

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

THE NEW WORLD

They were forever silent now, who, but a breath before, had been so full of life and the stir of mortal passion; Deleroy dead beneath the cloak upon the floor, Blanche dead in the oaken chair. We who remained alive were silent also. I glanced at Kari's face; it was as that of a stone statue on a tomb, only in it his large eyes shone, noting all things and, as I imagined in my distraught fancy, filled with triumph and foreknowledge. Considering it in that strange calm of the spirit which sometimes supervenes on great and terrible events that for a while crush its mortality from the soul and set it free to marvel at the temporal pettiness of all we consider immediate and mighty, I wondered what was the aspect of my own.

At the moment, I, who on this day had passed the portals of so many emotions: that of the lover's longing for his bride won at last, only to be lost again, that of acute and necessary business, that of the ancient joy of battle and vengeance wreaked upon an evil man; that of the unshuttering of my own eyes to the flame of a hellish truth, that of the self-murder and turning to cold clay before those same eyes of her whom

I had hoped to clasp in honest love--I, I say, felt as though I, too, were dead. Indeed all within was dead, only the shell of flesh remained alive, and in my heart I echoed the words of my old uncle and of a wiser than he who went before him--"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!"

It was Kari who spoke first, Kari as ever calm and even-voiced, saying in his broken English of which but the substance is recorded:

"Things have happened, good things I hold, though you, Master, may think otherwise for a little while. Yet in this rough land of savages and small justice these things may bring trouble. That lord brought a writing," and he nodded towards the document on the table, "and talked of death for you, Master--not for himself. And the lady, while she still lived, she say--'Fly, fly or die!' And now?" and he glanced at the two bodies.

I looked at him vacantly for the numbness following the first shock was passing away and all the eating agony of my loss began to fix its fangs upon my heart.

"Whither can I fly?" I asked. "And why should I fly? I am an innocent man and for the rest, the sooner I am dead the better."

"My Master must fly," answered Kari in swift, broken words, "because he still live and is free. Also sorrow behind, joy before. Kari, who hate women and read heart, Kari who drink this same bitter water long ago,

guess these things coming and think and think. No need that Master trouble, Kari settle all and tell Master that if he do what he say, everything come right."

"What am I to do?" I asked with a groan.

"Ship Blanche on great river ready for sea. Master and Kari sail in her before daybreak. Here leave everything: much land, much wealth--what matter? Life more than these things which can get again. Come. No, one minute, wait."

Then he went to the body of Deleroy and with wonderful swiftness took off it the chain coat he wore beneath his tunic, which he put on his own body. Also he took his sword and buckled it about him, while the parchment writ he threw upon the fire. Then he extinguished the hanging lamp and gave me one of the candles, taking the other himself.

At the door I held up my candle and by the light of it looked my last upon the ashen face of Blanche, which face I knew must go with me through all my life's days.

Kari locked the stout oaken door of the solar from the outside and took me into my chamber, where was the armour of the knight whom I had killed on Hastings Hill, which armour I had caused to be altered to fit myself. Swiftly he buckled it on to me, throwing over all a long, dark robe such as merchants wear. From the cupboard, too, he brought the big black bow

and a sheath of arrows, also a purseful of gold pieces from where they were kept, and with them the leathern bag which he had worn when I found him on the quay.

We went into the room where the feast had been held and there drank some wine, though eat I could not. The cup from which I drank was, as it chanced, the same in which I had pledged Blanche at the bride feast. Now I pledged her spirit whereon I prayed God's mercy.

We left the house and in the stable saddled two horses, strong, quiet beasts. Then by way of the back yard we rode out into the night, none seeing us, for by now all were asleep, and in that weather the streets were empty, even of such as walked them in darkness.

We reached the quay I know not how long afterwards whose mind was full of thoughts that blotted out all else. How strange had been my life--that was one of them. Within a few years I had risen to great wealth, and won the woman I desired. And now where was the wealth and where was the woman, and what was I? One flying his native land by night with blood upon his hands, the blood of a King's favourite that, if he were taken, would bring him to the noose. Oh! how great was the contrast between the morn and the midnight of that day for me! "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity!"

I think that my mind must have wandered, for when my soul was swallowed in this deepest pit of hell, it seemed to me that he whom I had

worshipped as a heavenly patron, St. Hubert, appeared striding by my horse with a shining countenance and said to me:

"Have good courage, Godson, and remember your mother's words--a wanderer

shall you be, but where'er you go the good bow and the good sword shall keep you safe and I wander with you. Nor does all love die with one woman's passing breath."

This phantasy, as it were, lanced the abscess of my pain and for a while I was easier. Also something of hope came back to me. I no longer desired to die but rather to live and in life, not in the tomb, to find forgetfulness.

We reached the quay and placed the horses in a shed that served as stables there, ridding them of their bits and saddles that they might eat of the hay in the racks. The thought to do this came to me, which showed that my mind was working again since still I could attend to the wants of other creatures. Then we went to the quayside where was made fast that boat in which I had come ashore some hours gone. There was a moon which now and again showed between the drifting clouds, and by the light of it I saw that the *Blanche* lay safe at her anchors not a bowshot away. The gale had fallen much with the rising of the moon, as it often does, and so it came about that although the boat was over-large for two men to handle rightly, Kari and I, by watching our chance, were able to row it to the ship, on to which we climbed by the

ladder.

Here we found a sailor on watch who was amazed to see us, and with his help, made the boat fast by the tow rope to the stern of the ship.

This done I caused the captain to be awakened and told him briefly that as the gale had abated and tide and wind served, I desired to sail at once. He stared at me, thinking me mad, whom he knew to have been married but that day.

Surely, he said, I should wait for the light and to gather up those of the ship's company who were still ashore. I answered that I would wait for nothing, and when he asked why, was inspired to tell him that it was because I went about the King's business, having letters from his Grace to deliver to his Envoys in the South Seas that brooked of no delay, since on them hung peace or war.

"Beware," I said to him, "how you, or any of you, dare to disobey the King's orders, for you know that the fate of such is a short shrift and a long rope."

Then that captain grew frightened and summoned the sailors, who by now had slept off their drink, and to them he told my commands. They murmured, pointing to the sky, but when they saw me standing there, wearing a knight's armour and looking very stern with my hand upon my sword, when also through Kari I promised them double pay for the voyage,

they, too, grew frightened, and having set some small sails, got up the anchors.

So it came about that within little more than an hour of our boarding of that ship she was running out towards the sea as fast as tide and wind could drive her. I think that it was not too soon, for as the quay vanished in the gloom I saw men with lanterns moving on it, and thought to myself that perhaps an alarm had been given and they were come to take me.

This captain was one who knew the river well, and with the help of another sailor he steered us down its reaches safely. By dawn we had passed Tilbury and at full light were off Gravesend racing for the open sea. Now it was that behind us we perceived from the rushing clouds that the gale, which had lulled during the night, was coming up more strongly than ever and still easterly. The sailors grew afraid again and together with the captain vowed that it was madness to face the sea in such weather, and that we must anchor, or make the shore if we could.

I refused to listen to them, whereat they seemed to give way.

At that moment Kari, who had gone forward, called to me. I went to him and he pointed out to me men galloping along the bank and waving kerchiefs, as though to signal to us to stop.

"I think, Master," said Kari, "that some have entered the sun-room at

your house."

I nodded and watched the men who galloped and waved. For some minutes I watched them till suddenly I saw that the ship was altering her course so that her bow pointed first one way and then another, as though she were no longer being steered. We ran aft to learn the cause, and found this.

That crew of dastards, every man of them and the captain with them, had drawn up the boat in which Kari and I came aboard, that was still tied to the ship's stern, and slid down the rope into her, purposing to win ashore before it was too late. Kari smiled as though he were not astonished, but in my rage I shouted at them, calling them curs and traitors. I think that the captain heard my words for I saw him turn his head and look away as though in shame, but not the others. They were engaged in hunting for the oars, only to find them gone, for it would seem that they had been washed or had fallen overboard.

Then they tried to set some kind of sail by aid of a boathook, but while they were doing this, the boat, which had drifted side on to the great waves raised by the gale upon the face of the broad river, overturned. I saw some of the men clinging to the boat and one or two scrambling on to her keel, but what chanced to them and the others I do not know, who had rushed to the steering gear to set the ship upon her course again, lest her fate should be that of the boat, or we should go ashore and be captured by those who galloped on the bank, or be drowned. This was the

last I ever saw or heard of the crew of the Blanche.

The ship's bow came round and, driven by the ever-increasing gale, she rushed on her course towards the sea, bearing us with her, two weak and lonely men.

"Kari," I said, "what shall we do? Try to run ashore, or sail on?"

He thought awhile then answered, pointing to those who galloped, now but tiny figures on the distant bank:

"Master, yonder is death, sure death; and yonder," here he pointed to the sea, "is death--perhaps. Master, you have a God, and I, Kari, have another God, mayhap same God with different name. I say--Trust our Gods and sail on, for Gods better than men. If we die in water, what matter? Water softer than rope, but I think not die."

I nodded, for the reasoning seemed good. Rather would I be drowned than fall into the hands of those who were galloping on the shore, to be dragged back to London and a felon's doom.

So I pressed upon the tiller to bring the Blanche more into mid-channel, and headed for the sea. Wider and wider grew the estuary and farther and farther away the shores as the Blanche scudded on beneath her small sails with the weight of the gale behind her, till at last there was the open sea.

Within a few feet of the tiller was a deck-house, in which the crew ate, built of solid oak and clamped with iron. Here was food in plenty, ale, too, and with these we filled ourselves. Also, leaving Kari to hold the tiller, I took off my armour and in place of it clothed myself in the rough sea garments that lay about with tall greased boots, and then sent him to do likewise.

Soon we lost sight of land and were climbing the great ocean billows, whose foamy crests rolled and spurted wherever the eye fell. We could set no course but must go where the gale drove us, away, away we knew not whither. As I have said, the Blanche was new and strong and the best ship that ever I had sailed in upon a heavy sea. Moreover, her hatches were closed down, for this the sailors had done after we weighed, so she rode the waters like a duck, taking no harm. Oh! well it was for me that from my childhood I had had to do with ships and the sailing of them, and flying from the following waves thus was able to steer and keep the Blanche's poop right in the wind, which seemed to blow first from one quarter and then from that.

Now over my memory of these events there comes a great confusion and sense of amazement. All became fragmentary and disjointed, separated also by what seemed to be considerable periods of time--days or weeks perhaps. There was a sense of endless roaring seas before which the ship

fled on and on, driven by a screaming gale that I noted dimly seemed to blow first from the northwest and then steadily from the east.

I see myself, very distinctly, lashing the tiller to iron rings that were screwed in the deck beams, and know that I did this because I was too weak to hold it any longer and desired to set it so that the Blanche should continue to drive straight before the gale. I see myself lying in the deck-house of which I have spoken, while Kari fed me with food and water and sometimes thrust into my mouth little pellets of I knew not what, which he took from the leathern bag he wore about him. I remembered that bag. It had been on his person when I rescued him at the quay, for I had seen it first as he washed himself afterwards, half full of something, and wondered what it contained. Later, I had seen it in his hand again when we left my house after the death of Blanche. I noted that whenever he gave me one of these pellets I seemed to grow strong for a while, and then to fall into sleep, deep and prolonged.

After more days--or weeks, I began to behold marvels and to hear strange voices. I thought that I was talking with my mother and with my patron, St. Hubert; also that Blanche came to me and explained everything, showing how little she had been to blame for all that had happened to me and her. These things made me certain that I was dead and I was glad to be dead, since now I knew there would be no more pain or strivings; that the endeavours which make up life from hour to hour had ceased and that rest was won. Only then appeared my uncle, John Grimmer, who kept quoting his favourite text at me--"Vanity of vanities. All is vanity,"

he said, adding: "Did I not tell you that it was thus years ago? Now you have learned it for yourself. Only, Nephew Hubert, don't think that you have finished with vanities yet, as I have, for I say that there are plenty more to come for you."

Thus he seemed to talk on about this and other matters, such as what would happen to his wealth and whether the hospitals would be quick to seize the lands to which he had given it the reversion, till I grew quite tired of him and wished that he would go away.

Then at length there was a great crash that I think disturbed him, for he did go, saying that it was only another "vanity," after which I seemed to fall asleep for weeks and weeks.

I woke up again for a warmth and brightness on my face caused me to open my eyes. I lifted my hand to shield them from the brightness and noted with a kind of wonder that it was so thin that the light shone through it as it does through parchment, and that the bones were visible beneath the skin. I let it fall from weakness, and it dropped on to hair which I knew must be that of a beard, which set me wondering, for it had been my fashion to go clean-shaven. How, then, did I come by a beard? I looked about me and saw that I was lying on the deck of a ship, yes, of the *Blanche* itself, for I knew the shape of her stern, also certain knots in one of the uprights of the deck-house that formed a rude resemblance to a human face. Nothing of this deck-house was left now, except the corner posts between which I lay, and to the tops of these was lashed a

piece of canvas as though to keep off the sun and the weather.

With difficulty I lifted my head a little and looked about me. The bulwarks of the ship had gone, but some of the uprights to which the planks had been nailed remained, and between them I perceived tall-stemmed trees with tufts of great leaves at the top of them, which trees seemed to be within a few yards of me. Bright-winged birds flew about them and in their crowns I saw apes such as the sailors used to bring home from Barbary. It would seem, then, that I must be in a river (in fact, it was a little bay or creek, on either side of which these trees appeared).

Noting these and the creeping plants with beautiful flowers, such as I had never seen, that climbed up them, and the sweet scents that floated on the air, and the clear light, now I grew sure that I was dead and had reached Paradise. Only then how came it that I still lay on the ship, for never had I heard that such things also went to Paradise? Nay, I must dream; it was nothing but a dream that I wished were true, remembering as I did the terrors of that gale-tossed sea. Or, if I did not dream, then I was in some new world.

While I mused thus I heard a sound of soft footsteps and presently saw a figure bending over me. It was Kari, very thin and hollow-eyed, much, indeed, as he had been when I found him on the quay in London, but still Kari without doubt. He looked at me in his grave fashion, then said softly:

"Master awake?"

"Yes, Kari," I said, "but tell me, where am I?"

He did not answer at once but went away and returned presently with a bowl from which he bade me drink, holding it to my lips. I did so, swallowing what seemed to be broth though I thought it strangely flavoured, after which I felt much stronger, for whatever was in that broth ran through my veins like wine. At last he spoke in his queer English.

"Master," he said, "when we still in Thames River, you ask me whether we should run ashore into the hands of the hunters who try to catch us, or sail on. I answer, 'You have God and I have God and better fall into hands of gods than into hands of men.' So we sail on into the big storm. For long we sail, and though once it turn, always the great wind blew, behind us. You grow weak and your mind leave you, but I keep you alive with medicine that I have and for many days I stay awake and steer. Then at last my mind leave me, too, and I know no more. Three days ago I wake up and find the ship in this place. Then I eat more medicine and get strength, also food from people on the shore who think us gods. That all the story, except that you live, not die. Your God and my God bring us here safe."

"Yes, Kari, but where are we?"

"Master, I think in that country from which I come; not in my own land which is still far away, but still in that country. You remember," he added with a flash of his dark eyes, "I always say that you and I go there together one day."

"But what is the country, Kari?"

"Master, not know its name. It big and have many names, but you first white man who ever come here, that why people think you God. Now you go sleep again; to-morrow we talk."

I shut my eyes, being so very tired, and as I learned afterwards, slept for twelve hours or more, to awake on the morning of the following day, feeling wonderfully stronger and able to eat with appetite. Also Kari brought me water and washed me, and clean clothes which he had found in the ship that I put on.

Thus it went on for a long while and day by day I recovered strength till at length I was almost as I had been when I married Blanche Aleys in the church of St. Margaret at Westminster. Only now sorrow had changed me within and without my face had grown more serious, while to it hung a short yellow beard which, when I looked at my reflection, seemed to become me well enough. That beard puzzled me much, since such are not grown in a day, although it is true that as yet it was not over-long. Weeks must have passed since it began to sprout upon my chin

and as we had been but three days in this place when I woke up, those weeks without doubt were spent upon the sea.

Whither, then, had we come? Driving all the while before a great gale, that for most of our voyage had blown from the east, as, if Kari were right, we had done, this country must be very far away from England. That it was so, indeed there could be no doubt, since here everything was different. For example, having been a mariner from my childhood, I had been taught and observed something of the stars, and noted that the constellations had changed their places in the heavens, also that some with which I was familiar were missing, while other new ones had appeared. Further, the heat was great and constant, even at night being more than that of our hottest summer day, and the air was full of stinging insects, which at first troubled me much, though afterwards I grew hardened to them. In short, everything was changed, and I was indeed in a new world that was not told of in Europe, but what world? What world? At least the sea joined it to the old, for beneath me was still the *Blanche*, which timber by timber I had seen built up upon the shores of Thames from oaks cut in my own woods.

As soon as I was strong enough, I went over the ship, or what was left of her. It was a marvel that she had floated for so long, since her hull was shattered. Indeed, I do not think she could have done so, save for the fine wool that was packed into the lower part of her, which wool seemed to have swollen when it grew wet and to have kept the water out. For the rest she was but a hulk, since both her masts were gone, and

much of the deck with them. Still she had kept afloat and driving into this creek, had beached herself upon the mud as though it were the harbour that she sought.

How had we lived through such a journey? The answer seemed to be, after we were too weak to find or take food, by means of the drug that Kari cherished in his skin bag, and water of which there was plenty left at hand in barrels, since the *Blanche* had been provisioned for a long voyage to Italy and farther. At least we had lived for weeks, and weeks, being still young and very strong, and not having been called upon to suffer great cold, since it would appear that although the gale continued after the first few days of our flight before it, the weather had turned warm.

During this time of my recovery, every morning Kari would go ashore, which he did by means of planks set upon the mud, since we were within a few feet of the bank of the creek into which a streamlet ran. Later he would return, bringing with him fish and wildfowl, and corn of a sort that I did not know, for its grains were a dozen times the size of wheat, flat-sided, and if ripe, of a yellow colour, which he said he had purchased from those who dwelt upon the land. On this good food I feasted, washing it down with ale and wine from the ship's stores; indeed never before did I eat so much, not even when I was a boy.

At length, one morning Kari made me put on my armour, the same which I had taken from the French knight, and fled in from London, that he had

burnished till it shone like silver, and seat myself in a chair upon what remained of the poop of the ship. When I asked him why, he answered in order that he might show me to the inhabitants of that land. In this chair he bade me sit and wait, holding the shield upon my arm and the bare sword in my right hand.

As I had come to know that Kari never did anything without a reason and remembered that I was in a strange country where, lacking him, I should not have lived or could continue to do so, I fell into his humour.

Moreover, I promised that I would remain still and neither speak, nor smile, nor rise from my chair unless he bade me. So there I sat glittering in the hot sunshine which burned me through the armour.

Then Kari went ashore and was absent for some time. At length among the trees and undergrowth I heard the sound of people talking in a strange tongue. Presently they appeared on the bank of the creek, a great number of them, very curious people, brown-skinned with long, lank black hair and large eyes, but not over-tall in stature; men, women and children together.

Among them were some who wore white robes whom I took to be their gentlefolk, but the most of them had only cloths or girdles about their middles. Leading the throng was Kari, who, as it appeared from the bushes, waved his hand and pointed me out seated in the shining armour on the ship, the visor up to show my face and the long sword in my hand. They stared, then, with a low, sighing exclamation, one and all fell

upon their faces and rubbed their brows upon the ground.

As they lay there Kari addressed them, waving his arms and pointing towards me from time to time. Afterwards I learned that he was telling them I was a god, for which lie may his soul be forgiven.

The end of it was that he bade them rise and led certain of them who wore the white robes across the planks to the ship. Here, while they hung back, he advanced towards me, bowing and kissing the air till he drew near, then he went upon his knees and laid his hands upon my steel-clad feet. More, from the bosom of his robe he drew out flowers which he placed upon my knees as though in offering.

"Now, Master," he whispered to me, "rise and wave your sword and shout aloud, to show that you are alive and not an image."

So up I sprang, circling Wave-Flame about my head and roaring like any bull of Bashan, for my voice was always loud and carried far. When they saw the bright sword whirling through the air and heard these bellowings, uttering cries of fear, those poor folk fled. Indeed most of them fell from the plank into the mud, where one stuck fast and was like to drown, had not Kari rescued him, which his brethren were in too great haste to do.

After they had gone Kari came and said that everything went well and that henceforward I was not a man but the Spirit of the Sea come to

earth, such a spirit as had never been dreamed of even by the wizards.

Thus then did Hubert of Hastings become a god among those simple people, who had never before so much as heard of a white man, or seen armour or a sword of steel.