

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Not a soul stirred in the one long street of the negro village. The yellow crescent of the diminished moon swam low in the pearly light of the dawn; and the bamboo walls of huts, thatched with palm leaves, glistened here and there through the great leaves of bananas. All that night we had been moving on and on, slowly crossing clear savannas, in which nothing stirred beside ourselves but the escort of our own shadows, or plunging through dense patches of forest of an obscurity so impenetrable that the very forms of our rescuers became lost to us, though we heard their low voices and felt their hands steadying us in our saddles. Then our horses paced softly on the dust of a road, while athwart an avenue of orange trees whose foliage seemed as black as coal, the blind walls of the hacienda shone dead white like a vision of mists. A Brazilian aloe flowered by the side of the gate; we drooped in our saddles; and the heavy knocks against the wooden portal seemed to go on without cause, and stop without reason, like a sound heard in a dream. We entered Seraphina's hacienda. The high walls inclosed a square court deep as the yard of a prison, with flat-roofed buildings all around. It rang with many voices suddenly. Every moment the daylight increased; young nêgresses in loose gowns ran here and there, cackling like chased hens, and a fat woman waddled out from under the shadow of a veranda.

She was Seraphina's old nurse. She was scolding volubly, and suddenly she shrieked, as though she had been stabbed. Then all was still for a long time. Sitting high on the back of my patient mount, with my fingers twisted in the mane, I saw in a throng of woolly heads and bright garments Seraphina's pale face. An increasing murmur of sobs and endearing names mounted up to me. Her hair hung down, her eyes seemed immense; these people were carrying her off-- and a man with a careworn, bilious face and a straight, gray beard, neatly clipped on the edges, stood at the head of my horse, blinking with astonishment.

The fat woman reappeared, rolling painfully along the veranda.

"Enrico! It is her lover! Oh! my treasure, my lamb, my precious child. Do you hear, Enrico? Her lover! Oh! the poor darling of my heart."

She appeared to be giggling and weeping at the same time. The sky above the yard brightened all at once, as if the sun had emerged with a leap from the distant waters of the Atlantic. She waved her short arms at me over the railing, then plunged her dark fingers in the shock of iron-gray hair gathered on the top of her head. She turned away abruptly, a yellow head-kerchief dodged in her way, a slap resounded, a cry of pain, and a negro girl bolted into the court, nursing her

cheek in the palms of her hands. Doors slammed; other negro girls ran out of the veranda dismayed, and took cover in various directions.

I swayed to and fro in the saddle, but faithful to the plan of our escape, I tried to make clear my desire that these peons should be sworn to secrecy immediately. Meantime, somebody was trying to disengage my feet from the stirrups.

"Certainly. It is as your worship wishes."

The careworn man at the head of my horse was utterly in the dark.

"Attention!" he shouted. "Catch hold, hombres. Carry the caballero."

What caballero? A rosy flush tinged a boundless expanse above my face, and then came a sudden contraction of space and dusk. There were big earthen' ware jars ranged in a row on the floor, and the two vaqueros stood bareheaded, stretching their arms over me towards a black crucifix on a wall, taking their oaths, while I rested on my back. A white beard hovered about my face, a voice said, "It is done," then called anxiously twice, "Señor! Señor!" and when I had escaped from the dream of a cavern, I found myself with my head pillowed on a fat woman's breast, and drinking chicken broth out of a basin held to my lips. Her large cheeks quivered, she had black twinkling eyes and slight moustaches at the corners of her lips. But where was her white beard? And why did she talk of an angel, as if she were Manuel?

"Seraphina!" I cried, but Castro's cloak swooped on my head like a sable wing. It was death. I struggled. Then I died. It was delicious to die. I followed the floating shape of my love beyond the worlds of the universe. We soared together above pain, strife, cruelty, and pity. We had left death behind us and everything of life but our love, which threw a radiant halo around two flames which were ourselves--and immortality inclosed us in a great and soothing darkness.

Nothing stirred in it. We drifted no longer. We hung in it quite still--and the empty husk of my body watched our two flames side by side, mingling their light in an infinite loneliness. There were two candles burning low on a little black table near my head. Enrico, with his white beard and zealous eyes, was bending over my couch, while a chair, on high runners, rocked empty behind him. I stared.

"Señor, the night is far advanced," he said soothingly, "and Dolores, my wife, watches over Dona Seraphina's slumbers, on the other side of this wall."

I had been dead to the world for nearly twenty hours, and the awakening

resembled a new birth, for I felt as weak and helpless as an infant.

It is extraordinary how quickly we regained so much of our strength; but I suppose people recover sooner from the effects of privation than from the weakness of disease. Keeping pace with the return of our bodily vigour, the anxieties of mind returned, augmented tenfold by all the weight of our sinister experience. And yet, what worse could happen to us in the future? What other terror could it hold? We had come back from the very confines of destruction. But Seraphina, reclining back in an armchair, very still, with her eyes fixed on the high white wall facing the veranda across the court, would murmur the word "Separation!"

The possibility of our lives being forced apart was terrible to her affection, and intolerable to her pride. She had made her choice, and the feeling she had surrendered herself to so openly must have had a supreme potency. She had disregarded for it all the traditions of silence and reserve. She had looked at me fondly through the very tears of her grief; she had followed me--leaving her dead unburied and her prayers unsaid. What more could she have done to proclaim her love to the world? Could she, after that, allow anything short of death to thwart her fidelity? Never! And if she were to discover that I could, after all, find it in my heart to support an existence in which she had no share, then, indeed, it would be more than enough to make her die of shame.

"Ah, dearest!" I said, "you shall never die of shame."

We were different, but we had read each other's natures by a fierce light. I understood the point of honour in her constancy, and she never doubted the scruples of my true devotion, which had brought so many dangers on her head. We were flying not to save our lives, but to preserve inviolate our truth to each other and to ourselves. And if our sentiments appear exaggerated, violent, and overstrained, I must point back to their origin. Our love had not grown like a delicate flower, cherished in tempered sunshine. It had never known the atmosphere of tenderness; our souls had not been awakened to each other by a gentle whisper, but as if by the blast of a trumpet. It had called us to a life whose enemy was not death, but separation.

The enemy sat at the gate of our shelter, as death sits at the gate of life. These high walls could not protect us, nor the tearful mumble of the old woman's prayers, nor yet the careworn fidelity of Enrico. The couple hung about us, quivering with emotion. They peeped round the corners of the veranda, and only rarely ventured to come out openly. The silent Galician stroked his clipped beard; the obese woman kept on crossing herself with loud, resigned sighs. She would waddle up, wiping her eyes, to stroke Seraphina's head and murmur endearing

names. They waited on us hand and foot, and would stand close together, ready for the slightest sign, in a rapt contemplation. Now and then she would nudge her husband's ribs with her thick elbow and murmur, "Her lover."

She was happy when Seraphina let her sit at her feet, and hold her hand. She would pat it with gentle taps, squatting shapelessly on a low stool.

"Why go so far from thy old nurse, darling of my heart? Ah! love is love, and we have only one life to live, but this England is very far--very far away."

She nodded her big iron-gray head slowly; and to our longing England appeared very distant, too, a fortunate isle across the seas, an abode of peace, a sanctuary of love.

There was no plan open to us but the one laid down by Sebright. The secrecy of our sojourn at the hacienda had, in a measure, failed, though there was no reason to suppose the two peons had broken their oath. Our arrival at dawn had been unobserved, as far as we knew, and the domestic slaves, mostly girls, had been kept from all communication with the field hands outside. All these square leagues of the estate were very much out of the world, and this isolation had not been broken upon by any of O'Brien's agents coming out to spy. It seemed to be the only part of Seraphina's great possessions that remained absolutely her own.

Not a whisper of any sort of news reached us in our hiding-place till the fourth evening, when one of the vaqueros reported to Enrico that, riding on the inland boundary, he had fallen in with a company of infantry encamped on the edge of a little wood. Troops were being moved upon Rio Medio. He brought a note from the officer in command of that party. It contained nothing but a requisition for twenty head of cattle. The same night we left the hacienda.

It was a starry darkness. Behind us the soft wailing of the old woman at the gate died out:

"So far! So very far!"

We left the long street of the slave village on the left, and walked down the gentle slope of the open glade towards the little river. Seraphina's hair was concealed in the crown of a wide sombrero and, wrapped up in a serape, she looked so much like a cloaked vaquero that one missed the jingle of spurs out of her walk. Enrico had fitted me out in his own clothes from top to toe. He carried a lanthorn, and we followed the circle of light that swayed and trembled upon the short grass. There was no one else with us, the crew of the drogher being already on board to await our coming.

Her mast appeared above the roof of some low sheds grouped about a short wooden jetty. Enrico raised the lamp high to light us, as we stepped on board.

Not a word was spoken; the five negroes of the crew (Enrico answered for their fidelity) moved about noiselessly, almost invisible. Blocks rattled feebly aloft.

"Enrico," said Seraphina, "do not forget to put a stone cross over poor Castro's grave."

"No, Señorita. May you know years of felicity. We would all have laid down our lives for you. Remember that, and do not forget the living. Your childhood has been the consolation of the poor woman there for the loss of our little one, your foster brother, who died. We have given to you much of our affection for him who was denied to our old age."

He stepped back from the rail. "Go with God," he said.

The faint air filled the sail, and the outlines of wharf and roof fell back into the sombre background of the land, but the lanthorn in Enrico's hand glimmered motionless at the end of the jetty, till a bend of the stream hid it from our sight.

We glided smoothly between the banks. Now and then a stretch of osiers and cane brakes rustled alongside in the darkness. All was strange; the contours of the land melted before our advance. The earth was made of shifting shadows, and only the stars remained in unchanged groups of glitter on the black sky. We floated across the land-locked basin, and under the low headland we had steered for from the sea in the storm. All this, seen only once under streams of lightning, was unrecognizable to us, and seemed plunged in deep slumber. But the fresh feel of the sea air, and the freedom of earth and sky wedded on the sea horizon, returned to us like old friends, the companions of that time when we communed in words and silences on board the Lion, that fragment of England found in a mist, boarded in battle, with its absurd and warmhearted protection. On our other hand, the rampart of white dunes intruded the line of a ghostly shore between the depth of the sea and the profundity of the sky; and when the faint breeze failed for a moment, the negro crew troubled the silence with the heavy splashes of their sweeps falling in slow and solemn cadence. The rudder creaked gently; the black in command was old and of spare build, resembling Cesar, the major-domo, without the splendour of maroon velvet and gold lace. He was a very good sailor, I believe, taciturn and intelligent. He had seen the Lion frequently on his trips to Havana, and would recognize her, he assured me, amongst a whole host of shipping. When I had explained what was expected of him, according to Sebright's programme, a bizarre grimace of a smile disturbed the bony, mournful

cast of his African face.

"Fall on board by accident, Señor. Si! Now, by St. Jago of Compostella, the patron of our hacienda, you shall see this old Pedro--who has been set to sail the craft ever since she was built--as overcome by an accident as a little rascal of a boy that has stolen a boat."

After this wordy declaration he never spoke to us again. He gave his short orders in low undertones, and the others, four stalwart blacks, in the prime of life, executed them in silence. Another night brought the unchanging stars to look at us in their multitudes, till the dawn put them out just as we opened the entrance of the harbour. The daylight discovered the arid colouring of the coast, a castle on a sandy hill, and a few small boats with ragged sails making for the land. A brigantine, that seemed to have carried the breeze with her right in, threw up the Stars and Stripes radiantly to the rising sun, before rounding the point. The sound of bells came out to sea, and met us while we crept slowly on, abreast of the battery at the water's edge.

"A feast-day in the city," said the old negro at the helm. "And here is an English ship of war."

The sun-rays struck from afar full at her belted side; the water was like glass along the shore. She swam into the very shade of the hill, before she wore round, with great deliberation, in an ample sweep of her headgear through a complete half-circle. She came to the wind on the other tack under her short canvas; her lower deck ports were closed, the hammock cloths like a ridge of unmelted snow lying along her rail.

It was evident she was kept standing off and on outside the harbour, as an armed man may pace to and fro before a gate. With the hum of six hundred wakeful lives in her flanks, the tap-tapping of a drum, and the shrill modulations of the boatswain's calls piping some order along her decks, she floated majestically across our path. But the only living being we saw was the red-coated marine on sentry by the lifebuoys, looking down at us over the taffrail. We passed so close to her that I could distinguish the whites of his eyes, and the tompions in the muzzles of her stern-chasers protruding out of the ports belonging to the admiral's quarters.

I knew her. She was Rowley's flagship. She had thrown the shadow of her sails upon the end of my first sea journey. She was the man-of-war going out for a cruise on that day when Carlos, Tomas, and myself arrived in Jamaica in the old Thames. And there she was meeting me again, after two years, before Havana--the might of the fortunate isle to which we turned our eyes, part and parcel of my

inheritance, formidable with the courage of my countrymen, humming with my native speech--and as foreign to my purposes as if I had forfeited forever my birthright in her protection. I had drifted into a sort of outlaw. You may not break the king's peace and be made welcome on board a king's ship. You may not hope to make use of a king's ship for the purposes of an elopement. There was no room on board that seventy-four for our romance.

As it was, I very nearly hailed her. What would become of us if the Lion had already left Havana? I thought. But no. To hail her meant separation--the only forbidden thing to those who, in the strength of youth and love, are permitted to defy the world together.

I did not hail; and the marine dwindled to a red speck upon the noble hull forging away from us on the offshore tack. The brazen clangour of bells seemed to struggle with the sharp puff of the breeze that sent us in.

The shipping in harbour was covered with bunting in honour of the feast-day; for the same reason, there was not a sign of the usual crowd of small boats that give animation to the waters of a port; the middle of the harbour was strangely empty. A solitary bumboat canoe, with a yellow bunch of bananas in the bow, and an old negro woman dipping a languid paddle at the stern, were all that met my eye. Presently, however, a six-oared custom-house galley darted out from the tier of ships, pulling for the American brigantine. I noticed in her, beside the ordinary port officials, several soldiers, and a person astonishingly like the alguazil of the illustrations to Spanish romances. One of the uniformed sitters waved his hand at us, recognizing an estate drogher, and shouted some directions, of which we only caught the words:

"Steps--examination--to-morrow."

Our steersman took off his old hat humbly, to hail back, "Muy bien, Señor."

I breathed freely, for they gave us no more of their attention. Soldiers, alguazil, and custom-house officers were swarming aboard the American, as if bent on ransacking her from stem to stern in the shortest possible time, so as not to be late for the procession.

The absence of movement in the harbour, the festive and idle appearance of the ships, with the flutter of innumerable flags on the forest of masts, and the great uproar of church bells in the air, made an impressive greeting for our eyes and ears. And the deserted aspect of the harbour front of the city was very striking, too. The feast had swept the quays of people so completely that the tiny pair of sentries at the foot of a tall yellow building caught the eye from afar. Sera-phina

crouched on a coil of rope under the bulwark; old Pedro, at the tiller, peered about from under his hand, and I, trying to expose myself to view as little as possible, helped him to look for the Lion. There she is. Yes! No! There she was. A crushing load fell off my chest. We had made her out together, old Pedro and I.

And then the last part of Sebright's plan had to be carried out at once. The foresheet of the drogher appeared to part, our mainsail shook, and before I could gasp twice, we had drifted stern foremost into the Lion's mizzen chains with a crash that brought a genuine expression of concern to the old negro's face. He had managed the whole thing with a most convincing skill, and without even once glancing at the ship. We had done our part, but the people of the Lion seemed to fail in theirs unaccountably. Of all the faces that crowded her rail at the shock, not one appeared with a glimmer of intelligence. All the cargo ports were down. Their surprise and their swearing appeared to me alarmingly unaffected; with a most imbecile alacrity they exerted themselves, with small spars and boathooks, to push the drogher off. Nobody seemed to recognize me; Seraphina might have been a peon sitting on deck, cloaked from neck to heels and under a sombrero. I dared not shout to them in English, for fear of being heard on board the other ships around. At last Sebright himself appeared on the poop.

He gave one look over the side.

"What the devil..." he began. Was he blind, too?

Suddenly I saw him throw up his arms above his head. He vanished. A port came open with a jerk at the last moment. I lifted Seraphina up: two hands caught hold of her, and, in my great hurry to scramble up after her, I barked my shins cruelly. The port fell; the drogher went on bumping alongside, completely disregarded. Seraphina dropped the cloak at her feet and flung off her hat.

"Good-morning, amigos," she said gravely.

A hissed "Damn you fools--keep quiet!" from Sebright, stifled the cheer in all those bronzed throats. Only a thin little poor "hooray" quavered along the deck. The timid steward had not been able to overcome his enthusiasm. He slapped his head in despair, and rushed away to bury himself in his pantry.

"Turned up, by heavens!... Go in.... Good God!... Bucketfuls of tears...." stammered Sebright, pushing us into the cuddy. "Go in! Go in at once!"

Mrs. Williams rose from behind the table wide-eyed, clasping her hands, and stumbled twice as she ran to us.



"What have you done to that child, Mr. Kemp!" she cried insanely at me. "Oh, my dear, my dear! You look like your own ghost."

Sebright, burning with impatience, pulled me away. The cabin door fell upon the two women, locked in a hug, and, stepping into his stateroom, we could do nothing at first but slap each other on the back and ejaculate the most unmeaning exclamations, like a couple of jocular idiots. But when, in the expansion of my heart, I tried to banter him about not keeping his word to look out for us, he bent double in trying to restrain his hilarity, slapped his thighs, and grew red in the face.

The excellent joke was that, for the past six days, we had been supposed to be dead--drowned; at least Dona Seraphina had been provided with that sort of death in her own name; I was drowned, too, but in the disguise of a piratical young English nobleman.

"There's nothing too bad for them to believe of us," he commented, and guffawed in his joy at seeing me unscathed. "Dead! Drowned! Ha! Ha! Good, wasn't it?"

Mrs. Williams--he said--had been weeping her eyes out over our desolate end; and even the skipper had sulked with his food for a day or two.

"Ha! Ha! Drowned! Excellent!" He shook me by the shoulders, looking me straight in the eyes--and the bizarre, nervous hilarity of my reception, so unlike his scornful attitude, proved that he, too, had believed the rumour. Indeed, nothing could have been more natural, considering my inexperience in handling boats and the fury of the norther. It had sent the *Lion* staggering into Havana in less than twenty hours after we had parted from her on the coast.

Suddenly a change came over him. He pushed me on to the settee.

"Speak! Talk! What has happened? Where have you been all this time? Man, you look ten years older."

"Ten years. Is that all?" I said.

And after he had heard the whole story of our passages he appeared greatly sobered.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" he muttered, lost in deep thought, till I reminded him it was his turn, now, to speak.

"You are the talk of the town," he said, recovering his elasticity of spirit as he

went on. The death of Don Balthasar had been the first great sensation of Havana, but it seemed that O'Brien had kept that news to himself, till he heard by an overland messenger that Sera-phina and I had escaped from Casa Riego.

Then he gave it to the world; he let it be inferred that he had the news of both events together. The story, as sworn to by various suborned rascals, and put out by his creatures, ran that an English desperado, arriving in Rio Medio with some Mexicans in a schooner, had incited the rabble of the place to attack the Casa Riego. Don Balthasar had been shot while defending his house at the head of his negroes; and Don Balthasar's daughter had been carried off by the English pirate.

The amazement and sensation were extreme. Several of the first families went into mourning. A service for the repose of Don Balthasar's soul was sung in the Cathedral. Captain Williams went there out of curiosity, and returned full of the magnificence of the sight; nave draped in black, an enormous catafalque, with silver angels, more than life-size, kneeling at the four corners with joined hands, an amazing multitude of lights. A demonstration of unbounded grief from the Judge of the Marine Court had startled the distinguished congregation. In his place amongst the body of higher magistrature, Don Patricio O'Brien burst into an uncontrollable paroxysm of sobs, and had to be assisted out of the church.

It was almost incredible, but I could well believe it. With the thunderous strains of Dies Irae rolling over his bowed head, amongst all these symbols and trappings of woe, he must have seen, in the black anguish of his baffled passion, the true image of death itself, and tasted all the profound deception of life. Who could tell how much secret rage, jealousy, regret, and despair had gone to that outburst of grief, whose truth had fluttered a distinguished company of mourners, and had nearly interrupted their official supplications for the repose of that old man, who had been dead to the world for so many years? I believe that, on that very day, just as he was going to the service, O'Brien had received the news of our supposed death by drowning. The music, the voices, the lights of the grave, the pomp of mourning, awe, and supplication crying for mercy upon the dead, had been too much for him. He had presumed too much upon his fortitude. He wept aloud for his love lost, for his vengeance defeated, for the dreams gone out of his life, for the inaccessible consummation of his desire.

"And, you know, with all these affairs, he feels himself wobbling in his socket," Sebright began again, after musing for a while. Indeed, the last events in Rio Medio were endangering his position. He could no more present his reports upon the state of the province with incidental reflections upon the bad faith of the English Government (who encouraged the rebels against the Catholic king), the arrogance of the English admiral, and concluding with the loyalty and honesty of

the Rio Medio population, "who themselves suffered many acts of molestation from the Mexican pirates." The most famous of these papers, printed at that time in the official Gazette, had recommended that the loyal town should be given a battery of thirty-six pounders for purposes of self-defence. They had been given them just in time to be turned on Rowley's boats; it is known with what deadly effect. O'Brien's report after that event had made it clear that that virtuous population of the bay, exasperated by the intrusions of the Mexicanos upon their peaceful state, and abhorring in their souls the rebellion trying to lift its envenomed head, etc., etc.,... heroically manned the battery to defend their town from the boats which they took to be these very pirates the British admiral was in search of. He pleaded for them the uncertain light of the early morning, the ardour of citizens, valorous, but naturally inexperienced in matters of war, and the impossibility to suppose that the admiral of a friendly power would dispatch an armed force to land on these shores. I have read these things with my own eyes; there were old files of the Gazette on board, and Sebright, who had been reading up his O'Brien, pointed them out to me with his finger, muttering:

"Here--look there. Pretty, ain't it?"

But that was all over. The bubble had burst. It was reported in town that the private audience the Juez had lately from the Captain-General was of a most stormy description. They say old Marshal What-d'ye-call-'um ended by flinging his last report in his face, and asking him how dared he work his lawyer's tricks upon an old soldier. Good old fighting cock. But stupid. All these old soldiers were stupid, Sebright declared. Old admirals, too. However, the land troops had arrived in Rio Medio by this time; the Tornado frigate, too, no doubt, having sailed four days ago, with orders to burn the villages to the ground; and the good Lugareños must be catching colds trying to hide from the carabineers in the deep, damp woods.

Our admiral was awaiting the issue of that expedition. Returning home under a cloud, Rowley wanted to take with him the assurance of the pirate nest being destroyed at last, as a sort of diplomatic feather in his cap.

"He may think," Sebright commented, "that it's his sailorly bluff that has done it, but, as far as I can see, nobody but you yourself, Kemp, had anything to do with bringing it about. Funny, is it not? Old Rowley keeps his ship dodging outside because it's cooler at sea than stewing in this harbour, but he sends in a boat for news every morning. What he is most anxious for is to get the notorious Nichols into his hands; take him home for a hanging. It seems clear to me that they are humbugging him ashore. Nichols! Where's Nichols? There are people here who say that Nichols has had free board and lodging in Havana jail for the last six months. Others swear that it is Nichols who has killed the old gentleman, run off

with Dona Seraphina, and got drowned. Nichols! Who's Nichols? On that showing you are Nichols. Anybody may be Nichols. Who has ever seen him outside Rio Medio? I used to believe in him at one time, but, upon my word I begin to doubt whether there ever was such a man."

"But the man existed, at any rate," I said. "I knew him--I've talked with him. He came out second mate in the same ship with me--in the old Thames. Ramon took charge of him in Kingston, and that's the last positive thing I can swear to, of him. But that he was in Rio Medio for two years, and vanished from there almost directly after that unlucky boat affair, I am absolutely certain."

"Well, I suppose O'Brien knows where to lay his hand on him. But no matter where the fellow is, in jail or out of it, the admiral will never get hold of him. If they had him they could not think of giving him up. He knows too much of the game; and remember that O'Brien, if he wobbles in the socket, is by no means down yet. A man like that doesn't get knocked over like a ninepin. You may be sure he has twenty skeletons put away in good places, that he will haul out one by one, rather than let himself be squashed. He's not going to give in. A few days ago, a priest--your priest, you know--turned up here on foot from Rio Medio, and went about wringing his hands, declaring that he knew all the truth, and meant to make a noise about it, too. O'Brien made short work of him, though; got the archbishop to send him into retreat, as they call it, to a Franciscan convent a hundred miles from here. These things are whispered about all along the gutters of this place."

I imagined the poor Father Antonio, with his simple resignation, mourning for us in his forced retreat, brokenhearted, and murmuring, "Inscrutable, inscrutable." I should have liked to see the old man.

"I tell you the town is fairly buzzing with the atrocities of this business," Sebright went on. "It's the thing for fashionable people to go and see what I may call the relics of the crime. They are on show in the waiting-hall of the Palace of Justice. Why, I went there myself. You go through a swing door into a big place that, for cheerfulness, is no better than a monster coal cellar, and there you behold, laid out on a little black table, Mrs. Williams' woollen shawl, your Señorita's tortoise-shell comb, that had got entangled in it somehow, and my old cap that I lent you--you remember. I assure you, it gave me the horrors to see the confounded things spread out there in that dim religious light. Dash me, if I didn't go queer all over. And all the time swell carriages stopping before the portico, dressed-up women walking up in pairs and threes, sighing before the missus' shawl, turning up their eyes, 'Ah! Pobrecita! Pobrecita! But what a strange wrap for her to have. It is very coarse. Perished in the flower of her youth. Incredible! Oh, the savage, cruel Englishman.' The funniest thing in the world."

But if this was so, Manuel's Lugareños were now in Havana. Sebright pointed out that, as things stood, it was the safest place for them, under the wing of their patron. Sebright had recognized the schooner at once. She came in very early one morning, and hauled herself unostentatiously out of sight amongst a ruck of small craft moored in the lower part of the harbour. He took the first opportunity to ask one of the guards on the quay what was that pretty vessel over there, just to hear what the man would say. He was assured that she was a Porto Rico trader of no consequence, well known in the port.

"Never mind the scoundrels; they can do nothing more to you."

Sebright dismissed the Lugareños out of my life. The unfavourable circumstance for us was that the captain had gone ashore. The ship was ready for sea; absolutely cleared; papers on board; could go in an hour if it came to that; but, at any rate, next morning at daylight, before O'Brien could get wind of the Riego drogher arriving. Every movement in port was reported to the Juez; but this was a feast, and he would not hear of it probably till next day. Even fiestas had their uses sometimes. In his anxiety to discover Seraphina, O'Brien had played such pranks amongst the foreign shipping (after the Lion had been drawn blank) that the whole consular body had addressed a joint protest to the Governor, and the Juez had been told to moderate his efforts. No ship was to be visited more than once. Still I had seen, myself, soldiers going in a boat to board the American brigantine: a garlic-eating crew, poisoning the cabins with their breath, and poking their noses everywhere. Of course, since our supposed drowning, there had been a lull; but the least thing might start him off again. He was reputed to be almost out of his mind with sorrow, arising from his great attachment for the family. He walked about as if distracted, suffered from insomnia, and had not been fit to preside in his court for over a week, now.

"But don't you expect Williams back on board directly?"

He shook his head.

"No. Not even to-night. He told the missus he was going to spend the day out of town with his consignee, but he tipped me the wink. This evening he will send a note that the consignee detains him for the night, because the letters are not ready, and I'll have to go to her and lie, the best I am able, that it's quite the usual thing. Damn!"

I was appalled. This was too bad. And, as I raged against the dissolute habits of the man, Sebright entreated me to moderate my voice so as not to be heard in the cabin. Did I expect the man to change his skin? He had been doing the gay

bachelor about here all his life; had never suspected he was doing anything particularly scandalous either.

"He married the old girl out of chivalry,--the romantic fat beggar,--and never realized what it meant till she came out with him," Sebright went on whispering to me. "He loves and honours her more than you may think. That is so, for all your shrugs, Mr. Kemp. It is not so easy to break the old connection as you imagine. Why, the other evening, two of his dissolute habits (as you call them) came off, with mantillas over their heads, in a boat, in company with a male scallawag of sorts, pinching a mandolin, and serenaded the ship for him. We were all in the cabin after supper, and poor Mrs. Williams, with her eyes still red from weeping over you people, says to us, 'How sweet and melancholy that sounds,' says she. You should have seen the skipper rolling his eyes at me. The perspiration of fright was simply pouring down his face. I rushed on deck, and it took me all my Spanish to stop them from coming aboard. I had to swear by all the saints, and the honour of a caballero, that there was a wife. They went away laughing at last. They did not want to make trouble. They simply had not believed the tale before. Thought it was some dodge of his. I could hear their peals of laughter all the way up the harbour. These are the difficulties we have. The old girl must be protected from that sort of eye-opener, if I've to forswear my soul. I've been keeping guard over her ever since we arrived here--besides looking out for you people, as long as there was any hope."

I was greatly cast down. Perhaps Williams was justified in making concessions to the associates of his former jolly existence to save some outrage to the feelings of his consort. I did not want to criticise his motives--but what about getting him back on board at once?

Sebright was biting his lip. The necessity was pressing, he admitted.

He had an idea where to find him. But for himself he could not go--that was evident. Neither would I wish him to leave the ship, even for a moment, now Seraphina was on board. An unexpected visit from some zealous police understrapper, a momentary want of presence of mind on the part of the timid steward; there was enough to bring about our undoing. Moreover, as he had said, he must remain on guard over the missus. But whom to send? There was not a single boatman about. The harbour was a desert of water and dressed ships; but even the crews of most of them were ashore--"on a regular spree of praying," as he expressed it vexedly. As to our own crew, not one of them knew anything more of Spanish than a few terms of abuse, perhaps. Their hearts were in the right place, but as to their wits, he wouldn't trust a single one of them by himself--no, not an inch away from the ship. How could he send one of them ashore with the wineshops yawning wide on all sides, and not enough lingo to ask for the way.

Sure to get drunk, to get lost, to get into trouble in some way, and in the end get picked up by the police. The slightest hitch of that sort would call attention upon the ship--and with O'Brien to draw inferences.... He rubbed his head.

"I suppose I'll have to go," he grunted. "But I am known; I may be followed. They may wonder why I rush to fetch my skipper. And yet I feel this is the time. The very time. Between now and four o'clock to-morrow morning we have an almost absolute certitude of getting away with you two. This is our chance and your chance."

He was lost in perplexity. Then, as if inspired, I cried:

"I will go!"

"The devil!" he said, amazed. "Would you?"

I rushed at him with arguments. No one would know me. My clothes were all right and clean enough for a feast-day. I could slip through the crowds unperceived. The principal thing was to get Seraphina out of O'Brien's reach. At the worst, I could always find means to get away from Cuba by myself. There was Mrs. Williams to look after her, and if I missed Williams by some mischance, and failed to make my way back to the ship in time, I charged them solemnly not to wait, but sail away at the earliest possible moment.

I said much more than this. I was eloquent. I became as if suddenly intoxicated by the nearness of freedom and safety. The thought of being at sea with her in a few hours away from all trouble of mind or heart, made my head swim. It seemed to me I should go mad if I was not allowed to go. My limbs tingled with eagerness. I stuttered with excitement.

"Well--after all!" Sebright mumbled.

"I must go in and tell her," I said.

"No. Don't do that," said that wise young man. "Have you made up your mind?"

"Yes, I have," I answered. "But she's reasonable."

"Still," he argued, "the old girl is sure to say that nothing of the kind is necessary. The captain told her that he was coming back for tea. What could we say to that? We can't explain the true state of the case, and if you persist in going, it will look like pig-headed folly on your part."

He threw his writing-desk open for me.

"Write to her. Write down your arguments--what you have been telling me. It's a fact that the door stands open for a few hours. As to the rest," he pursued, with a weary sigh, "I'll do the lying to pass it off with Mrs. Williams."

Thus it came about that, with only two flimsy bulkheads between us, I wrote my first letter to Seraphina, while Sebright went on deck to make arrangements to send me ashore. He was some time away; long enough for me to pour out on paper the exultation of my thought, the confidence of my hope, my desire to have her safe at last with me upon the blue sea. One must seize a propitious moment lest it should slip away and never return, I wrote. I begged her to believe I was acting for the best, and only from my great love, that could not support the thought of her being so near O'Brien, the arch-enemy of our union. There was no separation on the sea.

Sebright came in brusquely.

"Come along."

The American brigantine was berthed by then, close astern of the Lion, and Sebright had the idea of asking her mate to let his boat (it was in the water) put ashore a visitor he had on board. His own were hoisted, he explained, and there were no boatmen plying for hire.

His request was granted. I was pulled ashore by two American sailors, who never said a word to each other, and evidently took me for a Spaniard.

It was an excellent idea. By borrowing the Yankee's boat, the track of my connection with the Lion was covered. The silent seamen landed me, as asked by Sebright, near the battery on the sand, quite clear of the city.

I thanked them in Spanish, and, traversing a piece of open ground, made a wide circle to enter the town from the land side, to still further cover my tracks. I passed through a sort of squalid suburb of huts, hovels, and negro shanties. I met very few people, and these mostly old women, looking after the swarms of children of all colours and sizes, playing in the dust. Many curs sunned themselves among heaps of rubbish, and took not the trouble to growl at me. Then I came out upon a highroad, and turned my face towards the city lying under a crude sunshine, and in a ring of metallic vibrations.

Better houses with plastered fronts washed yellow or blue, and even pinky red, alternated with tumble-down wooden structures. A crenellated squat gateway



faced me with a carved shield of stone above the open gloom. A young smooth-faced mulatto, in some sort of dirty uniform, but wearing new straw slippers with blue silk rosettes over his naked feet, lounged cross-legged at the door of a kind of guardroom. He held a big cigar tilted up between his teeth, and ogled me, like a woman, out of the corners of his languishing eyes. He said not a word.

Fortunately my face had tanned to a dark hue. Enrico's clothes would not attract attention to me, of course. The light colour of my hair was concealed by the handkerchief bound under my hat; my footsteps echoed loudly under the vault, and I penetrated into the heart of the city.

And directly, it seemed to me, I had stepped back three hundred years. I had never seen anything so old; this was the abandoned inheritance of an adventurous race, that seemed to have thrown all its might, all its vigour, and all its enthusiasm into one supreme effort of valour and greed. I had read the history of the Spanish Conquest; and, looking at these great walls of stone, I felt my heart moved by the same wonder, and by the same sadness. With what a fury of heroism and faith had this whole people flung itself upon the opulent mystery of the New World. Never had a nation clasped closer to its heart its dream of greatness, of glory, and of romance. There had been a moment in its destiny, when it could believe that Heaven itself smiled upon its massacres. I walked slowly, awed by the solitude. They had conquered and were no more, and these wrought stones remained to testify gloomily to the death of their success. Heavy houses, immense walls, pointed arches of the doorways, cages of iron bars projecting balcony wise around each square window. And not a soul in sight, not a head looking out from these dwellings, these houses of men, these ancient abodes of hate, of base rivalries, of avarice, of ambitions--these old nests of love, these witnesses of a great romance now past and gone below the horizon. They seemed to return mournfully my wondering glances; they seemed to look at me and say, "What do you here? We have seen other men, heard other footsteps!" The peace of the cloister brooded over these aged blocks of masonry, stained with the green trails of mosses, infiltrated with shadows.

At times the belfry of a church would volley a tremendous crash of bronze into the narrow streets; and between whiles I could hear the faint echoes of far-off chanting, the brassy distant gasps of trombones. A woman in black whisked round a corner, hurrying towards the route of the procession. I took the same direction. From a wine-shop, yawning like a dirty cavern in the basement of a palatial old building, issued suddenly a brawny ruffian in rags, wiping his thick beard with the back of a hairy paw. He lurched a little, and began to walk before me hastily. I noticed the glitter of a gold earring in the lobe of his huge ear. His cloak was frayed at the bottom into a perfect fringe and, as he flung it about, he showed a good deal of naked skin under it. His calves were bandaged crosswise;

his peaked hat seemed to have been trodden upon in filth before he had put it on his head. Suddenly I stopped short. A Lugareño!

We were then in the empty part of a narrow street, whose lower end was packed, close with a crowd viewing the procession which was filing slowly past, along the wide thoroughfare. It was too late for me to go back. Moreover, the ruffian paid no attention to me. It was best to go on. The people, packed between the houses with their backs to us, blocked our way. I had to wait.

He took his position near me in the rear of the last rank of the crowd. He must have been inclined to repentance in his cups, because he began to mumble and beat his breast. Other people in the crowd were also beating their breasts. In front of me I had the façade of a building which, according to the little plan of my route Sebright drew for me, was the Palace of Justice. It had a peristyle of ugly columns at the top of a flight of steps. A cordon of infantry kept the roadway clear. The singing went on without interruption; and I saw tall saints of wood, gilt and painted red and blue, pass, borne shoulder-high, swaying and pitching above the heads of the crowd like the masts of boats in a seaway. Crucifixes were carried, flashing in the sun; an enormous Madonna, which must have weighed half a ton, tottered across my line of sight, dressed up in gold brocade and with a wreath of paper roses on her head. A military band sent a hurricane blast of brasses as it went by. Then all was still at once, except the silvery tinkling of hand-bells. The people before me fell on their knees together and left me standing up alone.

As a matter of fact I had been caught gaping at the ceremony quite new to me, and had not expected a move of that sort. The ruffian kneeling within a foot of me thumped and bellowed in an ecstasy of piety. As to me, I own I stood there looking with impatience at a passing canopy that seemed all gold, with three priests in gorgeous capes walking slowly under it, and I absolutely forgot to take off my hat. The bearded ruffian looked up from the midst of his penitential exercises, and before I realized I was outraging his or anybody else's feelings, leaped up with a yell, "Thou sacrilegious infidel," and sent my hat flying off my head.

Just then the band crashed again, the bells pealed out, and no one heard his shout. With one blow of my fist I sent him staggering backwards. The procession had passed; people were rising from their knees and pouring out of the narrow street. Swearing, he fumbled under his cloak; I watched him narrowly; but in a moment he sprang away and lost himself amongst the moving crowd. I picked up my hat.

For a time I stood very uneasy, and then retreated under a doorway. Nothing

happened, and I was anxious to get on. It was possible to cross the wide street now. That Lugareño did not know me. He was a Lugareño, though. No doubt about it. I would make a dash now; but first I stole a hasty glance at the plan of my route which I kept in the hollow of my palm.

"Señor," said a voice. I lifted my head.

An elderly man in black, with a white moustache and imperial, stood before me. The ruffian was stalking up to his side, and four soldiers with an officer were coming behind. I took in the whole disaster at a glance.

"The Señor is no doubt a foreigner--perhaps an Englishman," said the official in black. He had a lace collar, a chain on his neck, velvet breeches, a well-turned leg in black stockings. His voice was soft.

I was so disconcerted that I nodded at him.

"The Señor is young and inconsiderate. Religious feelings ought to be respected." The official in black was addressing me in sad and measured tones. "This good Catholic," he continued, eying the bearded ruffian dubiously, "has made a formal statement to me of your impious demonstration."

What a fatal accident, I thought, appalled; but I tried to explain the matter. I expressed regret. The other gazed at me benevolently.

"Nevertheless, Señor, pray follow me. Even for your own safety. You must give some account of yourself."

This I was firmly resolved not to give. But the Lugareño had been going through a pantomime of scrutinizing my person. He crouched up, stepped back, then to one side.

"This worthy man," began the official in black, "complains of your violence, too...."

"This worthy man," I shouted stupidly, "is a pirate. He is a Rio Medio Lugareño. He is a criminal."

The official seemed astounded, and I saw my idiotic mistake at once--too late!

"Strange," he murmured, and, at the same time, the ruffianly wretch began to shout:

"It is he! The traitor! The heretic! I recognize him!"

"Peace, peace!" said the man in black.

"I demand to be taken before the Juez Don Patricio for a deposition," shrieked the Lugareño. A crowd was beginning to collect.

The official and the officer exchanged consulting glances. At a word from the latter, the soldiers closed upon me.

I felt utterly overcome, as if the earth had crumbled under my feet, and the heavens had been rent in twain.

I walked between my captors across the street amongst hooting knots of people, and up the steps of the portico, as if in a frightful dream.

In the gloomy, chilly hall they made me wait. A soldier stood on each side of me, and there, absolutely before my eyes on a little table, reposed Mrs. Williams' shawl and Sebright's cap. This was the very hall of the Palace of Justice of which Sebright had spoken. It was more than ever like an absurd dream, now. But I had the leisure to collect my wits. I could not claim the Consul's protection simply because I should have to give him a truthful account of myself, and that would mean giving up Seraphina. The Consul could not protect her. But the Lion would sail on the morrow. Sebright would understand it if Williams did not. I trusted Sebright's sagacity. Yes, she would sail tomorrow evening. A day and a half. If I could only keep the knowledge of Seraphina from O'Brien till then--she was safe, and I should be safe, too, for my lips would be unsealed. I could claim the protection of my Consul and proclaim the villainy of the Juez.

"Go in there now, Señor, to be confronted with your accuser," said the official in black, appearing before me. He pointed at a small door to the left. My heart was beating steadily. I felt a sort of intrepid resignation.