

## CHAPTER XI

### THE LOSS OF THE CARAK

On the day after I had given my fortune and letters into the charge of Captain Bell, I watched the 'Adventuress' drop slowly round the mole of Cadiz, and so sad was I at heart, that I am not ashamed to confess I wept. I would gladly have lost the wealth she carried if she had but carried me. But my purpose was indomitable, and it must be some other ship that would bear me home to the shores of England.

As it chanced, a large Spanish carak named 'Las Cinque Llagas,' or 'The Five Wounds,' was about to sail for Hispaniola, and having obtained a licence to trade, I took passage in her under my assumed name of d'Aila, passing myself off as a merchant. To further this deception I purchased goods the value of one hundred and five pesos, and of such nature as I was informed were most readily saleable in the Indies, which merchandise I shipped with me. The vessel was full of Spanish adventurers, mostly ruffians of varied career and strange history, but none the less good companions enough when not in drink. By this time I could speak Castilian so perfectly, and was so Spanish in appearance, that it was not difficult for me to pass myself off as one of their nation and this I did, inventing a feigned tale of my parentage, and of the reasons that led me to tempt the seas. For the rest, now as ever I kept my own counsel, and notwithstanding my reserve, for I would not mingle in their

orgies, I soon became well liked by my comrades, chiefly because of my skill in ministering to their sicknesses.

Of our voyage there is little to tell except of its sad end. At the Canary Isles we stayed a month, and then sailed away for Hispaniola, meeting with fine weather but light winds. When, as our captain reckoned, we were within a week's sail of the port of San Domingo for which we were bound, the weather changed, and presently gathered to a furious tempest from the north that grew more terrible every hour. For three days and nights our cumbrous vessel groaned and laboured beneath the stress of the gale, that drove us on rapidly we knew not whither, till at length it became clear that, unless the weather moderated, we must founder. Our ship leaked at every seam, one of our masts was carried away, and another broken in two, at a height of twenty feet from the deck. But all these misfortunes were small compared to what was to come, for on the fourth morning a great wave swept off our rudder, and we drifted helpless before the waves. An hour later a green sea came aboard of us, washing away the captain, so that we filled and settled down to founder.

Then began a most horrid scene. For several days both the crew and passengers had been drinking heavily to allay their terror, and now that they saw their end at hand, they rushed to and fro screaming, praying, and blaspheming. Such of them as remained sober began to get out the two boats, into which I and another man, a worthy priest, strove to place the women and children, of whom we had several on board. But this was no

easy task, for the drunken sailors pushed them aside and tried to spring into the boats, the first of which overturned, so that all were lost. Just then the carak gave a lurch before she sank, and, seeing that everything was over, I called to the priest to follow me, and springing into the sea I swam for the second boat, which, laden with some shrieking women, had drifted loose in the confusion. As it chanced I reached it safely, being a strong swimmer, and was able to rescue the priest before he sank. Then the vessel reared herself up on her stern and floated thus for a minute or more, which gave us time to get out the oars and row some fathoms further away from her. Scarcely had we done so, when, with one wild and fearful scream from those on board of her, she rushed down into the depths below, nearly taking us with her. For a while we sat silent, for our horror overwhelmed us, but when the whirlpool which she made had ceased to boil, we rowed back to where the carak had been. Now all the sea was strewn with wreckage, but among it we found only one child living that had clung to an oar. The rest, some two hundred souls, had been sucked down with the ship and perished miserably, or if there were any still living, we could not find them in that weltering sea over which the darkness was falling.

Indeed, it was well for our own safety that we failed in so doing, for the little boat had ten souls on board in all, which was as many as she could carry--the priest and I being the only men among them. I have said that the darkness was falling, and as it chanced happily for us, so was the sea, or assuredly we must have been swamped. All that we could do was to keep the boat's head straight to the waves, and this we did

through the long night. It was a strange thing to see, or rather to hear, that good man the priest my companion, confessing the women one by one as he laboured at his oar, and when all were shriven sending up prayers to God for the salvation of our souls, for of the safety of our bodies we despaired. What I felt may well be imagined, but I forbear to describe it, seeing that, bad as was my case, there were worse ones before me of which I shall have to tell in their season.

At length the night wore away, and the dawn broke upon the desolate sea. Presently the sun came up, for which at first we were thankful, for we were chilled to the bone, but soon its heat grew intolerable, since we had neither food nor water in the boat, and already we were parched with thirst. But now the wind had fallen to a steady breeze, and with the help of the oars and a blanket, we contrived to fashion a sail that drew us through the water at a good speed. But the ocean was vast, and we did not know whither we were sailing, and every hour the agony of thirst pressed us more closely. Towards mid-day a child died suddenly and was thrown into the sea, and some three hours later the mother filled a bailing bowl and drank deep of the bitter water. For a while it seemed to assuage her thirst, then suddenly a madness took her, and springing up she cast herself overboard and sank. Before the sun, glowing like a red-hot ball, had sunk beneath the horizon, the priest and I were the only ones in that company who could sit upright--the rest lay upon the bottom of the boat heaped one on another like dying fish groaning in their misery. Night fell at last and brought us some relief from our sufferings, for the air grew cooler. But the rain we prayed for did

not fall, and so great was the heat that, when the sun rose again in a cloudless sky, we knew, if no help reached us, that it must be the last which we should see.

An hour after dawn another child died, and as we were in the act of casting the body into the sea, I looked up and saw a vessel far away, that seemed to be sailing in such fashion that she would pass within two miles of where we were. Returning thanks to God for this most blessed sight, we took to the oars, for the wind was now so light that our clumsy sail would no longer draw us through the water, and rowed feebly so as to cut the path of the ship. When we had laboured for more than an hour the wind fell altogether and the vessel lay becalmed at a distance of about three miles. So the priest and I rowed on till I thought that we must die in the boat, for the heat of the sun was like that of a flame and there came no wind to temper it; by now, too, our lips were cracked with thirst. Still we struggled on till the shadow of the ship's masts fell athwart us and we saw her sailors watching us from the deck. Now we were alongside and they let down a ladder of rope, speaking to us in Spanish.

How we reached the deck I cannot say, but I remember falling beneath the shade of an awning and drinking cup after cup of the water that was brought to me. At last even my thirst was satisfied, and for a while I grew faint and dizzy, and had no stomach for the meat which was thrust into my hand. Indeed, I think that I must have fainted, for when I came to myself the sun was straight overhead, and it seemed to me that I had

dreamed I heard a familiar and hateful voice. At the time I was alone beneath the awning, for the crew of the ship were gathered on the foredeck clustering round what appeared to be the body of a man. By my side was a large plate of victuals and a flask of spirits, and feeling stronger I ate and drank of them heartily. I had scarcely finished my meal when the men on the foredeck lifted the body of the man, which I saw was black in colour, and cast it overboard. Then three of them, whom from their port I took to be officers, came towards me and I rose to my feet to meet them.

'Senor,' said the tallest of them in a soft and gentle voice, 'suffer me to offer you our felicitations on your wonderful--' and he stopped suddenly.

Did I still dream, or did I know the voice? Now for the first time I could see the man's face--it was that of JUAN DE GARCIA! But if I knew him he also knew me.

'Caramba!' he said, 'whom have we here? Senor Thomas Wingfield I salute you. Look, my comrades, you see this young man whom the sea has brought to us. He is no Spaniard but an English spy. The last time that I saw him was in the streets of Seville, and there he tried to murder me because I threatened to reveal his trade to the authorities. Now he is here, upon what errand he knows best.'

'It is false,' I answered; 'I am no spy, and I am come to these seas for

one purpose only--to find you.'

'Then you have succeeded well, too well for your own comfort, perhaps. Say now, do you deny that you are Thomas Wingfield and an Englishman?'

'I do not deny it. I--'

'Your pardon. How comes it then that, as your companion the priest tells me, you sailed in Las Cinque Llagas under the name of D'AILA?'

'For my own reasons, Juan de Garcia.'

'You are confused, senor. My name is Sarceda, as these gentlemen can bear me witness. Once I knew a cavalier of the name of de Garcia, but he is dead.'

'You lie,' I answered; whereon one of De Garcia's companions struck me across the mouth.

'Gently, friend,' said de Garcia; 'do not defile your hand by striking such rats as this, or if you must strike, use a stick. You have heard that he confesses to passing under a false name and to being an Englishman, and therefore one of our country's foes. To this I add upon my word of honour that to my knowledge he is a spy and a would-be murderer. Now, gentlemen, under the commission of his majesty's representative, we are judges here, but since you may think that, having

been called a liar openly by this English dog, I might be minded to deal unjustly with him, I prefer to leave the matter in your hands.'

Now I tried to speak once more, but the Spaniard who had struck me, a ferocious-looking villain, drew his sword and swore that he would run me through if I dared to open my lips. So I thought it well to keep silent.

'This Englishman would grace a yardarm very well,' he said.

De Garcia, who had begun to hum a tune indifferently, smiled, looking first at the yard and then at my neck, and the hate in his eyes seemed to burn me.

'I have a better thought than that,' said the third officer. 'If we hung him questions might be asked, and at the least, it would be a waste of good money. He is a finely built young man and would last some years in the mines. Let him be sold with the rest of the cargo, or I will take him myself at a valuation. I am in want of a few such on my estate.'

At these words I saw de Garcia's face fall a little, for he wished to be rid of me for ever. Still he did not think it politic to interfere beyond saying with a slight yawn:

'So far as I am concerned, take him, comrade, and free of cost. Only I warn you, watch him well or you will find a stiletto in your back.'



The officer laughed and said: 'Our friend will scarcely get a chance at me, for I do not go a hundred paces underground, where he will find his quarters. And now, Englishman, there is room for you below I think;' and he called to a sailor bidding him bring the irons of the man who had died.

This was done, and after I had been searched and a small sum in gold that I had upon my person taken from me--it was all that remained to me of my possessions--fettters were placed upon my ankles and round my neck, and I was dragged into the hold. Before I reached it I knew from various signs what was the cargo of this ship. She was laden with slaves captured in Fernandina, as the Spaniards name the island of Cuba, that were to be sold in Hispaniola. Among these slaves I was now numbered.

How to tell the horrors of that hold I know not. The place was low, not more than seven feet in height, and the slaves lay ironed in the bilge water on the bottom of the vessel. They were crowded as thick as they could lie, being chained to rings fixed in the sides of the ship.

Altogether there may have been two hundred of them, men, women and children, or rather there had been two hundred when the ship sailed a week before. Now some twenty were dead, which was a small number, since the Spaniards reckon to lose from a third to half of their cargo in this devilish traffic. When I entered the place a deadly sickness seized me, weak as I was, brought on by the horrible sounds and smells, and the sights that I saw in the flare of the lanterns which my conductors

carried, for the hold was shut off from light and air. But they dragged me along and presently I found myself chained in the midst of a line of black men and women, many feet resting in the bilge water. There the Spaniards left me with a jeer, saying that this was too good a bed for an Englishman to lie on. For a while I endured, then sleep or insensibility came to my succour, and I sank into oblivion, and so I must have remained for a day and a night.

When I awoke it was to find the Spaniard to whom I had been sold or given, standing near me with a lantern and directing the removal of the fetters from a woman who was chained next to me. She was dead, and in the light of the lantern I could see that she had been carried off by some horrible disease that was new to me, but which I afterwards learned to know by the name of the Black Vomit. Nor was she the only one, for I counted twenty dead who were dragged out in succession, and I could see that many more were sick. Also I saw that the Spaniards were not a little frightened, for they could make nothing of this sickness, and strove to lessen it by cleansing the hold and letting air into it by the removal of some planks in the deck above. Had they not done this I believe that every soul of us must have perished, and I set down my own escape from the sickness to the fact that the largest opening in the deck was made directly above my head, so that by standing up, which my chains allowed me to do, I could breathe air that was almost pure.

Having distributed water and meal cakes, the Spaniards went away. I drank greedily of the water, but the cakes I could not eat, for they

were mouldy. The sights and sounds around me were so awful that I will not try to write of them.

And all the while we sweltered in the terrible heat, for the sun pierced through the deck planking of the vessel, and I could feel by her lack of motion that we were becalmed and drifting. I stood up, and by resting my heels upon a rib of the ship and my back against her side, I found myself in a position whence I could see the feet of the passers-by on the deck above.

Presently I saw that one of these wore a priest's robe, and guessing that he must be my companion with whom I had escaped, I strove to attract his notice, and at length succeeded. So soon as he knew who it was beneath him, the priest lay down on the deck as though to rest himself, and we spoke together. He told me, as I had guessed, that we were becalmed and that a great sickness had taken hold of the ship, already laying low a third of the crew, adding that it was a judgment from heaven because of their cruelty and wickedness.

To this I answered that the judgment was working on the captives as well as on the captors, and asked him where was Sarceda, as they named de Garcia. Then I learned that he had been taken sick that morning, and I rejoiced at the news, for if I had hated him before, it may be judged how deeply I hated him now. Presently the priest left me and returned with water mixed with the juice of limes, that tasted to me like nectar from the gods, and some good meat and fruit. These he gave me through

the hole in the planks, and I made shift to seize them in my manacled hands and devoured them. After this he went away, to my great chagrin; why, I did not discover till the following morning.

That day passed and the long night passed, and when at length the Spaniards visited the hold once more, there were forty bodies to be dragged out of it, and many others were sick. After they had gone I stood up, watching for my friend the priest, but he did not come then, nor ever again.