said suddenly and trembling, "Oh, young sir, reflect upon these things before it is too late. You young men, in your luxurious, worldly, ungoverned lives..."

I shall never forget that first talk with her on the poop--her hurried, nervous voice (for she was a timid woman, speaking from a sense of duty), and the extravagant forms her ignorance took. With the emotions of the past night still throbbing in my brain and heart, with the sight of the sea and the coast, with the *Rio Medio* schooner hanging on our quarter, I listened to her, and had a hard task to believe my ears. She was so convinced that I was "dissolute," because of my class--as an earl's grandson.

It is difficult to imagine how she arrived at the conviction; it must have been from pulpit denunciations of the small Bethel on the outskirts of Bristol. Her uncle, J. Perkins, was a great ruffian, certainly, and Williams was dissolute enough, if one wished to call his festive imbecilities by a hard name. But these two could, by no means, be said to belong to the upper classes. And these two, apart from her favourite preacher, were the only two men of whom she could be said to have more than a visual knowledge.

She had spent her best years in domestic slavery to her bachelor uncle, an old shipowner of savage selfishness; she had been the deplorable mistress of his big, half-furnished house, standing in a damp garden full of trees. The outrageous Perkins had been a sailor in his time--mate of a privateer in the great French war, afterwards master of a slaver, developing at last into the owner of a small fleet of West Indiamen. Williams was his favourite captain, whom he would bring home in the evening to drink rum and water, and smoke churchwarden pipes with him. The niece had to sit up, too, at these dismal revels. Old Perkins would keep her out of bed to mix the grogs, till he was ready to climb the bare stone staircase, echoing from top to bottom with his stumbles. However, it seems he dozed a good deal in snatches during the evening, and this, I suppose, gave their opportunity to the pale, spiritual-looking spinster with the patient eyes, and to the thick, staring Williams, florid with good living, and utterly unused to the company of women of that sort. But in what way these two unsimilar beings had looked upon each other, what she saw in him, what he imagined her to be like, why, how, wherefore, an understanding arose between them, remains inexplicable. It was

her romance--and it is even possible that he was moved by an unselfish sentiment. Sebright accounted for the matter by saying that, as to the woman, it was no wonder. Anything to get away from a bullying old ruffian, that would use bad language in cold blood just to horrify her--and then burst into a laugh and jeer; but as to Captain Williams (Sebright had been with him from a boy), he ought to have known he was quite incapable of keeping straight after all these free-and-easy years.

He used to talk a lot, about that time, of good women, of settling down to a respectable home, of leading a better life; but, of course, he couldn't. Simply couldn't, what with old friends in Kingston and Havana--and his habits formed--and his weakness for women who, as Sebright put it, could not be called good. Certainly there did not seem to have been any sordid calculation in the marriage. Williams fully expected to lose his command; but, as it turned out, the old beast, Perkins, was quite daunted by the loss of his niece. He found them out in their lodgings, came to them crying--absolutely whimpering about his white hairs, talking touchingly of his will, and promising amendment. In the end it was arranged that Williams should keep his command; and Mrs. Williams went back to her uncle. That was the best of it. Actually went back to look after that lonely old rip, out of pure pity and goodness of heart. Of course old Perkins was afraid to treat her as badly as before, and everything was going on fairly well, till some kind friend sent her an anonymous letter about Williams' goings on in Jamaica. Sebright strongly suspected the master of another regular trading ship, with whom Williams had a difference in Kingston the voyage before last--Sebright said--about a small matter, with long hair--not worth talking about. She said nothing at first, and nearly worried herself into a brain-fever. Then she confessed she had a letter--didn't believe it--but wanted a change, and would like to come for one voyage. Nothing could be said to that.

The worst was, the captain was so knocked over at the idea of his little sins coming to light, that he--Sebright--had the greatest difficulty in preventing him from giving himself away.

"If I hadn't been really fond of her," Sebright concluded, "I would have let everything go by the board. It's too difficult. And mind, the whole of Kingston was on the broad grin all the time we were there--but it's no joke. She's a good woman, and she's jealous. She wants to keep her own. Never had much of her own in this world, poor thing. She can't help herself any more than the skipper can. Luckily, she knows no more of life than a baby. But it's a most cruel set out."

Sebright had exposed the domestic situation on board the *Lion* with a force of insight and sympathy hardly to be expected from his years. No doubt his

attachment to the disparate couple counted for not a little. He seemed to feel for them both a sort of exasperated affection; but I have no doubt that in his way he was a remarkable young man with his contrasted bringing up first at the hands of an old maiden lady; afterwards on board ship with Williams, to whom he was indentured at the age of fifteen, when as he casually mentioned--"a scoundrelly attorney in Exeter had run off with most of the old girl's money." Indeed, looking back, they all appear to me uncommon; even to the round-eyed Williams, cowed simply out of respect and regard for his wife, and as if dazed with fright at the conventional catastrophe of being found out before he could get her safely back to Bristol. As to Mrs. Williams, I must confess that the poor woman's ridiculous and genuine misery, inducing her to undertake the voyage, presented itself to me simply as a blessing, there on the poop. She had been practically good to Seraphina, and her talking to me mattered very little, set against that.... And such talk!

It was like listening to an earnest, impassioned, tremulous impertinence. She seemed to start from the assumption that I was capable of every villainy, and devoid of honour and conscience; only one perceived that she used the words from the force of unworldly conviction, and without any real knowledge of their meaning, as a precocious child uses terms borrowed from its pastors and masters.

I was greatly disconcerted at first, but I was never angry. What of it, if, with a sort of sweet absurdity, she talked in great agitation of the depravity of hearts, of the sin of light-mindedness, of the self-deception which leads men astray--a confused but purposeful jumble, in which occasional allusions to the errors of Rome, and to the want of seriousness in the upper classes, put in a last touch of extravagance?

What of it? The time was coming when I should remember the frail, homely, as if starved, woman, and thank heaven for her generous heart, which was gained for us from that moment. Far from being offended, I was drawn to her. There is a beauty in the absolute conscience of the simple; and besides, her distrust was for me, alone. I saw that she erected\* herself not into a judge, but into a guardian, against the dangers of our youth and our romance. She was disturbed by its origin.

There was so much of the unusual, of the unheard of in its beginning, that she was afraid of the end. I was so inexperienced, she said, and so was the young lady--poor motherless thing--wilful, no doubt--so very taking--like a little child, rather. Had I comprehended all my responsibility? (And here one of the hurried side-allusions to the errors of Rome came in with a reminder, touching the charge of another immortal soul beside my own.) Had I reflected?...

It seems to me that this moment was the last of my boyishness. It was as if the contact with her earnestness had matured me with a power greater than the power of dangers, of fear, of tragic events. She wanted to know insistently whether I were sure of myself, whether I had examined my feelings, and had measured my strength, and had asked for guidance. I had done nothing of this. Not till brought face to face with her unanswerable simplicity did I descend within myself. It seemed I had descended so deeply that, for a time, I lost the sound of her voice. And again I heard her.

"There's time yet," she was saying. "Think, young sir (she had addressed me throughout as 'young sir.')

My husband and I have been talking it over most anxiously. Think well before you commit the young lady for life. You are both so young. It looks as if we had been sent providentially...."

What was she driving at? Did she doubt my love? It was rather horrible; but it was too startling and too extravagant to be met with anger. We looked at each other, and I discovered that she had been, in reality, tremendously excited by this adventure. This was the secret of her audacity. And I was also possessed by excitement. We stood there like two persons meeting in a great wind. Without moving her hands, she clasped and unclasped her fingers, looking up at me with soliciting eyes; and her lips, firmly closed, twitched.

"I am looking for the means of explaining to you how much I love her," I burst out. "And if I found a way, you could not understand. What do you know?--what can you know?..."

I said this not in scorn, but in sheer helplessness. I was at a loss before the august magnitude of my feeling, which I saw confronting me like an enormous presence arising from that blue sea. It was no longer a boy-and-girl affair; no longer an adventure; it was an immense and serious happiness, to be paid for by an infinity of sacrifice.

"I am a woman," she said, with a fluttering dignity. "And it is because I know how women suffer from what men say...."

Her face flushed. It flushed to the very bands of her hair. She was rosy all over the eyes and forehead. Rosy and ascetic, with something outraged and inexpressibly sweet in her expression. My great emotion was between us like a mist, through which I beheld strange appearances. It was as if an immaterial spirit had blushed before me. And suddenly I saw tears--tears that glittered exceedingly, falling hard and round, like pellets of glass, out of her faded eyes.

"Mrs. Williams," I cried, "you can't know how I love her. No one in the world can know. When I think of her--and I think of her always--it seems to me that one life is not enough to show my devotion. I love her like something unchangeable and unique--altogether out of the world; because I see the world through her. I would still love her if she had made me miserable and unhappy."

She exclaimed a low "Ah!" and turned her head away for a moment.

"But one cannot express these things," I continued. "There are no words. Words are not meant for that. I love her so that, were I to die this moment, I verily believe my soul, refusing to leave this earth, would remain hovering near her...."

She interrupted me with a sort of indulgent horror. "Sh! sh!" I mustn't talk like that. I really must not--and in consequence she declared she was quite willing to believe me. Her husband and herself had not slept a wink for thinking of us. The notion of the fat, sleepy Williams, sitting up all night to consider, owlshly, the durability of my love, cooled my excitement. She thought they had been providentially thrown into our way to give us an opportunity of reconsidering our decision. There were still so many difficulties in the way.

I did not see any; her utter incomprehension began to weary me, while she still twined her fingers, wiped her eyes by stealth, as it were, and talked unflinchingly. She could not have made herself clearly understood by Seraphina. Moreover, women were so helpless--so very helpless in such matters. That is why she was speaking to me. She did not doubt my sincerity at the present time--but there was, humanly speaking, a long life before us--and what of afterwards? Was I sure of myself--later on--when all was well?

I cut her short. Seizing both her hands:

"I accept the omen, Mrs. Williams!" I cried. "That's it! When all is well! And all must be well in a very short time, with you and your husband's help, which shall not fail me, I know. I feel as if the worst of our troubles were over already...."

But at that moment I saw Seraphina coming out on deck. She emerged from the companion, bare-headed, and looked about at her new surroundings with that air of imperious and childlike beauty which made her charm. The wind stirred slightly her delicate hair, and I looked at her; I looked at her stilled, as one watches the dawn or listens to a sweet strain of music caught from afar. Suddenly dropping Mrs. Williams' hand, I ran to her....

When I turned round, Williams had joined his wife, and she had slipped her arm under his. Her hand, thin and white, looked like the hand of an invalid on the

brawny forearm of that man bursting with health and good condition. By the side of his lustiness, she was almost ethereal--and yet I seemed to see in them something they had in common--something subtle, like the expression of eyes. It was the expression of their eyes. They looked at us with commiseration; one of them sweetly, the other with his owlish fixity. As we two, Seraphina and I, approached them together, I heard Williams' thick, sleepy voice asking, "And so he says he won't?" To which his wife, raising her tone with a shade of indignation, answered, "Of course not." No, I was not mistaken. In their dissimilar persons, eyes, faces, there was expressed a common trouble, doubt, and commiseration. This expression seemed to go out to meet us sadly, like a bearer of ill-news. And, as if at the sight of a downcast messenger, I experienced the clear presentiment of some fatal intelligence.

It was conveyed to me late in the afternoon of that 'same day out of Williams' own thick lips, that seemed as heavy and inert as his voice.

"As far as we can see," he said, "you can't stay in the ship, Kemp. It would do no one any good--not the slightest good. Ask Sebright here."

It was a sort of council of war, to which we had been summoned in the saloon. Mrs. Williams had some sewing in her lap. She listened, her hands motionless, her eyes full of desolation. Seraphina's attitude, leaning her cheek on her hand, reminded me of the time when I had seen her absorbed in watching the green-and-gold lizard in the back room of Ramon's store, with her hair falling about her face like a veil. Castro was not called in till later on. But Sebright was there, leaning his back negligently against the bulkhead behind Williams, and looking down on us seated on both sides of the long table. And there was present, too, in all our minds, the image of the Rio Medio schooner, hull down on our quarter. In all the trials of sailing, we had not been able to shake her off that day.

"I don't want to hide from you, Mr. Kemp," Sebright began, "that it was I who pointed out to the captain that you would be only getting the ship in trouble for nothing. She's an old trader and favourite with shippers; and if we once get to loggerheads with the powers, there's an end of her trading. As to missing Havana this trip, even if you, Mr. Kemp, could give a pot of money, the captain could never show his nose in there again after breaking his charter-party to help steal a young lady. And it isn't as if she were nobody. She's the richest heiress in the island. The biggest people in Spain would have their say in this matter. I suppose they could put the captain in prison or something. Anyway, good-bye to the Havana business for good. Why, old Perkins would have a fit. He got over one runaway match.... All right, Mrs. Williams, not another word.... What I meant to say is that this is nothing else but a love story, and to knock on the head a valuable old-established connection for it..Don't bite your lip, Mr. Kemp. I mean

no disrespect to your feelings. Perkins would start up to break things--let alone his heart. I am sure the captain and Mrs. Williams think so, too."

The festive and subdued captain of the Lion was staring straight before him, as if stuffed. Mrs. Williams moved her fingers, compressed her lips, and looked helplessly at all of us in turn. "Besides altering his will," Sebright breathed confidentially at the back of my head. I perceived that this old Perkins, whom I had never seen, and was never to see in the body, whose body no one was ever to see any more (he died suddenly on the echoing staircase, with a flat candlestick in his hand; was already dead at the time, so that Mrs. Williams was actually sitting in the cabin of her very own ship)--I perceived that old Perkins was present at this discussion with all the power of a malignant, bad-tempered spirit. Those two were afraid of him. They had defied him once, it is true--but even that had been done out of fear, as it were.

Dismayed, I spoke quickly to Seraphina. With her head resting on her hand, and her eyes following the aimless tracings of her finger on the table, she said:

"It shall be as God wills it, Juan."

"For Heaven's sake, don't!" said Sebright, coughing behind me. He understood Spanish fairly well. "What I've said is perfectly true. Nevertheless the captain was ready to risk it."

"Yes," ejaculated Williams profoundly, out of almost still lips, and otherwise so motionless all over that the deep sound seemed to have been produced by some person under the table. Mrs. Williams' fingers were clasped on her lap, and her eyes seemed to beg for belief all round our faces.

"But the point is that it would have been no earthly good for you two," continued Sebright. "That's the point I made. If O'Brien knows anything, he knows you are on board this ship. He reckons on it as a dead certainty. Now, it is very evident that we could refuse to give you up, Mr. Kemp, and that the admiral (if the flagship's off Havana, as I think she must be by now) would have to back us up. How you would get on afterwards with old Groggy Rowley, I don't know. It isn't likely he has forgotten you tried to wipe the floor with him, if I am to take the captain's yarn as correct."

"A regular hero," Williams testified suddenly, in his concealed, from-under-the-table tone. "He's not afraid of any of them; not he. Ha! ha! Old Topnambo must have...." He glanced at his wife, and bit his tongue--perhaps at the recollection of his unsafe conjugal position--ending in disjointed words, "In his chaise--warrant--separationist--rebel," and all this without moving a limb or a muscle of his face,

till, with a low, throaty chuckle, he fluttered a stony sort of wink to my address.

Sebright had paused only long enough for this ebullition to be over. The cool logic of his surmise appalled me. He didn't see why O'Brien or anybody in Havana should want to interfere with me personally. But if I wanted to keep my young lady, it was obvious she must not arrive in Havana on board a ship where they would be sure to look for her the very first thing. It was even worse than it looked, he declared. His firm conviction was that if the *Lion* did not turn up in Havana pretty soon, there would be a Spanish man-of-war sent out to look for her--or else Mr. O'Brien was not the man we took him for. There was lying in harbour a corvette called the *Tornado*, a very likely looking craft. I didn't expect them to fight a corvette. No doubt there would be a fuss made about stopping a British ship on the high seas; but that would be a cold comfort after the lady had been taken away from me. She was a person of so much importance that even our own admiral could be induced--say, by the Captain-General's remonstrances--to sanction such an action. There was no saying what Rowley would do if they only promised to present him with half a dozen pirates to take home for a hanging. Why! that was the very identical thing the flagship was kept dodging off Havana for! And O'Brien knew where to lay his hands on a gross of such birds, for that matter.

"No," concluded Sebright, overwhelming me from behind, as I sat looking, not at the uncertainties of the future, but at the paralyzing hopelessness of the bare tomorrow. "The *Lion* is no place for you, whether she goes into Havana or not. Moreover, into Havana she must go now. There's no help for it. It's the deuce of a situation."

"Very well," I gasped. I tried to be resolute. I felt, suddenly, as if all the air in the cabin had gone up the open skylight. I couldn't remain below another moment; and, muttering something about coming back directly, I jumped up and ran out without looking at any one lest I should give myself away. I ran out on deck for air, but the great blue emptiness of the open staggered me like a blow over the heart. I walked slowly to the side, and, planting both my elbows on the rail, stared abroad defiantly and without a single clear thought in my head. I had a vague feeling that the descent of the sun towards the waters, going on before my eyes with changes of light and cloud, was like some gorgeous and empty ceremonial of immersion belonging to a vast barren faith remote from consolation and hope. And I noticed, also, small things without importance--the hirsute aspect of a sailor; the end of a rope trailing overboard; and Castro, so different from everybody else on board that his appearance seemed to create a profound solitude round him, lounging before the cabin door as if engaged in a deep conspiracy all by himself. I heard voices talking loudly behind me, too.



I noted them distinctly, but with perfect indifference. A long time after, with the same indifference, I looked over my shoulder. Castro had vanished from the quarter-deck. And I turned my face to the sea again as a man, feeling himself beaten in a fight with death, might turn his face to the wall.

I had fought a harder battle with a more cruel foe than death, with the doubt of myself; an endless contest, in which there is no peace of victory or of defeat. The open sea was like a blank and unscalable wall imprisoning the eternal question of conduct. Right or wrong? Generosity or folly? Conscience or only weak fear before remorse? The magnificent ritual of sunset went on palpitating with an inaudible rhythm, with slow and unerring observance, went on to the end, leaving its funeral fires on the sky and a great shadow upon the sea. Twice I had honourably stayed my hand. Twice... to this end.

In a moment, I went through all the agonies of suicide, which left me alive, alas, to burn with the shame of the treasonable thought, and terrified by the revolt of my soul refusing to leave the world in which a young girl lived! The vast twilight seemed to take the impress of her image like wax. What did Seraphina think of me? I knew nothing of her but her features, and it was enough. Strange, this power of a woman's face upon a man's heart--this mastery, potent as witchcraft and mysterious like a miracle. I should have to go and tell her. I did not suppose she could have understood all of Sebright's argumentation. Therefore, it was for me to explain to what a pretty pass I had brought our love.

I was so greatly disinclined to stir that I let Sebright's voice go on calling my name half a dozen times from the cabin door. At last I faced about.

"Mr. Kemp! I say, Kemp! Aren't you coming in yet?"

"To say good-by," I said, approaching him.

It had fallen dark already.

"Good-by? No. The carpenter must have a day at least."

Carpenter! What had a carpenter to do in this? However, nothing mattered--as though I had managed to spoil the whole scheme of creation.

"You didn't think of making a start to-night, did you?" Sebright wondered. "Where would be the sense of it?"

"Sense," I answered contemptuously. "There is no sense in anything. There is necessity. Necessity."

He remained silent for a time, peering at me.

"Necessity, to be sure," he said slowly. "And I don't see why you should be angry at it."

I was thinking that it was easy enough for him to keep cool--the necessity being mine. He continued to philosophize with what seemed to me a shocking freedom of mind.

"Must try to put some sense into it. That's what we are here for, I guess. Anyhow, there's some room for sense in arranging the way a thing is to be done, be it as hard as it may. And I don't see any sense, either, in exposing a woman to more hardship than is absolutely necessary. We have talked it out now, and I can do no more. Do go inside for a bit. Mrs. Williams is worrying the Señorita, rather, I'm afraid."

I paused a moment to try and regain the command of my faculties. But it was as if a bombshell had exploded inside my skull, scattering all my wits to the four winds of heaven. Only the conviction of failure remained, attended by a profound distress.

I fancy, though, I presented a fairly bold front. The lamp was lit, and small changes had occurred during my absence. Williams had turned his bulk sideways to the table. Mrs. Williams had risen from her place, and was now sitting upright close to Seraphina, holding one little hand inclosed caressingly between her frail palms, as if she had there something alive that needed cherishing. And in that position she looked up at me with a strange air of worn-out youth, cast by a rosy flush over her forehead and face. Seraphina still leaned her head on her other hand, and I noted, through the soft shadow of falling hair, the heightened colour on her cheek and the augmented brilliance of her eye.

"How I wish she had been an English girl," Mrs. Williams sighed regretfully, and leaned forward to look into Seraphina's half-averted face.

"My dear, did you quite, quite understand what I have been saying to you?"

She waited.

"Si Señora," said Seraphina. None of us moved. Then, after a time, turning to me with sudden animation, "This woman asked me if I believed in your love," she cried. "She is old. Oh, Juan, can the years change the heart? your heart?" Her voice dropped. "How am I to know that?" she went on piteously. "I am young--and

we may not live so long. I believe in mine...."

The corners of her delicate lips drooped; but she mastered her desire to cry, and steadied her voice which, always rich and full of womanly charm, took on, when she was deeply moved, an imposing gravity of timbre.

"But I am a Spaniard, and I believe in my lover's honour; in your--your English honour, Juan."

With the dignity of a supreme confidence she extended her hand. It was one of the culminating moments of our love. For love is like a journey in mountainous country, up through the clouds, and down into the shadows to an unknown destination. It was a moment rapt and full of feeling, in which we seemed to dwell together high up and alone--till she withdrew her hand from my lips, and I found myself back in the cabin, as if precipitated from a lofty place.

Nobody was looking at us. Mrs. Williams sat with downcast eyelids, with her hands reposing on her lap: her husband gazed discreetly at a gold moulding on the deck-beam; and the upward cast of his eyes invested his red face with an air of singularly imbecile ecstasy. And there was Castro, too, whom I had not seen till then, though I must have brushed against him on entering. He had stood by the door a mute, and, as it were, a voluntarily unmasked conspirator with the black round of the hat lying in front of his feet. He, alone, looked at us. He looked from Seraphina to me--from me to Seraphina. He looked unutterable things, rolling his crow-footed eyes in pious horror and glowering in turns. When Seraphina addressed him, he hastened to incline his head with his usual deference for the daughter of the Riegos.

She said, "There are things that concern this caballero, and that you can never understand. Your fidelity is proved. It has sunk deep here.... It shall give you a contented old age--on the word of Seraphina Riego."

He looked down at his feet with gloomy submission.

"There is a proverb about an enamoured woman," he muttered to himself, loud enough for me to overhear. Then, stooping deliberately to pick up his hat, he flourished it with a great sweep lower than his knees. His dumpy black back flitted out of the cabin; and almost directly we heard the sharp click of his flint and blade outside the door.